



AROUND BURKE

Burke County Relief Center is open until 8 p.m. Monday and will reopen 8 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 1. Food, clothing, hygiene items, and more are available. The center is at the Foothills Higher Education Center, 2128 S. Sterling St., Morganton.

If you need volunteer assistance or would like to volunteer, call Burke County's volunteer hotline at 828-764-7068.

Burke County's shelter at Oak Hill United Methodist Church remains open. The church is at 2239 NC-181, Morganton.

Phifer YMCA is opening its doors to anyone who needs a shower, to charge their cell phones, etc. There are no fees. No exercise or swimming activities are taking place.

All public water providers have issued a boil water advisory.

Burke County Public Schools are closed through Oct. 4. Thursday, Oct. 3, and Friday, Oct. 4, are optional teacher workdays.

Athletics through the schools and recreation centers are suspended.

New Dimensions Charter School is closed through Oct. 4. Thursday, Oct. 3, and Friday, Oct. 4, are optional teacher workdays.

Western Piedmont Community College is closed through Oct. 4. The campus is being used as a staging area for recovery crews.

Morganton City Hall will reopen to the public on Wednesday, Oct. 2. City of Morganton Recreation Centers will open 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. All City parks are closed until further notice.

Valdese Town Hall is open for regular hours. The Town Council's pre-agenda meeting has been rescheduled to 6 p.m. Monday, Oct. 7. The Old Rock School and Valdese Recreation Center remain closed.

The joint groundbreaking of the EMS Base and Animal Shelter for Burke County will not take place as originally planned on Oct. 4.

Burke County Board of Commissioners' pre-agenda meeting scheduled for Oct. 1 is canceled. The commission will hold its regular meeting at 6 p.m. on Oct. 15.

Duke Energy expects all Burke customers to have power by the end of the week.

Rutherford Electric Membership Corporation hopes to have the bulk of its

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The Paper prohibits publishing AI-generated content unless the AI aspect is the focus of the story. The Paper also prohibits AI-edited text, as editing requires human judgment. AI-generated headlines or social media posts are permissible but must receive human approval.



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Special Edition Hurricane Helene Coverage

CLOSURES LIST BELOW



ALLEN VANNOPPEN / THE PAPER

River Village

Hurricane Helene impacts, recovery efforts

By **ALLEN VANNOPPEN**
Publisher

Burke County begins what will be a slow recovery of its entire infrastructure as a result of the historic and catastrophic damage from Hurricane Helene.

Though not obvious to many, municipal, county, state, federal, and emergency crews have been hard at it since Friday. Ever so slowly services are crawling back to life, one block at a time, one house at a time, as crews wrestle with downed powerlines, fallen trees, impassable roads, and inoperable cell and internet service.

Our lifestyle revolves around four central services: water, power, cell telephone, and internet. Lose any two and life is manageable. Lose all four and things grind to a halt.

The complications cross all sectors of our community:



BRENT BRINKLEY, FOOTHILLS AIRPORT MANAGER /FOR THE PAPER

Preparing to conduct an aerial tour of Burke County are (from left) N.C. Speaker of the House Tim Moore, Rep. Hugh Blackwell, and Burke Sheriff Banks Hinceman.

health care, transportation, education, utilities, power and water, food, gasoline, extensive property damage, parks and recreation. Barriers to communication — no cell, internet, social media — intensely impact

residents' ability to manage emergencies.

The magnitude of Helene's fury and the destruction in its path has garnered national attention. Residents report being contacted by friends and rela-

tives from afar who heard about the trauma from cable news networks.

The recovery will be long, but steps forward will be rapid. The Paper will be updating its website continuously with developments as they occur.

HERE IS WHAT WE KNOW

Electric power has been restored to 60% to 65% of homes and businesses in Morganton. Crews from Greenville, Wilson, and other towns are assisting in the recovery. However, some businesses and residents could remain without power until the end of the week.

Morganton's municipal water and sewer plants are operational and water quality testing will begin soon. Meantime, any water from any water source should be boiled before drinking, according to health

See **HELENE**, Page 6A



ANGELA KUPER COPELAND / THE PAPER

Burkemont Avenue between Lowe's and Rural King was closed until Monday because of downed power lines.

POWERING THROUGH

Electric crews race to restore service across Burke in Hurricane Helene's aftermath

By **SAYDIE E. BEAN**

Municipal and Courts Reporter

Electric providers are making progress with each passing day following the tremendous damages from Hurricane Helene.

All directions of Burke County have experienced outages from the hurricane, with some recovering faster than others.

The following information was gathered from various electric providers and is current as of 3 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 30.

DUKE ENERGY

Countywide, Duke Energy

estimates 15,943 customers are without power. In North Carolina, there are 309,035 customers without power.

Spokesperson Jeff Brooks reported that crews are throughout Burke and western North Carolina to restore power to customers. Since the power outages began, nearly 30% of customers are back on.

Those still in the dark will see power restoration this week. Crews expect to be wrapped by Friday, Oct. 4.

Brooks explained there is considerable work to be done with the challenging

Many Burke restaurants open amid power outages and boil water notice

By **SANDRA WILKERSON QUEEN**
Arts & Entertainment Editor

While many Burke County residents are still without electricity at their homes, finding a place to get a hot meal in a local restaurant should not be a big challenge.

Despite some food loss due to power outages and in the face of a mandatory county-wide boil water notice, many local restaurants are open to serve the public. Some eater-

ies are offering short hours and limited menus, while others are running on a regular schedule.

When contacted by The Paper, several restaurant managers said the boil water notice has presented an added challenge, but employees are handling the inconvenience well.

The following restaurants are open, most on a regular schedule. Some may be cash

See **EATERIES**, Page 6A



SANDRA WILKERSON QUEEN / THE PAPER

Server Cindy Charlet delivers warm meals to Morganton residents Sarah and Elias Gomez, who had no power at their home as of Monday afternoon. The couple visited Blue 42 for an early dinner.

See **POWER**, Page 6A

THE WEEK AHEAD

						
MONDAY Cloudy	TUESDAY Showers, humid	WEDNESDAY Partly sunny	THURSDAY Partly sunny	FRIDAY Humid	SATURDAY Sunny	SUNDAY Sunny
HIGH: 76° LOW: 61°	HIGH: 82° LOW: 62°	HIGH: 83° LOW: 66°	HIGH: 81° LOW: 64°	HIGH: 78° LOW: 62°	HIGH: 79° LOW: 59°	HIGH: 75° LOW: 57°

BURKE

FROM PAGE 1A

customers reconnected to power by the end of the week, but it could take weeks before some customers can turn on the lights.

The following convenience sites are open and operating during normal business hours, 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

- 3836 N.C.18 South, Morganton
 - 3251 U.S.64, Morganton
 - 1679 N.C. 126, Morganton
- (Note: This location is currently without power and can only accept bagged trash at this time.)

• 2350 U.S. 70, Connelly Springs
Burke County is beginning debris cleanup efforts following the recent storm. Do not bring debris to the landfill.

To ensure the process is efficient and in line with federal guidelines, the County is adhering to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) standards for debris removal.

Do Not Bring Debris to the Landfill: To avoid disposal charges, residents should not transport storm debris to the landfill. The county has contracted with a hauler to manage debris collection directly from residential areas.

Debris Collection Process: Our contracted hauler will be tagging debris and coordinating pickups throughout the county. You do not need to be present for pickup. They will make two to three passes through affected areas to ensure all debris is collected.

Debris Separation: Residents are requested to move storm debris to the back of the curb at the right of way and separate it into three distinct piles:

- Vegetation (tree limbs, branches, etc.)
- White goods (appliances like refrigerators, washing machines)
- Building materials (construction debris, wood, dry-wall)

By keeping the debris sorted into these categories, we can ensure faster and more efficient pickup.

Please be patient as the County works to manage the cleanup. Due to the large volume of material, there may be some delays.

School closures extended through Oct. 4

By CHARDA PEARSON
Education and Business Reporter

Burke County Public Schools held a leadership meeting today. Shortly after, the school district announced school closures through Friday, Oct. 4, including YMCA before and after-school programs. Staff members will have optional workdays Oct. 3 and 4.

In a statement by public relations officer Cheryl Shuffler, BCPS is currently evaluating the condition of the 24 campuses. All campuses have no power or water, and all perishable cafeteria items have spoiled.

Some schools have sustained roof damage causing leaks. Freedom High School has sustained the most damage, the football field and field house being the worst.

According to Shuffler, all decisions about reopening schools next week will be made based on the status of water, power, and the ability to provide meals at schools.

The Board of Education rescheduled the Sept. 30 special called board meeting for an emergency board meeting tomorrow, Oct. 1 at noon.

North Carolina School of Science and Math (NCSSM) is closed until further notice. According to the school’s social media page, all students departed campus by mid-afternoon on Friday. Buildings on campus sustained water intrusion and some trees on campus are down.



SOCIAL MEDIA / FOR THE PAPER

Freedom High School’s football field and field house flooded as a result of Hurricane Helene aftermath.

Currently, only mandatory employees are permitted on campus.

New Dimension Charter School has announced the school will be closed all week with optional teacher workdays on Thursday and Friday.

Western Piedmont Community College

(WPCC) is closed this week. According to the school’s Facebook page, the campus will serve as a base for 500 power trucks as crews work to restore power throughout the county.

Charda Pearson may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2012, or charda@thepaper.media.



FOR THE PAPER

No power? No problem! Tommy Sain cuts hair using a head lamp and a lantern as Tropical Storm Helene roars outside on Friday morning in downtown Morganton.

Even Tommy Sain had to yield to the fury of Helene

By BILL POTEAT
Editor Emeritus

“Neither snow nor rain nor gloom of night,” is supposed to apply to the U.S. Postal Service, but everyone in Morganton knows it **truly** applies to downtown barber extraordinaire Tommy Sain.

Tommy, who once had a heart ablation done one day and worked 14 hours the next, came on into work Friday morning and opened his North Sterling Street shop as usual around 6 a.m.

Soon after, the full impact of Tropical Storm Helene began to be felt as it lashed the area with tree-toppling winds and

doused the region with inch after inch of heavy rain.

Tommy had customers waiting and dove into another day at work. Normality did not continue for very long, however.

Soon after 6:30 a.m., as the storm intensified, the lights went out.

No lights. No problem. Tommy turned on a camping lantern, strapped on a headlamp, and kept putting his scissors to work.

“I cut a couple in the dark,” he reflected on Monday morning, as he worked on one customer while half a dozen others sat waiting. “But I figured about 10:30, it was time to go home.”

Wait, Tommy Sain, go home? Before noon?

“Bill,” he said, “there’s dedicated and there’s crazy.”

Sain’s Barber and Style was also closed Saturday. No power.

But come 6 a.m. Monday, those doors were back open, and Tommy was going strong.

Back to normal feels good!

Bill Poteat, who relies on Tommy Sain for the ‘old number one’ as well as a steady flow of information, may be reached at 828-445-8595 or via email at bill@thepaper.media.



More information will be posted online as it unfolds. The Paper will be back in print Saturday, Oct. 5.

Your locally owned, locally managed source for hometown news



110 S. Sterling St., Morganton, NC 28655
828-445-8595 • thepaper.media

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CONTACT US

Display ads: ads@thepaper.media or 828-445-8595 ext. 2005
Subscriptions: info@thepaper.media or 828-445-8595 ext. 2006
Obituaries: obits@thepaper.media
News tips: news@thepaper.media
General info: info@thepaper.media



PUBLISHER
Allen VanNoppen
allen@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2008



EDITOR EMERITUS
Bill Poteat
bill@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2004



EDITOR
Angela Copeland
angela@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2003



DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
Janina Linens
nina@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2005



SENIOR REPORTER
Marty Queen
marty@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2001



SPORTS EDITOR
Paul Schenkel
paul@thepaper.media
828-445-8595



EDUCATION/BUSINESS REPORTER
Charda Pearson
charda@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2012



ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR
Josh McKinney
josh@thepaper.media
828-445-8595



MUNICIPAL AND COURTS REPORTER
Saydie Bean
saydie@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2011



STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Lisa Price
lisa@thepaper.media
828-445-8595



A&E EDITOR
Sandra Wilkerson Queen
sandra@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2002



OFFICE AND CIRCULATION MANAGER
Lilly Brown
lilly@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2006



ADVERTISING/MARKETING COORDINATOR
Devan Berry
devan@thepaper.media
828-445-8595, ext. 2007

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Burke 911 answered 6 times the number of calls for help

By MARTY QUEEN
Senior Reporter

Burke County’s situation in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene is bad enough as it is. Folks who grow impatient and lash out at essential workers are only making matters worse.

Burke 911 Assistant Director Chris White, the county’s designated public information officer for the event, said he’s been getting reports of people being rude to workers trying to repair power lines.

White said it’s vital for people to keep their frustrations in check.

“We’re asking for patience right now,” White said. “One thing we’re hearing from the line crews is that when they have to block out one lane of traffic, people are giving them a hard time and not giving them room to work. Their work is priority right now, and it takes priority over anybody’s travel.

“If you’re not going to let them restore power, we’re going to be here a while.”

Even without the occasional surly motorist, it will still likely be days before the power companies can get all customers back on line.

911 CENTER FULLY OPERATIONAL

Burke’s 911 center was up and running again by 11 a.m. Monday, however, following a temporary interruption of service over the weekend.

White said Burke answered 2,700 calls between midnight Thursday and midnight Friday, nearly six times the average number.

But a fiber optic cable that connects the center to ESInet — Emergency Services Interoperability, the engine behind the new Next Generation (NG911) technology the county employs — was washed away by flood waters.

During the downtime, Burke’s 911 calls were rerouted to Catawba County. White said the NG911 system worked flawlessly and not a single call was missed. Burke sent several telecommunicators to Catawba County to help with the increased call volume.

“Everything automatically routed to Catawba County as designed,” White said.

Although the Burke 911 Center is operational, all non-essential county services were closed as of Monday afternoon. White said he was awaiting



SANDRA WILKERSON QUEEN / THE PAPER

Volunteer Corey Olsen (right) delivers a bag of ice to Morganton resident Tabatha Boyd on Monday afternoon at the former Kmart store on Bost Road. A large nonstop flow of people brought coolers to stock up on free bags of ice, provided by the Burke County Government.

word from County Manager Brian Epley about Tuesday’s closings. Epley was unavailable for comment Monday.

Currently, all the county’s department heads are being redirected to the emergency effort, White said. Most of that work consists of transitioning from the response phase to the recovery phase, conducting damage surveys, and coordinating donations, volunteers, and debris removal.

Meanwhile, the state is helping out in Burke, flying in communications equipment that should expedite recovery efforts. White said the state is supplying the county with Starlink satellite cell phones and mobile cellular towers.

Despite the damage, Burke County had no confirmed fatalities as of Monday afternoon, and Emergency Services

Director James Robinson said he was impressed with the efficiency his team has shown in dealing with those who are injured or sick.

“I’m thoroughly impressed with my crew’s responses,” Robinson said. “These folks are working tirelessly. There are just no words to express the appreciation for what they’re doing.”

Burke County Sheriff Banks Hinceman said there has not been an uptick in crime due to the impact of Tropical Storm Helene, but did say that his officers have been plenty busy over the last few days.

“We had a lot of flooding and a number of evacuations, especially on Friday and Saturday,” said Hinceman, “and we had to do a lot of controlling traffic in those situations.”

The sheriff also said his offi-

cers have been doing a lot of “welfare checks” since Helene exited the area.

“Folks will call and tell us, ‘We haven’t heard from Grandpa for two days,’ and we’ll go out to Grandpa’s house and make sure he’s OK,” Hinceman said.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

As for what the average person can do to help the situation, Robinson advised people to limit travel to essential trips only.

“We appreciate peoples’ support and staying home as much as possible,” Robinson said. “Travel is still a challenge. If they have a medical emergency, call 911.”

White agreed. “If you’re going to be out and traveling, you’ve got to ex-

ercise a lot of patience, because traffic is not back to normal yet,” White said. “There are still a lot of roads that are washed out and a lot of roads that still have trees down in them, and power lines.”

White also said residents should also conserve water because Burke’s water plant is operating at a limited capacity.

“If you take 30-minute therapy showers, you’re part of the problem,” White said. “You’re creating more issues and taxing the water supply.

The numerous downed power lines across the county can also present a hazard. White said all downed lines should be considered live since power is incrementally being restored.

Burke County residents should also be aware the county is contracting with a debris removal service and should not take storm debris to the county landfill. He said folks should separate vegetation (like tree branches), white goods (appliances like refrigerators and washing machines), and building materials (construction debris, wood, dry-wall) into piles, and the county will pick it up.

The service will conduct multiple passes, so homeowners don’t have to worry about doing all their clean-up at one time. The county is adhering to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines for debris removal.

Finally, White said those who want to help can drop off donations at the Foothills Higher Education Center, and those in need of help can pick up supplies there.

The center is at 2128 S. Sterling St., Morganton, just off Exit 105 from Interstate 40. Donations are accepted from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and can be picked up from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. For any questions or to reach the Donation Team, call 828-764-3204.

If you are in need of volunteer services or would like to volunteer to assist, contact the volunteer hotline at 828-764-7068. Volunteer services include but are not limited to property cleanup, animal care, and food assistance for those affected by the hurricane.

The Volunteer Hotline phones will be open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily.

In addition, the Red Cross shelter at Oak Hill United Methodist Church is open.

Marty Queen may be reached at 828-445-8595 or marty@thepaper.media.

White: No new hurricane headed our way anytime soon

By MARTY QUEEN
Senior Reporter

Hurricane Helene cut a swath of destruction across western North Carolina Friday morning, but fortunately, she was a solo act.

Despite what some Facebook sites say, another devastating storm is not headed our way any time soon.

Burke County 911 Assistant Director Chris White, who also runs Foothills Action Network, one of the area’s most popular and accurate weather sites, said there is no evidence another storm is brewing.

“There’s a lot of Facebook pages out there of people who want to make a name for themselves, and they use times like this when people are down on their luck,” White said. “It creates clicks, and it creates hype, but it also creates panic in people’s nerves that are already very thin because of the ongoing situation.

“When cell phone service comes back up and the first thing they see is, oh, it’s another hurricane, it causes a panic, and it spreads like wildfire. I think it’s important to denounce that.”

White said the forecast calls for only a tiny amount of rain in the foreseeable future.

“We’re watching it, and we’ll continue to watch it,” White said. “The tropic season is not over until Nov. 30. But it’s also important to note that for the 10-day ensemble forecast — which takes 90-plus models and puts them together — the mean rainfall (forecast) is a quarter of an inch over the next 10 days. It’s not this 30-inch stuff that people are throwing out there.

“People have enough to worry about without having to fret over a



MARTY QUEEN / THE PAPER

Chris White, assistant director of the Burke County 911 Center.

storm that’s non-existent.”

A veteran weather observer, White said the severity of the storm was not a surprise.

“I saw that it was going to be a catastrophic event, and it was nothing short of that,” White said, adding he told family members who live on Powerhouse Road below the dam on Lake James to evacuate two days before the hurricane hit.

Their homes were later destroyed by flood waters.

“This is the most devastating storm that I can remember,” White said. “If you take Hugo and Francis and put them together, this is what you have. You’re talking about 30 inches of rain on the mountain, and you have 60 to 65 mph winds, some 70 mph wind gusts sporadically, then you’ve got big problems.”

Despite the devastation, White is determined to learn from Helene.

“We’ll get through it, and we’ll learn and adapt and be better off next time,” he said.

Marty Queen may be reached at 828-445-8595 or marty@thepaper.media.



CHARDA PEARSON / THE PAPER

A line of people stood outside the Northwest ACE Hardware to refill propane tanks. The store has propane, refillable propane tanks, and nearly 75 chainsaws left.

Hardware stores down to last of emergency items

By CHARDA PEARSON
Education and Business Reporter

Customers have flocked to hardware stores for emergency items, leaving only chainsaws and propane tanks. Stores like Ace Hardware have had emergency trucks come in fully stocked while others are unsure of truck deliveries due to highway closures.

A line of people stood outside the Northwest ACE Hardware to refill propane tanks. The store has propane, refillable propane tanks, and nearly 75 chainsaws left.

The store has no generators in stock but is set to receive an emergency truck tomorrow with 192 generators (6500 watts), bottled water, gas cans, batteries, flashlights, extension cords, lighter fluid, and charcoal.

According to Jordan Karnes, regional manager for Ace Hardware, emergency trucks brought in 284 generators in the past two days.

“We got a truck today, but most of that is already gone today,” Karnes said.

Customers can purchase empty propane tanks that hold 4.5 gallons of propane. Empty propane tanks start at \$44; the store will fill those tanks bringing the total to \$68. Pricing for generators set to

arrive tomorrow will start around \$899.

“All of our pricing has 100% stayed the same. The things currently on special will continue to be on special. Cases of water have been discounted,” said Olivia Overstreet, gift and seasonal decor manager for Ace Hardware.

Overstreet traveled to Morganton from a Virginia location, along with 17 additional managers who will bring supplies from other locations to the West Fleming store.

The Morganton Lowe’s Home Improvement store is down to the last chainsaws, with only about six left. The sign outside the store shows a list of items the store is currently out of with no exact time on when inventory will restock. The store is not allowing the use of restrooms, cash back, or refunds/returns.

According to sales associates, the store is scheduled to receive a truck today, but there is no sign of one. Associates cite the closing of I-40 West and I-77 to be the cause of any possible truck delays.

The Morganton Rural King location has chainsaws but no propane or generators. The store is expecting trucks to come in tomorrow or Wednesday.

Charda Pearson may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2012, or charda@thepaper.media.



STEVEN COOKE PHOTOGRAPHY & AERIAL VIDEO / FOR THE PAPER

The Catawba River Soccer Complex, behind Ingles on Carbon City Road in Morganton, was under water following Friday's flooding along the Catawba River in Morganton.



PAUL SCHENKEL / THE PAPER

The two-tone coloration of the Freedom High School baseball press box on Monday shows the level that the Catawba River flooding reached at the back side of the school's campus on Friday.

Morganton athletic facilities flooded

Local games postponed indefinitely; parks closed

By PAUL SCHENKEL
Sports Editor

Friday's historic flooding from Tropical Storm Helene affected athletic facilities along the Catawba River in Morganton, suspending some local seasons and leaving city parks still closed.

The damage was perhaps most striking at Freedom High School, where on Friday and Saturday the side of campus closest to the river — including the football field, field house, baseball field, and driving range — were submerged by about 10 feet of flood water.

Freedom athletic director Rob Scott on Monday said the field house was cleared out prior to the flooding, meaning computers and all football gear were saved.

"The building itself is a swampy mess," Scott said. "Stuff that was on the floor is on the ceiling, and stuff that was on the ceiling is on the

floor, and there's mud everywhere ... but all necessary gear was gotten out."

Several trees were down around campus on Monday as a result of the high winds with the storm, but none had fallen on facilities. Scott said no determination has yet been made on where Patriots' home football games would be played the rest of the season.

Burke County Public Schools public relations officer Cheryl Shuffler said the field at Walter Johnson Middle School also sustained damage "but buildings are the priority" for the schools system at this time.

The baseball and softball fields at both Catawba Meadows Park and Shuey Park were also flooded Friday, as were the fields at the Catawba River Soccer Complex.

The Morganton Parks and Recreation Department has announced that all city parks are closed until further notice,



STEVEN COOKE PHOTOGRAPHY & AERIAL VIDEO / FOR THE PAPER

The Catawba River Soccer Complex, and (at top left), the back of Freedom High School's campus including the football and baseball fields, were inundated by Friday's flooding along the Catawba River.

meaning that all adult softball and youth flag football and soccer seasons are also suspended until further notice.

The Burke County Parks and Recreation Department has also suspended all athletic activities, including youth football and outdoor soccer, including practices until further

notice.

Those five rec sports' seasons had just gotten underway, with the exception of county outdoor soccer, which had been slated for its first games last Thursday just prior to the storm.

And BCPS announced on Monday that schools would re-

main closed for the duration of the week, postponing all local high school and middle school events through at least this Friday, Oct. 4.

Paul Schenkel may be reached at 828-445-8595 or paul@thepaper.media.



PAUL SCHENKEL / THE PAPER

Catawba Meadows Park and all other Morganton city parks remained closed on Monday. The baseball and softball fields at Catawba Meadows, which was built in 2006, were flooded on Friday.



PAUL SCHENKEL / THE PAPER

The Catawba River Soccer Complex remained closed Monday as debris from Friday's tropical storm lined the fence.



PAUL SCHENKEL / THE PAPER

A fallen tree sits near the road at Sanford Drive behind the sign for the Morganton Aquatics Center. The center has been closed since Friday's storm.

County Relief Center offers free water, food, paper goods, personal items

Free ice is available in four locations

By BILL POTEAT
Editor Emeritus

A Burke County Relief Center has opened in the Foothills Higher Education Center on South Sterling Street near Interstate 40 in Morganton.

In addition to bottled water, the Center offers canned foods, staples such as rice and spaghetti, toilet paper and paper towels, diapers and baby wipes, feminine hygiene products, cleaning supplies, snack food items, children's toys, children's clothes, and small copies of "The New Testament."

The center is operating under a "take what you need but take no more" honor system with most folks choosing carefully the items they want to take home.

The center will be open until 8 p.m. today and reopen at 8 a.m. Tuesday. Donation hours Tuesday will be from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The Center is staffed primarily by Burke County government employees augmented by a host of volunteers from the Sheriff's Office, other local agencies, and community folk.

Ramrodding the operation is Deana Gates, of the Burke County Parks and Recreation Department.

Gates, dressed for action in a



BILL POTEAT / THE PAPER

The Burke County Relief Center will be open until 8 p.m. Monday and will reopen at 8 a.m. Tuesday.

park department polo, white shorts, and sneakers, took time to answer a few questions while standing in the midst of the cavernous facility, even as she calmly fended requests from volunteers and from those picking up items.

"It's nothing short of amazing, all of the volunteers who have turned out, and all of the supplies that have been donated," said Gates. "This really demonstrates how Burke County can come together in a

time of crisis."

Gates credited Burke Sheriff Banks Hinceman with arranging for one of the largest contributions — two truckloads of donated materials from Person County, a rural county located between Orange County and the Virginia border.

"I'm good friends with Sheriff Jason Wilborn," said Hinceman, who was at the Center at the same time as a Paper reporter. "I told him the fix we're in up here and he certainly

came through for us."

Large donations have also been received, Gates said, from Elizabethton, Tenn.; Durham; Raleigh; Concord; and Charlotte.

One of the many volunteers helping out at the center this morning was Shane Prisby, trails program director for Foothills Conservancy.

"This really is a shining moment for Burke County," said Prisby as he looked out over the sea of volunteers and the

folks picking up items. "This is one of those occasions when our community really bonds."

COUNTY OFFERS FREE ICE

In response to long-duration power outages due to Hurricane Helene and to support the community, Burke County Government is offering free ice to all residents at four designated locations throughout Morganton. This service is provided at no charge, and ice will be available on a self-serve basis. Ice is bagged, so you need a way to keep it cold while traveling back to your location.

Residents can pick up ice at the following locations:

- 110 Bost Road, Morganton, NC 28655 — Old Kmart parking lot
- 160 Fiddlers Run Blvd., Morganton, NC 28655 — Fiddlers Run Shopping Center parking lot (truck is running behind but should arrive shortly)
- 1911 Jamestown Road, Morganton, NC 28655 — Brentwood Water Corporation Office parking lot
- 2886 U.S. 70, Morganton, NC 28655 — Foothills Thrift Store parking lot

Please bring your containers or coolers to collect the ice. These locations are available 24/7 while supplies last.

Bill Poteat may be reached at 828-445-8595 or bill@thepaper.media.

How to apply for FEMA assistance

By FOR THE PAPER

North Carolina homeowners and renters in Burke and 24 other counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who had uninsured damage or losses caused by Hurricane Helene may be eligible for FEMA disaster assistance.

FEMA may be able to help with serious needs, displacement, temporary lodging, basic home repair costs, personal property loss or other disaster-caused needs. Homeowners and renters in Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians can apply.

There are several ways to apply: Go online to DisasterAssistance.gov, use the FEMA App or call 800-621-3362 from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. ET daily. The telephone line is open every day and help is available in most languages. If you use a relay service, such as Video Relay Service (VRS), captioned telephone or other service, give FEMA your number for that service.

To view an accessible video on how to apply, visit Three

Ways to Apply for FEMA Disaster Assistance — YouTube.

FEMA's disaster assistance offers new benefits that provide flexible funding directly to survivors. In addition, a simplified process and expanded eligibility allow North Carolinians access to a wider range of assistance and funds for serious needs.

What you'll need when you apply:

- A current phone number where you can be contacted.
- Your address at the time of the disaster and the address where you are now staying.
- Your Social Security number.
- A general list of damage and losses.
- Banking information if you choose direct deposit.
- If insured, the policy number or the agent and/or the company name.
- If you have homeowners, renters or flood insurance, you should file a claim as soon as possible. FEMA cannot duplicate benefits for losses covered by insurance. If your policy does not cover all your disaster expenses, you may be eligible for federal assistance.

For the latest information about North Carolina's recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4827. Follow FEMA on X at x.com/femaregion4 or on Facebook at facebook.com/fema.



CHARDA PEARSON / THE PAPER

Flood water in the parking lot of Ingles has drained, but the store has sustained extensive damages and is closed with no reopening date in sight.

Empty shelves greet many grocery shoppers

By CHARDA PEARSON
Education and Business Reporter

Grocery stores in Morganton are waiting patiently for trucks to arrive with stock for the dairy, frozen, and refrigerated sections. Other stores severely impacted by damage have closed with no reopening dates announced.

Ingles has closed with no reopening date in sight. Associates disclosed the store was severely damaged. The grocery chain is sure the store will be closed for weeks. The Morganton location was flooded when the Catawba River overflowed its banks.

As of Monday afternoon, Food Matters had only a few cases of water left. Frozen items are stocked in the freez-

er with a sign that items are not safe. The staff anticipates a truck to come Thursday with refrigerated, frozen, and dairy items.

At Aldi, refrigeration systems are back up and working. The store anticipates trucks to arrive Tuesday but could not specify a time of arrival.

Employees at the Food Lion on Burkemont Avenue were seen stocking ice coolers. The store has a two-bag limit for ice. The store is allowing customers to receive up to \$50 cash from their debit card when making purchases.

Charda Pearson may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2012, or charda@thepaper.media.



For grocery stores that open, many have empty shelves — like Food Lion on Bost Road in Morganton.



Frozen items at Food Matters are stocked in the freezer with a sign that items are not safe.

EATERIES

FROM PAGE 1A

only. A sampling of open restaurants are below:

- El Portal
- Carolina Diner
- Buffalo Wild Wings
- Applebees
- Swede's Cafe
- Cracker Barrel
- Longhorn Steakhouse

- Abele's
- Blue 42's Burger Bar & Wingery
- Greenway Pizza
- Foxhole Pizza and Subs
- Subway restaurants
- Green Street Grille
- Las Salsas

A few restaurants have had to alter their plans because of the effects of Hurricane Helene. Downtown Morganton's Ono Poke Bowl's co-owner Brooke Hudgins announced

on Facebook that she could not get out of her housing development on Monday, and that all of the food in the restaurant's cooler and freezer had been lost. She said she will post on Facebook when service resumes. Jim Toner, co-owner of Toner's Irish Pub, said the restaurant lost all of the food in their coolers as well.

Root & Vine restaurant offered pizzas Monday afternoon

for emergency workers. "Ovens hot! All emergency professionals, if you have worked at all and serve the public, come see us. Please share this post with anyone you know who has served the public over the past few days come get some hot food!" they announced on Facebook. The eatery posted they will reopen to the public "when the time is right."

"Right now, the safety and health is the main focus of

concern for our community," they said.

Most fast food restaurants are also open for business. Many eateries are posting up-to-date information on their social media pages.

And no, Olive Garden is still not open in Morganton.

Sandra Wilkerson Queen may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2002, or sandra@thepaper.media.



DEVAN BERRY / THE PAPER

POWER

FROM PAGE 1A

circumstances of the storm. One of the bigger obstacles presented is rebuilding sections of the lines that have been damaged.

It is not just repairing a pole, a line, or a substation, but rebuilding sections that have seen a "tremendous amount of damages," Brooks said.

Duke Energy is doing everything it can and will continue to push out information through alerts and social media to keep the public apprised of the progress.

"We appreciate your patience as we work through this historical disaster," Brooks said to impacted customers. "We are very committed and are working as fast and safely as we can."

In the City of Morganton, its ElectriCities-powered system (partners with Duke Energy) has 4,000 reported outages as of Monday morning. Morganton has 8,529 customers.

Public Information Officer Jonelle Sigmon reported on Saturday, Sept. 28, that it would take three to five days before the power returned.

The local crews are receiving help from sister city power communities such as Maiden, Wilson, Granite Falls, and Greenville.

City officials advise residents to slow down as crews are on the roadway and remain patient while they work away. Residents should make sure their main breaker is off when connecting a generator to prevent backfeed and possible injuries to themselves or linemen.

RUTHERFORD EMC

Around 39,680 Rutherford EMC members are without power. This was down from a peak of 61,000 just after Hurricane Helene moved across our area.

Cooperative crews from less-impacted regions of the state have joined forces with Rutherford EMC's local crews to navigate hard-hit communities and tackle outages. Restoration points are inaccessible in many areas due to flooding or damaged roadways, and damage to power poles and lines is severe across the system.

"It's hard to describe the extent of the damage to our system," said Dirk Burleson, general manager for Rutherford EMC. "In many cases, it's not just a repair effort, but a rebuild. ... When crews get to where they need to be, they're not just met with a limb on a line — they're met with entire trees that have pulled down spans of line and snapped poles that need to be rebuilt."

With the extent of the damages, their repair efforts will take several days or weeks to fully restore power to all customers.

Saydie Bean may be reached at 828-445-8595, ext. 2011, or saydie@thepaper.media.

HELENE

FROM PAGE 1A

experts.

Burke County Public Schools will be closed for the rest of the week.

The Morganton campus of the NC School of Science and Mathematics is closed.

President Biden has granted Gov. Roy Cooper's request for a Federal Major Disaster Declaration for Tropical Storm Helene providing immediate federal help for Burke County.

The declaration means that FEMA will be able to speed additional help to the county, and provide Individual Assistance to people living in Burke, as well as Public Assistance to reimburse local governments, state agencies, and nonprofits or other eligible organizations for funds spent repairing facilities and infrastructure.

A Burke County Relief Center has opened in the Foothills Higher Education Center on South Sterling Street near Interstate 40 in Morganton and offers water, canned foods, children's necessities, cleaning supplies, and other needed items.

UNC Health Blue Ridge established an Incident Command at its Morganton campus. In the midst of the storm the hospital lost power at both its Morganton and Valdese campuses. Its generators immediately took over, and power has since been restored. Like most of the area, the hospital experienced a temporary water outage at Morganton, and a contractual agreement enabled transferring potable water from Catawba County. Importantly, this has not affected patient care.

Non-emergent surgeries temporarily are canceled until it's safe to resume normal operations and the staff can safely return to work.

The hospital is assessing outpatient clinics for any damage or utility outages and will reopen them as soon as possible.

Today, Valdese Express Care, Cajun Mountain Express Care, and McDowell Express Care have reopened with more expected to follow tomorrow.

Countywide, Duke Energy estimates 15,943 customers are without power. In North Carolina, there are 309,035 customers without power.

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Grocery stores and restaurants discarded frozen foods and produce as required by health codes that set emergency guidelines. Replenishment efforts are underway.

Hardware stores are sold out of chainsaws and generators. Truckloads of those are inbound to restock inventory.

Aviation traffic at the Morganton-Lenoir Airport is busy. As of mid-afternoon Friday, there were five helicopters in operation, including several Black Hawks and a couple of National Guard choppers. These were delivering food and other emergency supplies for Burke and Caldwell counties. NC Rep. Hugh Blackwell, Speaker of the House Tim Moore, and Burke Sheriff Banks Hinceman were

CLOSURES / SCHEDULE CHANGES

- **Burke County Public Schools** are closed through Friday, Oct. 4. Next week is questionable at this point. YMCA before- and after-school programs.
- **New Dimensions Charter School** is closed through at least Wednesday, Oct. 2.
- **The North Carolina School for the Deaf** is closed through at least Wednesday, Oct. 2.
- **Western Piedmont Community College** will be closed through Friday, Oct. 4.
- **JR's Rodeo at Burke County Fairgrounds** has been rescheduled to Friday, Oct. 4, and Saturday, Oct. 6.
- **The U.S. Forest Service** will close its roads in Burke County, including the Table Rock picnic area.
- **Burke County landfill and convenience sites** have reopened for normal hours.
- **All Burke County and Morganton parks**, including canoe access on Watermill Road and Fonta Flora County Park, are closed until further notice.
- **The Morganton Aquatic Center** is closed.
- **Burke County Animal Clinic** is closed.
- **Burke United Christian Ministries** is serving lunch at its normal time, 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. All other services are closed.
- **Burke County Senior Services**, including the Burke Senior Center in Morganton; the East Burke Senior Center in Hildebran; Nutrition Services; and Veterans' Services, are closed until further notice.
- **Green Street Grille** is open for lunch on Monday, Sept. 30, noon to 4 p.m. Limited menu available. Credit/debit cards accepted.
- **Toasted and Rolled** is closed until further notice.
- **The Reptile Cantina** hopes to reopen on Tuesday.
- **Ono Poke Bowl** is closed until further notice.
- **Republic Services** is a minimum of two days behind schedule.
- **Burke County Public Libraries and other non-essential services** are closed.

SAFETY TIPS FOR RESIDENTS

- To prepare for the Hurricane Helene storm and remain safe, here are some tips for residents:
- Stock your home with non-perishable food and a gallon of water for each person per day
 - Check your power generators or invest in one during this hurricane season
 - Stay off the roads if possible, motorists are killed in rising flood waters every year
 - Do not touch or move fallen power lines, instead call your electric services provider
 - Call 911 for life-threatening emergencies to keep the emergency lines open

aboard another helicopter taking aerial tours of the area.

The Town of Valdese is clearing a landing pad for a federal/military fire and rescue helicopter on Old Rock School grounds to be used as a landing zone in case needed. The town's pre-agenda meeting is postponed until Oct. 7.

Valdese Lakeside Park is closed until further notice.

Water service is restored in Valdese, and customers are advised to boil water. Extensive power outages remain and are being restored. Additional information forthcoming. Public works and cleaning crews from Maiden, Duke Energy, and locally have been working throughout the town to collect debris and fallen trees.

Mimosa Golf Course is closed for the week.

PREPARATIONS

Meteorologists forecasted record-setting creek, stream, river, and lake levels with this weather event. They underestimated the power and fury of Helene. Imagine the power of a storm that can lift trillions of tons of water from the Gulf of Mexico, haul it north and dump it over western North Carolina.

Helene made landfall Thursday night as a Category 4 storm with 140 mph winds, the strongest storm on record to hit the Big Bend region.

The devastation to western North Carolina cannot be underestimated. Or for that matter, described at this point with clarity.

Helene's approach had area officials and leaders scrambling to predict the storm's impact on businesses, municipi-

USEFUL CONTACTS

- For current weather conditions in Morganton, go to the NC School Science and Math — Morganton weather station.
- City of Morganton — 828-438-5277
- Duke Energy —1-800-POWERON (1-800-769-3766)
- Rutherford Electric — 1-800-228-9756
- Town of Drexel — 828-430-1794
- Blue Ridge Energy — 1-800-448-2383
- Mountain Electric — 828-733-0159
- Burke County 911 Admin — 828-437-1911

pal infrastructure, school schedules, sports and other outdoor events throughout the region. Television crews from Charlotte were onsite Wednesday afternoon interviewing residents about Helene and emergency preparations. Burke County emergency personnel and utility workers were loading trucks, calling in works and taking proactive steps to react quickly to whatever the storm brought.

Travelers on I-40 witnessed on Thursday caravans of utility trucks and river-rescue crews with inflatable boats heading into Burke County and points west.

Within the City of Morganton, Chief Jason Whisnant of Public Safety and his team reviewed their emergency plan for flooding and tropical-type storms.

"We do this every year as hurricane season approaches. Understanding although rare, we do get tropical systems like the major flooding of 2004," Whisnant said. "Part of this preparation is communicating with our patrol units and distributing information on 'flood-prone' areas. These are areas within the city that flood and are close to residential neighborhoods. We will be vigilant in monitoring those areas over the next 48 hours."

The department's emergency call-back plan can activate 20-plus personnel on the scene within an hour's notice. This plan is in place for any major incidents, weather events, or fires, he said.

Morganton's Electric Services Director Brooks Kirby conducted similar precautions, checking their trucks while stocking them with spare parts. They also preemptively checked transformers to see if they were up to par.

Morganton contracted with a standby tree-trimming company. They will also lean on the support of ElectriCities of North Carolina.

The electric services throughout Burke geared up for power outages.

Rutherford Electric Membership Corporation, along with other electric cooperatives, monitored the storm. N.C. Electric Cooperatives' se-

nior vice president and chief operating officer Nelle Hotchkiss said that cooperatives train year-round for a situation like this.

"Any time a tropical system is forecast to impact our state, electric cooperative personnel move from preparation to action," Hotchkiss said. "This storm is no different. Our trucks are fueled. Our materials are stocked. Our equipment is tested. Our line crews are prepped, in place, and ready to respond."

Rutherford Electric relies upon other cooperatives for help. To monitor the outages in North Carolina, visit <https://outages.ncelectriccooperatives.com/outages/maps>.

Meteorologists forecasted record-setting creek, stream, river, and lake levels with this weather event. They underestimated the power and fury of Helene.

Burke County opened a shelter at Oak Hill United Methodist Church (2239 NC-181, Morganton) starting at 8 p.m. Thursday night. This shelter provides refuge for residents in need during the most intense period of the storm.

Gov. Cooper declared on Friday a State of Emergency.

Emergency Management Director Mike Willis readied his teams for flooding in the following areas: Lookout Shoals dams, Bridgewater, Rhodhiss, and near the Catawba River which may see potential road closures later this afternoon.

Burke County Assistant 911 Director Chris White reported that additional team members are in place. Storms can cause a high volume of 911 calls in addition to the typical medical emergencies, fires, and crime reports.

"Normal emergencies don't stop because storms are coming," White said.

Emergency 911 should only be used for true emergencies, otherwise the lines can become overwhelmed and response time impacted. Non-emergency calls should be made to the department's administrative line, 828-437-1911. Calls regarding power and utility disruptions should be directed to local providers.