The background of the cover is a photograph of several rescue workers in yellow and red gear wading through floodwaters. They are wearing helmets and life jackets. In the background, there are houses and a car partially submerged in the water. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

HURRICANE

MATTHEW

COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

THE
ROBESONIAN

October 2017 | A Special Supplement

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HURRICANE MATTHEW COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

The Robesonian asked readers to provide their memories of the hurricane and the immediate aftermath. Thanks to Angela Lamb, Charles Kemp and Wendy Field for sharing their recollections of heroism.

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Dear Reader,

In putting together today's commemorative edition of Hurricane Matthew, The Robesonian turned to our readers for help for two primary reasons.

One, our ability to cover the story in its immediate aftermath, which including taking photographs, was severely hampered because of damage to our building and the loss of electronics, including cameras, and a shortage of personnel. More on that can be found in columns by Editor Donnie Douglas and Sarah Willets, who was then the managing editor of the newsroom, in today's special section.

Secondly, we knew that there were literally thousands of Robesonians who chronicled the devastation in their own way, including through photographs.

So we invited submissions and were overwhelmed but pleased by the positive response. For that reason, some photographs might not be of the quality our readers expect, but we publish them today knowing that all of them are part of the story of Hurricane Matthew.

Thanks to all who contributed.

HURRICANE MATTHEW COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

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Preparation enabled SRMC continue to provide care

By T.C. Hunter

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LUMBERTON — As Hurricane Matthew roared through Robeson County on Oct. 8, 2016, 165 patients lay in their beds at Southeastern Regional Medical Center listening to the wind howl, the rain pound and wondering if it would become impossible for their care to continue — and if they would be forced to evacuate.

The care continued, even as the waters rose around the hospital, city water and public power were lost, and flooded roads, streets and highways made it difficult for needed supplies to be delivered. Continuously caring for the patients and dealing with the myriad problems created by the storm were about 1,000 medical center employees, many of whom slept at the hospital until the floodwaters receded, water and power were restored, and normal operations initiated.

Among the staffers sleeping at the hospital were Jason Cox, vice president and chief operating officer, and Fordham Britt, director of Primary Care, Coding, Billing and Quality for Physicians.

“I’m from Georgia, so it was a first for me,” said Cox, 39, who had held his job at the medical center for about 10 months when Matthew hit.

The hospital’s staff started having daily meetings about Hurricane Matthew



Jason Cox, Southeastern Regional Medical Center vice president/chief operating officer, sits in his office, where he slept during the days after Hurricane Matthew hit on Oct. 8, 2016.

T.C. Hunter | The Robsonian



T.C. Hunter

on Oct. 5, three days before it hit, according to Cox. The hospital started ordering extra supplies and asked its satellite clinics to send its refrigerated supplies to SRMC because the hospital was better equipped to keep them cold if power were lost. Administrators decided on Oct. 7 to make sure the hospital had four days worth of supplies on hand.

The hospital activated its Command Center late on the morning of Oct. 8, in the midst of the storm.

Among the center’s duties are supporting ongoing hospital operations in a disaster, ensuring doctors and nurses have what they need to continue treating patients, coordinating on-site lodging for staff, and interfacing with federal, state and local disaster agencies.

“It was very eye-opening and quite intriguing working with those agencies,” Cox said.

The center also has a person in charge

of supplies, a person to oversee safety and security, an administrative assistant and a public relations person.

“We try to keep it as small as possible so as to keep operations efficient,” Cox said.

Twenty-four hours after Matthew hit, hospital administrators called in extra doctors, nurses and pharmacists, and they slept on site. A

normal staffing level of food services, housekeeping and other support personnel were in the building during the days after the storm hit.

“I was actually sleeping right here on an old military cot,” said Cox, a former captain in the U.S. Army Medical Service Corps who sent his wife and three children to Georgia to stay with family.

The hospital lost power on the afternoon of Oct. 8 and immediately turned to its five on-site generators for power. Two of the generators eventually failed because they weren’t accustomed to being run at 100 percent capacity for so long. In order to keep the remaining three operating, the hospital reduced its power usage, including shutting down freight elevators and turning off some hall lighting.

“We turned off whatever we could, whatever we deemed nonessential,” Cox said.

Power was restored about 11 p.m. on the Oct. 11, the Wednesday after Matthew struck. That same day the U.S. Army

Corps of Engineers finished setting up a generator and tying into the the hospital's power grid. The engineers kept the generator ready to supply electricity in case the Duke Energy power supply wasn't stable.

"We were very thankful they brought it, and the soldiers did a lot of work getting it operational," Cox said.

Water was another matter.

"We still didn't have water," Cox said.

The hospital has a shallow well from which water could be drawn into cart-mounted 55-gallon drums and used for such functions as flushing toilets, Cox said. To augment that limited supply water was brought in by tractor-trailer rigs for two weeks. The hospital was going through water at a rate one tanker per hour.

"It was quite a logistical feat," Cox said.

The trucks would pick up water in St. Pauls, make it potable and pressurize it, Fordham Britt said. The trucks would then come to the hospital, attach a hose to a valve and pump the water directly into the hospital's water system. The water then could be accessed through the building's plumbing system wherever it was needed. The staff on-site tried to conserve water where possible but made sure patient care was never slighted.

The hospital's city-fed water supply didn't return until the week of Oct. 24, 2016.

Patient care continued throughout the weather drama.

"Some of the most vulnerable people in the county were sitting right here in the hospital," Cox said.



Courtesy photo | Southeastern Health
Helping Southeastern Regional Medical Center's staff care for patients in the days after Hurricane Matthew hit on Oct. 8, 2016, was a Carolinas HealthCare System Med 1 Mobile Hospital Unit.

A Carolinas HealthCare System mobile hospital unit out of Charlotte arrived at SRMC in the days after Matthew passed, fully staffed with physicians, physician assistants and nurses. It had 10 treatment bays and a fully functioning emergency room.

The unit was set up on 27th Street and stayed at SRMC for about 10 days.

"They delivered a baby in it," Cox said.

Nobody at the hospital went hungry, he said. The hospital was able to be restocked thanks to help from the county Emergency Operations Center, which arranged escorts using county deputies and state troopers, to guide in 18-wheelers bringing in supplies. Truckers accustomed to using Interstate 95 and U.S. 74 to make deliveries to SRMC had to be guided over secondary roads not swamped by Matthew's floodwaters.

"We were getting them every day," Cox said of the supply trucks.

Some patients had to be evacuated.

Four or five infants in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit were sent on Oct. 9 to New Hanover Regional Medical Center in Wilmington, he said. When the two generators started to fail the eight or nine patients in the adult Intensive Care Unit were evacuated. Some were sent to Duke University Hospital and others to Cape Fear Regional Medical Center.

Britt played a leadership role for the duration of the hospital's Matthew saga.

"I was the leader on duty, and he (Cox) was the administrator on duty," Britt said.

She was called in on the morning of Oct. 8 and stayed at the hospital until the crisis situation was over.

"I was there basically 24-7," Britt said.

She was able to take small breaks to go home and change clothes and take "sponge baths" using bottled water, Britt said.

"Jason Cox brought me a cot and I slept in my office," she said.

She and Cox rotated leadership shifts, she said. When Cox was asleep, she was awake and when she slept, Cox was awake. Often the sleep was little

more than a few hours at a time as the situation allowed.

The hospital has 2,500 employees. About 1,000 of them, including doctors, nurses, other caregivers and support staff, were at the hospital during the days after Matthew struck and until normal operations were resumed, Britt said.

Work shifts and stations were assigned by the Human Resources Department. Some of the employees were assigned duties not related to their normal jobs and stations. For example, people who normally work in Billing were sweeping floors or working in the cafeteria. While some staffers slept, the others were working.

“For what we were doing, though, it was very organized,” Britt said.

When it was determined the hospital had enough caregivers on-site, some of them were sent to help at evacuation shelters throughout the county.

“Many of our nurses were in some of those locations,” Britt said.

The hospital also sent to the shelters medical supplies from clinics that were closed because of the storm and resulting flooding.

Throughout the ordeal “the staff was strong,” very professional and calm, Britt said. They were concerned about their co-workers who weren’t with them because they knew some of them were dealing with the flooding and the losses it caused.

Their concerns were accentuated by the fact they could get only limited information about what was happening in their communities, Britt said. They had no television and no internet. Their main sources of information were telephone calls from friends and family members and the emergency centers.

“They didn’t truly understand the magnitude of the storm’s effect on the community,” Britt said.

They had no idea the county was the center of a national story.

“They couldn’t see what was going on outside, and, in a sense, maybe that was a good thing,” Britt said.



Helping the staff members struggle through the ordeal was a “very good support system” of co-workers and administrators, Britt said. Administrators ensured they were fed, that they had toiletries and that they had clean undergarments.

The system still is helping hospital employees cope with the losses they suffered.

Southeastern Health President and CEO Joann Anderson was chief among that support system, Britt said. She described Anderson as a caring, compassionate and strong person who inspires those traits in others.

“You have a tendency to follow that lead,” Britt said.

Then there was the Rev. Dean Carter, SRMC chaplain. Carter and the hospital’s chapel stayed open to serve spiritual needs.

“He does a tremendous job,” Britt said of Carter.

Inside a hospital surrounded by flooded streets, the patients weathered the storm well, Britt said. The staff made sure the patients were fed and cared for, and made sure their rooms remained cool even when the sleeping area assigned to the staff wasn’t.

“I think they were dealing with it fine,” Britt said.

One challenge faced by the SRMC staff came in the form of “patient visitors” who came to SRMC only because the hospital had power and a functioning cafeteria, Britt said. Eventually the hospital had to go into lockdown and limit access to only patients and staff.

“The hospital is not a shelter,” Britt said. Helping secure the hospital were members of the North Carolina National Guard, she said. The soldiers helped maintain security and served as a deterrent against possible looting and violence.

And through it all spirits never sank, Britt said. There were even moments when something would happen to spark laughter.

“All in all we tried to maintain a sense of humor”

“All in all we tried to maintain a sense of humor,” Britt said.

The hospital and its staff handled the weather emergency so well because it was prepared, Cox said.

“Be prepared, to rip off the Boy Scout’s motto, and take your training seriously,” Cox said.

Reach T.C. Hunter at 910-816-1974.

CITY OF LUMBERTON



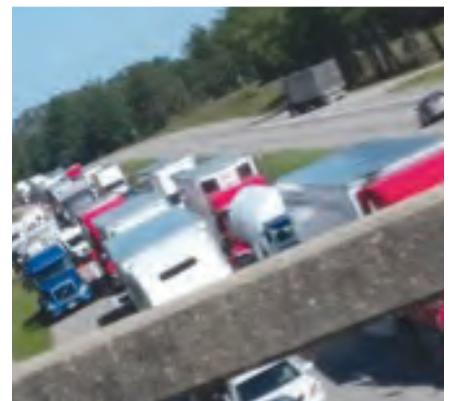
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

To all First Responders Who Assisted During Hurricane Matthew:

The City of Lumberton was the hardest hit and yet the first to recover its public facilities. The floodwaters are gone but in their wake are countless families who have been displaced. We want to thank all First Responders including Police, Fire, Rescue, and the many Volunteers who worked nonstop during Hurricane Matthew. We recognize you for your service, sacrifice, and your strength of heart. As a First Responder you are part of a noble profession, one that embodies a Patriot's Call and a Servant's Heart. There is no higher calling than giving of one's self for another.

Thank you for your service,
Mayor Bruce W. Davis



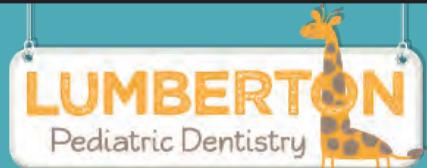




Courtesy photo | Southeastern Health
A Carolinas HealthCare System Med 1 Mobile Hospital Unit was dispatched to Southeastern Regional Medical Center to help care for patients until the hospital's utility services were restored.

Courtesy photo | Stephanie Chavis
Hurricane Matthew's wet rampage is evident in this photo taken from the home of Stephanie Chavis' parents.

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When should my child first see a dentist?

"First visit by first birthday" sums it up. Your child should visit a pediatric dentist when the first tooth comes in, usually between 6 and 12 months of age. This visit will establish a dental home for your child. Early examination and preventive care will protect your child's smile now and in the future.

Who should receive general anesthesia for dental treatment?

General anesthesia may be indicated for children with extensive dental needs who are extremely uncooperative, fearful or anxious or for the very young who do not understand how to cope in a cooperative fashion. General anesthesia also can be helpful for children requiring significant surgical procedures or patients having special health care needs.

What are sealants?

Sealants protect the grooved and pitted surfaces of the teeth, especially the chewing surfaces of back teeth where most cavities in children are found. Made of clear or shaded plastic, sealants are applied to the teeth to help keep them cavity-free.

When should I start cleaning my baby's teeth?

The sooner the better! Starting at birth, clean your child's gums with a soft infant toothbrush or cloth and water. As soon as the teeth begin to appear, start brushing twice daily using fluoridated toothpaste and a soft, age-appropriate sized toothbrush. Use a "smear" of toothpaste to brush the teeth of a child less than 2 years of age. For the 2-5 year old, dispense a "pea-size" amount of toothpaste and perform or assist your child's tooth brushing. Remember that young children do not have the ability to brush their teeth effectively.

Schools chief wore many hats in early recovery



Robeson County schools Superintendent Tommy Lowry was busy after Hurricane Matthew left the area. He helped local emergency management leaders coordinate recovery efforts and helped get food to storm refugees.

By Scott Bigelow

Bigelow@yahoo.com

LUMBERTON — When Hurricane Matthew closed the Public Schools of Robeson County and swamped the central office, school officials, led by Superintendent Tommy Lowry, got busy, helping to lead the recovery effort.

With the central office under more than 5 feet of water, Lowry opened five shelters across Robeson County. He also coordinated the transportation by school bus of evacuees, many still soaked from floodwaters and carrying the few belongings they could salvage. Food from school cafeterias was used to feed people in shelters.

While disaster response was his first priority, Lowry said the work to reopen schools as quickly as possible went on simultaneously. The superintendent met with his staff every day at 5 p.m. under a tree outside their destroyed offices near the Lumber River, just west of Interstate 95.

“We got back to school in three weeks,” Lowry said with considerable pride. “But this story isn’t about Tommy Lowry because many people worked very hard.”

In a disaster there is one certainty: Everything will not go as planned. In a first-person account, Lowry recalls the story from pre-hurricane meetings to the restart of schools on Oct. 31, which was a Monday.

“During the week before the hurricane, we met again with the Robeson County Emergency Management Center,” Lowry said. “When we left, the forecast was for some wind as the hurricane brushed by the side of us.

“The high schools were prepared as emergency shelters. We had Purnell Swett, South Robeson, St. Pauls and Carroll Middle ready. Lumberton High School was having its gym floor refinished, so we could not use it.

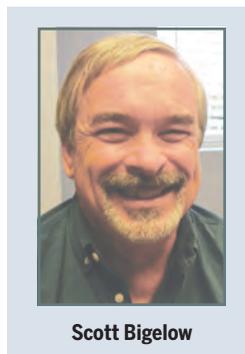
“Later Saturday, we were hearing the storm had changed direction. It was raining pretty hard, but we were hoping that it would move on. We were going to ride it out.

“On Sunday morning, I got the first call at 5:30 a.m. about flooding. We opened up St. Pauls High School. I stayed there all day.

“We were getting reports of more flooding from Ricky (County Manager Ricky Harris) and his staff at the Emergency Management Center. The focus was on evacuating people. Ricky and his people did a great job throughout.”

Sunday came and people being evacuated were without transportation to shelters.

“(Lumberton City Councilman) Eric Hackney called me about getting school buses to deliver people to shelters,” Lowry said.



Scott Bigelow

“I was able to get bus drivers, and we started taking people to shelters. With flooding occurring all over the county, I sent Ernie Hammonds, our maintenance supervisor, to survey the schools. “On Sunday morning, I went to the central office. Water was up to the front door. When I returned around 2 p.m. on Sunday, the offices and maintenance buildings were completely submerged. There was a lot of moving water. I began calling the principals to assess damage. We did this through Wednesday.

“As water levels started to go down after Wednesday, I told Mr. Harris that we needed to get to West Lumberton and Knuckles elementary schools. When we did get there, West Lumberton had 3 to 4 feet of water inside, and Knuckles had water in the cafeteria and in one wing of the school.

“All this time, we were carrying food and water to shelters from our cafeterias. We continued to assess damage to the schools. We also had people out assessing the roads. We found that 280 roads were damaged.

“My first thought was to get kids back in school and get employees back to work. Our employees needed paychecks. My key staff met every day at the central office at 5 p.m. under a tree. I met with Thomas Benson, Jeff Fipps, Everett Teal, Bobby Locklear, Raymond Cummings and Tasha Oxendine, who all put in a lot of hours.”

As the week wore on, Superintendent Lowry and his staff focused on the transition from disaster to recovery. Paychecks needed to be cut and the central office needed temporary quarters. But they were not finished with disaster relief.

County emergency officials said Lowry was a constant presence at the command center.

“On Wednesday after the hurricane, a shelter closed, and people had to be moved to Red Springs High School,” Lowry said. “I called the principal to get the school open and rounded up bus drivers. I drove to Red Springs to make sure the school was ready.

“The buses did not arrive in Red Springs until around midnight because so many roads were closed. The people were tired and a little on edge,” he said. “Red Springs Police Chief Ronnie Patterson was there to welcome them, and everything went smoothly.

“My concern was that to open the schools, the shelters had to close. There was lots of damage to the schools that sheltered people. The bus garage was also flooded. We needed to get paychecks out. Many of our employees live paycheck to paycheck, and everyone needed money after the hurricane.

“We were bouncing everywhere. I was working 14 to 16 hours a day and weekends. We had trees down and water damage in many schools.

“Then, there was the mold scare. To ease people’s minds about black mold, we had every school tested by air quality professionals. We only found one problem and fixed it quickly.

“To find a place for the central office staff, we looked in Lumberton, Red Springs and Pembroke. We ended up in the Native Angels building at COMtech. On Friday, I called Frank Till (Cumberland County school superintendent) to see if our payroll department could run checks there. He graciously said ‘yes.’ It took a week, but we got the payroll out.

“There were so many details. We were able to put our maintenance department in a warehouse on U.S. 74. We cleaned up some of the flooded maintenance buildings at the central office. The above-ground tanks had spilled fuel at the central office. The EPA was called in, and we got that solved quickly.

“Besides damaged roads, our buses had to pick up students whose families were housed in hotels. We worked that out.

“Decisions had to be made about West Lumberton and Knuckles. There was room for all the Knuckles students in their school. Tanglewood Elementary was able to provide their food. West Lumberton students moved to Lumberton Junior High, which had room for them.

“Everybody got their regular paycheck on time with no days taken away for the hurricane. We were blessed that the state forgave us all but two school days.

“We tried to stay in constant contact with parents through the Connect Education phone system. The media helped, too. Hundreds of people helped us recover. When schools started back, about 700 students were absent. They had, undoubtedly, moved out of the county to stay with relatives.

“Everywhere, people helped and did everything they could. My staff worked with me the entire time. The Sheriff’s Department, Highway Patrol, local and county governments and police all did great work.

“I’m sure we made mistakes, but we had never seen anything like this. We did our best, and we were more than willing to help anyone who needed it. This is a good county, and I want it to prosper, and the only way to do that is through education.”

Harris, the county manager, had a front-row seat watching Lowry throughout the immediate recovery effort.

“He went above and beyond the call of duty of his job and the concerns he had for the citizens of our County,” Harris said.

Scott Bigelow can be reached at 910-416-5649.

Athletics rallied to help when games put on pause



"We had athletes show up every day to help with the shelter, not because they were asked to or told to, but because they felt like that's what they needed to do," Hunt said.

Rodd Baxley | The Robesonian

Hunter Bullard, left, and Keely Jones organize clothes at Purnell Swett High School last October following Hurricane Matthew. Bullard and Jones were two of 30 student-athletes helping at the shelter.

By Rodd Baxley

rbaxley@robesonian.com

LUMBERTON — Jerome Hunt remembers the devastation following Hurricane Matthew.

The director of athletics at Purnell Swett High School, Hunt, along with his staff, worked tirelessly when his school was turned into a shelter that would end up housing roughly 800 people over the course of two weeks following the storm.

He remembers the helplessness. He remembers the tears shed by people who no longer had a place to call home. But most of all, he remembers his student-athletes stepping up to help those in need.

"We had athletes show up every day to help with the shelter, not because they

were asked to or told to, but because they felt like that's what they needed to do," Hunt said.

"As parents and coaches, it makes you feel very proud to know that these athletes stepped up in a time of need. We also know that some of these athletes that came to help during those two weeks are going to be our future leaders. They have already proven that."



Rodd Baxley

With athletic events in Robeson County on hold as recovery efforts continued, the near future of the fall sports season was in jeopardy. There was a two-week break from football, with other fall sports cancelling their conference tournaments.

Along with Purnell Swett, Red Springs, South Robeson and St. Pauls high schools were also being used as shelters.

"The West Robeson community saw a group of people in the shelter at Purnell Swett that needed help and stepped in to help in any way they could," Hunt said. "Just to watch our community come together to provide this help was amazing and it just lets you know what kind of great people we have in our community."

Jeff Fipps, the county's director of athletics, was being pulled in multiple directions, delivering food to various locations and dealing with the hassle of rescheduling athletic events.

"A lot of our athletes jumped in and did some volunteer work, as well as coaches. They really did their part to help their neighbors," Fipps said. "We looked around and those first couple of days there were some hard discussions about being able to get back on the field. We knew we couldn't just fold the season, but we were concerned."

Many of those student-athletes yearning to get back in the competitive arena



Rodd Baxley | The Robesonian

Lumberton's Stephon Lloyd, left with box, lost everything in the flooding caused by Hurricane Matthew. That didn't stop Lloyd from helping unload and organize boxes of donations at Lumberton High School following the storm.



Rodd Baxley | The Robesonian

Noah Evington, left, and Will Deese did their part to help out at Purnell Swett following the storm.



Rodd Baxley | The Robesonian

Mickey Bell, 10, was one of several Red Springs football players organizing clothes at the school's shelter to help those affected by Hurricane Matthew.

were among the roughly 1,500 people who were displaced in the wake of the storm.

"The biggest thing was the concern for our student-athletes," Fipps said. "We wanted to make sure they had some sense of normalcy. We wanted to get them back on the athletic field and at practice to take their minds off of what was going on."

Still, the uncertainty didn't stop the county's athletes from answering the call for help.

At Lumberton High School, the auxiliary gym was set up as a donation center. A slew of student-athletes and coaches were at the center of organizing donations to give back to their own and anyone else in need, sifting through hundreds of boxes of clothing, toiletries, food and other items.

It was happening across the county at each of the six high schools, all of them forgetting about rivals and focusing on doing their part to get the county back on its feet.

"It goes to show you that we're still all about genuine love for each other," Fipps said. "We all want each other to do well. Everybody in the county still knows each other and has ties.

"(There are) rivals on the field, but when they get off the field, they still have a bond and friendship. They genuinely care about each other. I thought that was very evident. Times like that you find out about people."

Rodd Baxley can be reached at 910-416-5182. Follow him on Twitter @RoddBaxley.



BEHIND EVERY PROJECT IS A TRUE VALUE

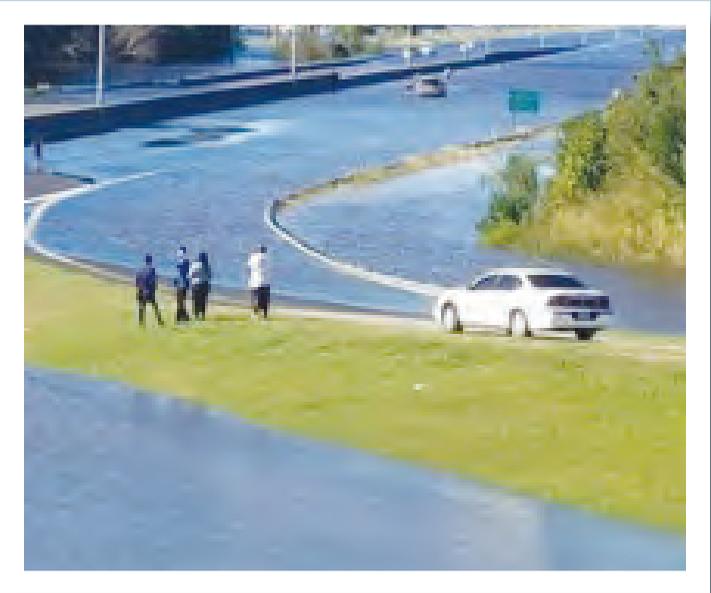
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Rescuers also came to the aid of stranded pets during Matthew

By Angela W. Lamb

For the Robesonian

Oct. 8, 2016, will be a day for all Robesonians to remember. We remember the wind, the water, the loss. People came together thereafter serving food, providing blankets and linens, and delivering water.



Angela W. Lamb

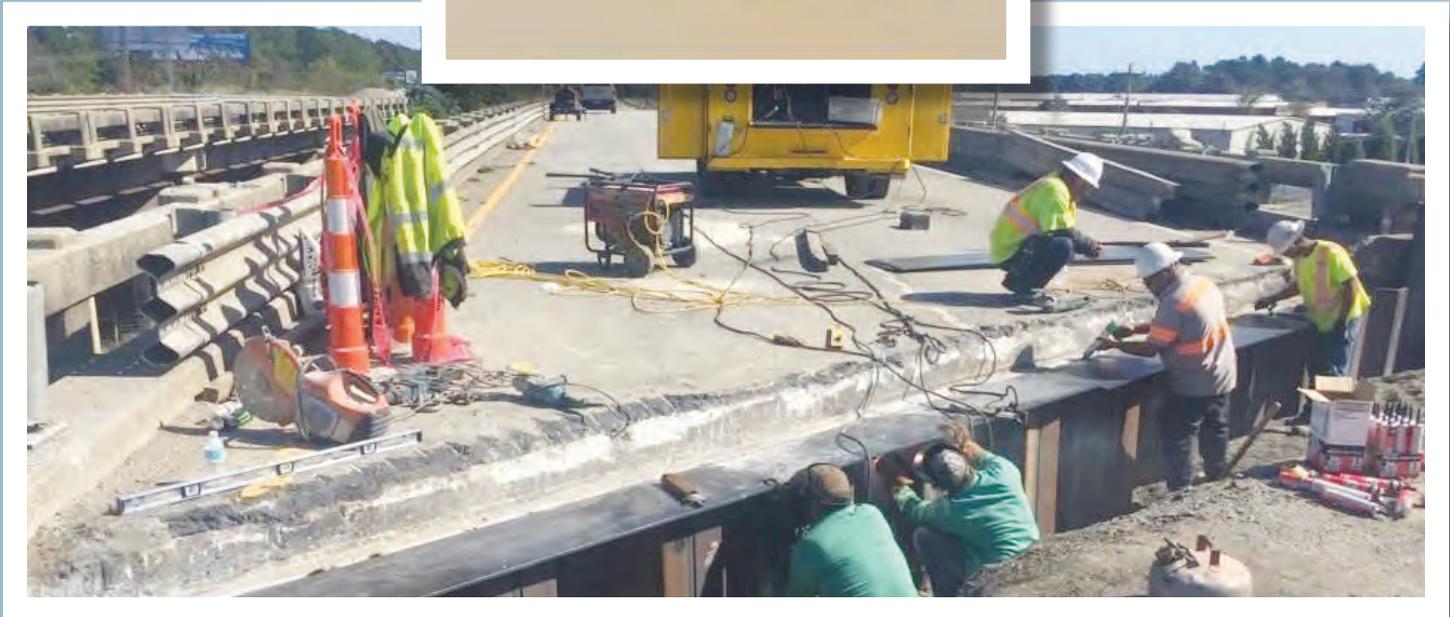
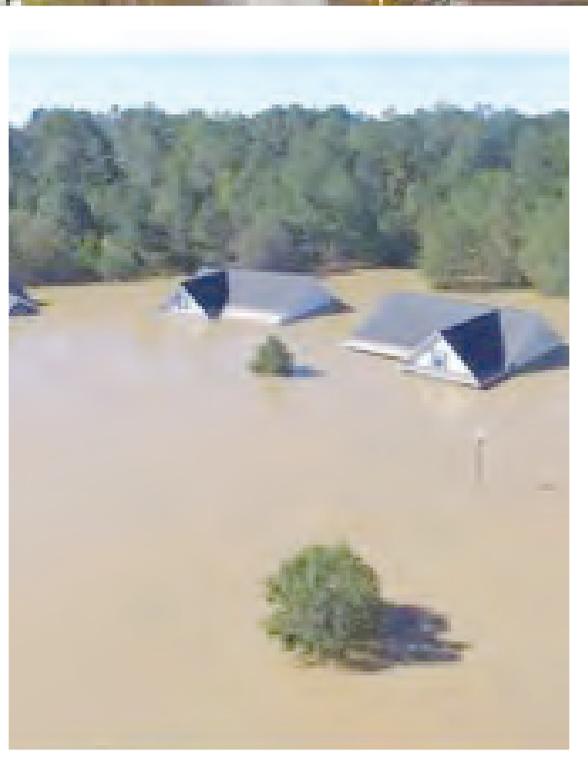
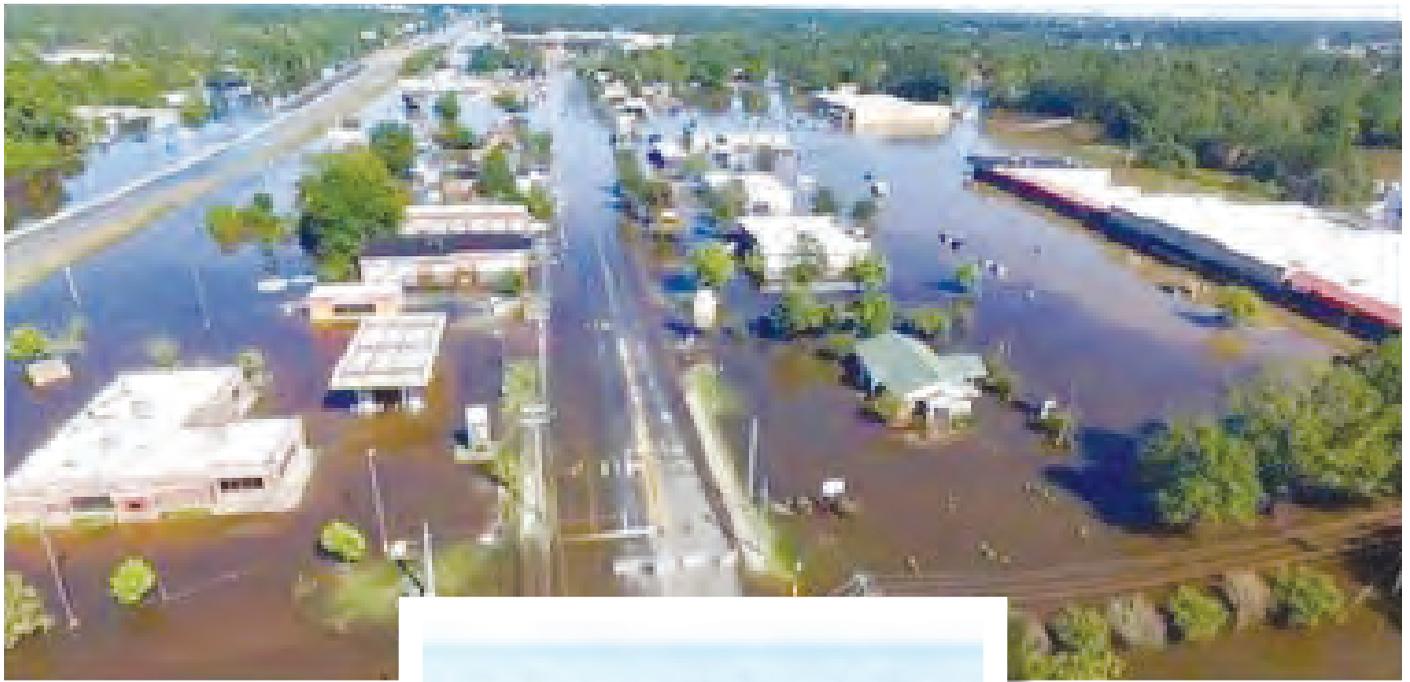
In difficult times, we need to remember a pet's point of view matters. We all know how pets give us unconditional love, and in times of disaster, we find them to be resilient, for many will fend for themselves for survival. They also look to their owners for protection and answers.

The Alamac Road rescues during Hurricane Matthew come to mind when I think of these pets. My son and husband took their small riverboat, as did many other people, to this area to rescue people from their homes. The water was rising by the hour and people wanted to stay behind in their homes, but it was time to leave.

Pets were everywhere. They, too, were scared. These animals had never seen such a sight just as we had not. Wet, shaking, and sad-eyed animals begging for comfort was a memory instilled in others and me. Sure, some of them resisted my son's and my husband's effort to load them in a boat, as the unknown frightened them. Some snapped a bit and had a defiant look as they did not know these strangers taking them away from their home. Like any pet, they followed their owners even though all were unsure of this small riverboat carrying them over water. They, like their owners, want safety and security. Isn't that what we all want? We want a safe place to call home and practice the things we believe in. We want peace. We want serenity.

As I watch on the news how Texans still are suffering from Hurricane Harvey, I think of the animals. Many lost their lives to this devastation of water. The dog carrying a bag of dog food down a Texan street is an amazing image of survival. Yes, animals are resilient and beautiful.

Thanks to all who rescued your neighbors, and if you rescued an animal, give yourself another pat on the back.



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Boat owners came to the rescue for many stranded Mayfair residents

By Wendy Fields

For the Robesonian

Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016, the day after Hurricane Matthew, our neighbors pulled up in our driveway and frantically asked if we would help search for their daughter. They saw a boat in our yard and needed my husband's help. They explained their daughter lived in Mayfair. She had not gone to a shelter because she didn't want to leave her dog behind. The parents had not heard from her and any attempt to drive to the home was futile due to the high waters.



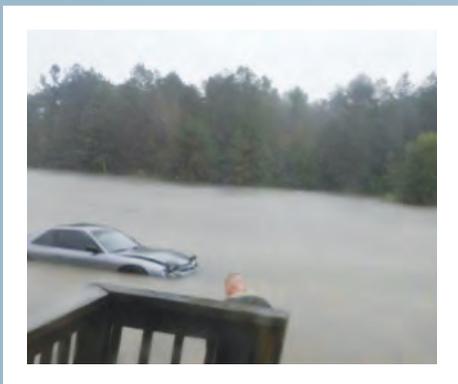
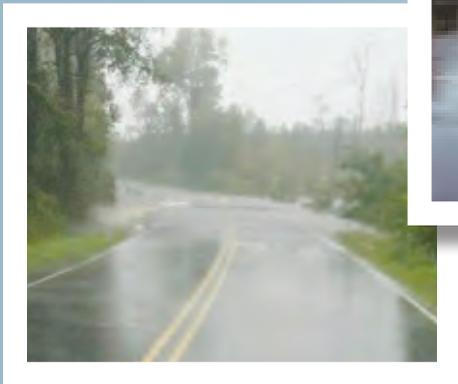
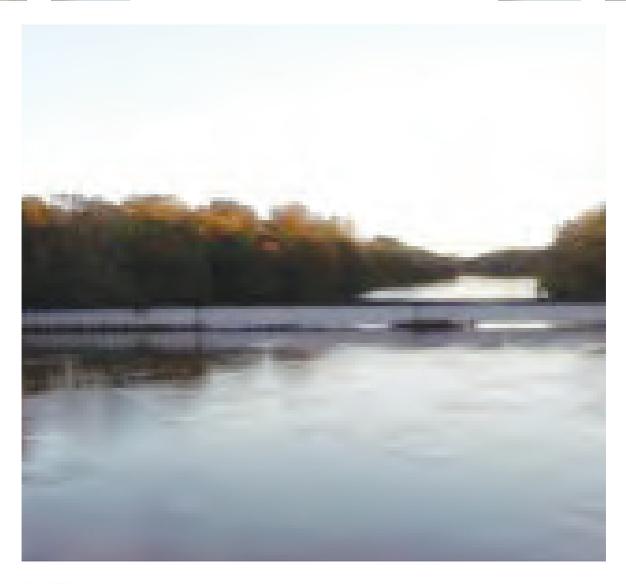
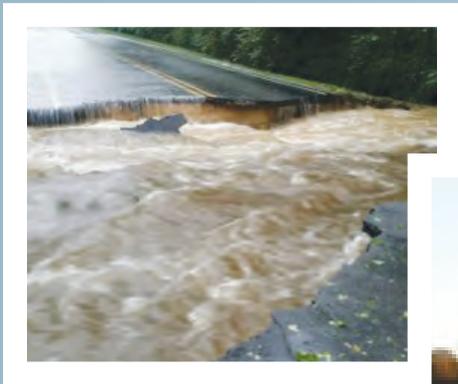
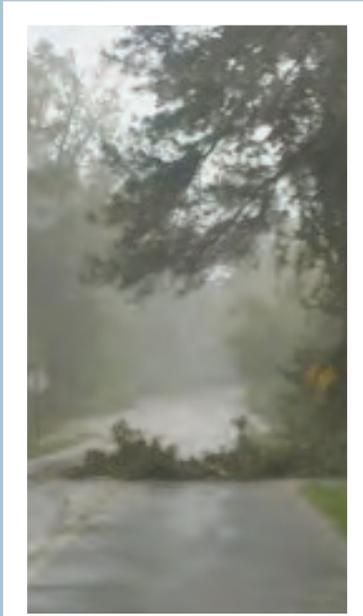
Wendy Fields

Immediately, my husband agreed to help. My daughter and I jumped into our truck as my husband hooked up the boat.

We arrived in the Mayfair subdivision to see water as tall as the mailboxes lining the street. My husband and the father boarded the boat and took off. After what seemed like an hour, the men returned with a load of people, but not our neighbors' daughter. They had gone to her house, but it was empty. She was nowhere to be found, yet.

The family on the boat with my husband had been trapped in their home and caught his ride out to drier land. Next, he went back down the watery street and picked up friends of ours who were trapped as well. People began to hear the motor on the boat and called out to my husband for help. After several times, back and forth, my daughter and I went back to our house as my husband stayed and rescued stranded residents. Many came out with just the clothes on their backs and with pets. Some were able to pack some bags. Some didn't know what to do next, asking him, "Where do we go now?" All were relieved to see a boat pass by and know they were being taken to safety — somewhere, anywhere.

My husband, Daniel, would never want this kind of recognition, but he went to Mayfair for three straight days chauffeuring people out as the waters kept rising. A couple of our neighbors (one who is our pastor) at times accompanied Daniel on his trips. Daniel even helped carry supplies in to Mayfair residents who had not left their homes. My husband is a simple man who loves the water — boating and fishing are his favorite pastimes. He was just doing what he loved. I am very proud that God used him to serve during this time.



ROBESONIAN READER RECOLLECTION OF HEROISM

Commissioner saw countless acts of unselfishness and heroism

By Charles Kemp

For the Robesonian

On Oct. 8, 2016, Hurricane Matthew visited the East Coast and our county as well. Torrential rains and excessively high winds resulted in flooded streets, businesses, and homes along with a massive loss of power.

As a Fairmont town commissioner I felt my place after the storm had passed was to assist my community and I chose to help out at our Public Works Department. For seven days I worked there manning the phones, taking messages, and coordinating public works officials. From my vantage point I witnessed several acts of unselfishness and outright heroism which I wish to share.



Charles Kemp

On the afternoon of Matthew's arrival several low lying streets in one of our residential neighborhoods soon flooded and word came that a handicapped person was unable to be removed from his home. Fairmont police detective Sgt. Chris McManus walked in waist deep floodwater several hundred feet to remove the person and carry him in his arms to higher ground, where he was transported to an alternate residence.

On Monday, Oct. 10, it was determined that without gas for the backup generator at Fairmont's sewer plant the entire system would become inoperable. The problem was that the sewer plant is 12 miles from Fairmont and much of N.C. 130 East was under water. With 500 gallons of gas local farmer Zack Johnson, Waste Water operator Kevin Taylor, rural firefighter Kenny Caulder, and Fairmont Rescue Commander Brandon Stone drove those miles on Johnson's large farm tractor to the plant's entry road only to find it under water and virtually impassable. With Taylor sitting atop the tractor guiding Johnson they were able to navigate the 4-foot-wide dirt road safely and fill the generator, thus keeping our sewer plant functioning. Later in the week they returned carrying Duke Energy linemen to repeat their efforts and restore permanent power to the plant.

These two incidents showed me the great care and unselfishness which several Fairmont workers exhibited during this weather disaster and they, as well as many others, deserve our praise and commendations.



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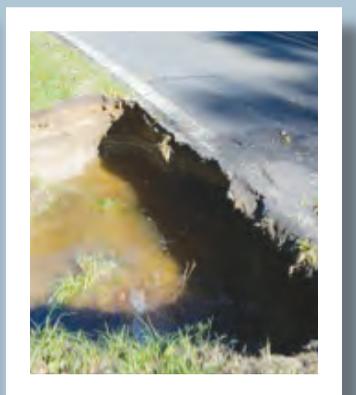
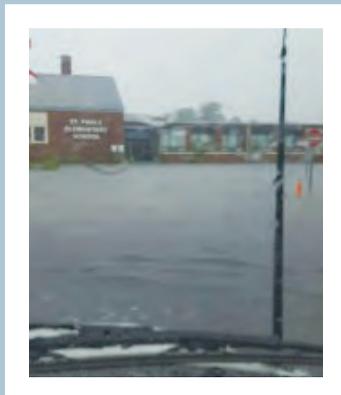
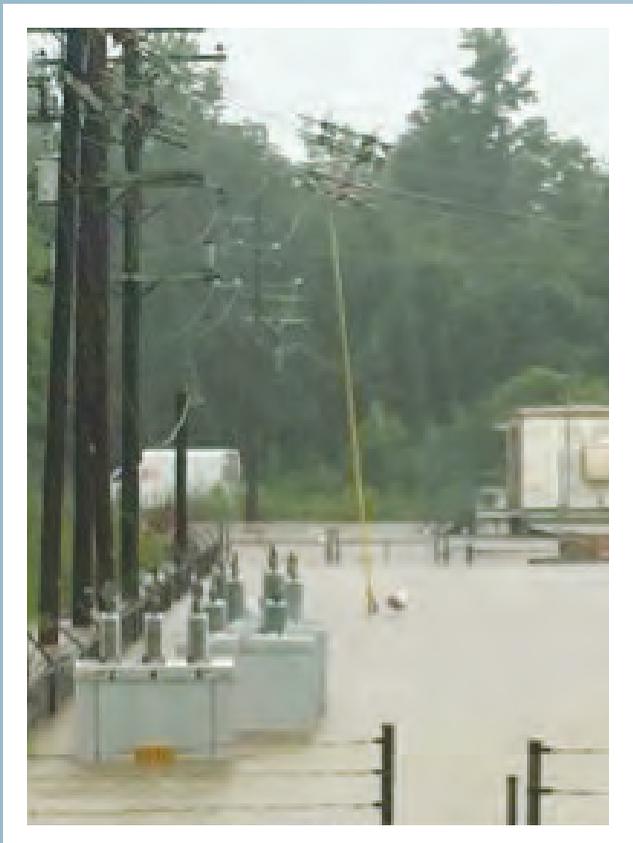
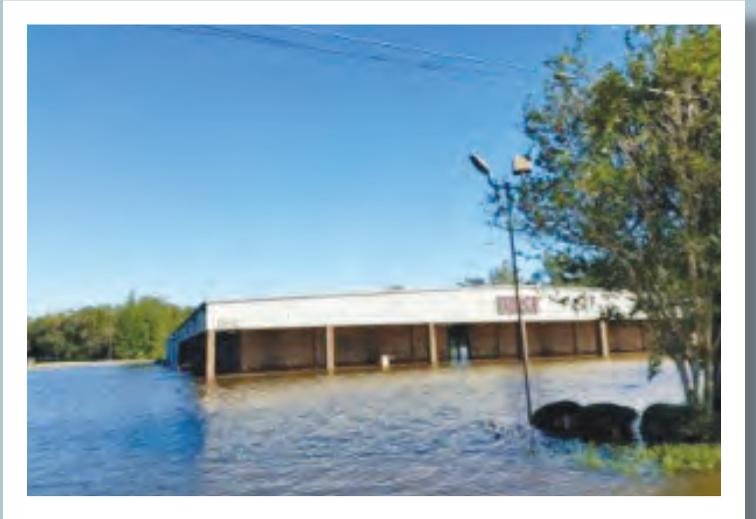


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Community rallied together in Matthew's wake



Courtesy photo | James Bass

Lumberton residents quickly came to the aid of their neighbors in the days after Hurricane Matthew left destruction and floodwaters in its wake.

By Sarah Willets

For the Robesonian

Oct. 8, 2016, started out as a fairly normal rainy Saturday. I was tasked with making sure the Sunday edition of The Robesonian got out OK, pretty simple given most of the Sunday edition is put together on Fridays.

But as I refreshed my browser, looking for the latest updates on Hurricane Matthew's approach toward the North Carolina coast, where it was expected to turn out to sea, it became clear that Matthew had other plans. I started getting calls from colleagues, one trapped inside The Robesonian's office as it filled with water and the other stranded at an emergency shelter, his car flooded as he tried to interview residents. Someone sent me a video of a person kayaking on a

residential street. I walked down to the end of my block to where the Lumber River passed through Stephens Park and saw water spraying at full force from manhole covers.



Sarah Willets

I got this alert from the city of Lumberton: "Most city streets are flooded and citizens are urged not to drive unless absolutely necessary." It wasn't even 2 p.m. and the county had already been inundated with more than 7 inches of rain, with hours of the onslaught still to come.

But probably the most eye-opening moment that day was when (in between intermittent power outages) I saw on Twitter that then-Gov. Pat McCrory had said the levee in Lumberton was failing, offering no other details. I called every person, every city and county department I could think of

to confirm and no one was picking up. Finally, through the police department, I reached a supervisor. He had no idea whether or not the news about the levee was true. He really wanted to help me, he said barely audible over the wind and rain, but he was knee deep in water evacuating people from their homes.

I've since moved away from Robeson County. Busy with a new reporting job in a new place with its own challenges, it can be easy to forget that Matthew happened. But sometimes, when the power flickers or I pull on the rain boots that practically never left my feet for a month, I remember.

This sense is even more acute in the wake of Hurricane Harvey and (as I write this) the approach of Hurricane Irma. Images of Texans stranded on rooftops, videos of reporters and law enforcement working together, and talking to my mom, who lives in Florida, as she searched empty Target shelves looking

for literally anything — all of this transports me back to Oct. 8, 2016.

As a reporter, covering Matthew was an emotional roller coaster. Journalists really do see their work as a public service (trust me, we are way too busy and underpaid to come up with “fake news”), so in that way it was exciting, like this was our moment to step up. I vacillated between this gratifying sense of duty and frustration that I couldn’t meet it the way that I wanted.

We were limited, not only in staff, but in movement, by road closures and the scarcity of gasoline, and in resources. Internet, power and cell phone service — critical to news in this day and age — could not be counted on. We were also limited by the fact that all of our usual sources, though they made genuine efforts to provide us with whatever we needed, were busy with their own jobs, and often just as overwhelmed and isolated as we were.

Thanks to the good will of city officials and Mayor Bruce Davis, I “embedded” at City Hall along with reporter Mike Gellatly, who lived with me for two weeks after being evacuated from his place and losing his car at the shelter. Keenly aware that we did not want to exploit the devastation affecting our neighbors, we made a decision early on the focus on need-to-know updates. What people needed was basic information — is my water safe to drink, how can I locate a relative in a shelter, will there be more flooding? We became a megaphone for information as municipalities and the county struggled with some of the same communication, staffing and mobility issues we faced in an unprecedented scenario.

And it was unprecedented. Ahead of the storm’s landfall, we expected a rainy day in Robeson County, where flooding is a fact of life. Although elected officials, city and county staff and first responders worked tirelessly in the wake of the storm,

Robeson County wasn’t ready for such a disaster and there were times when it showed.

I was infuriated when, a week after the storm, county officials called a press conference, commented on how positive they felt about the situation, bizarrely assured us they didn’t cause the hurricane and tried to leave without taking any questions. Meanwhile, the homes of residents relegated to flood zones because of their socioeconomic status were still water-logged, industrial farms filled with animal waste and chemicals had

been flooded, and the town of Fairmont had seen “an unknown amount of untreated wastewater” spill into the Lumber River basin.

North Carolina has yet to reckon with the pervasive social and environmental issues that exacerbated Matthew’s devastation across the state, and we’ve seen this same scenario now play out in Texas (and likely will again in Irma’s wake). According to the Governor’s Office, our state has only received a quarter of the \$4.8 billion it needs, and proposed cuts at the federal level for

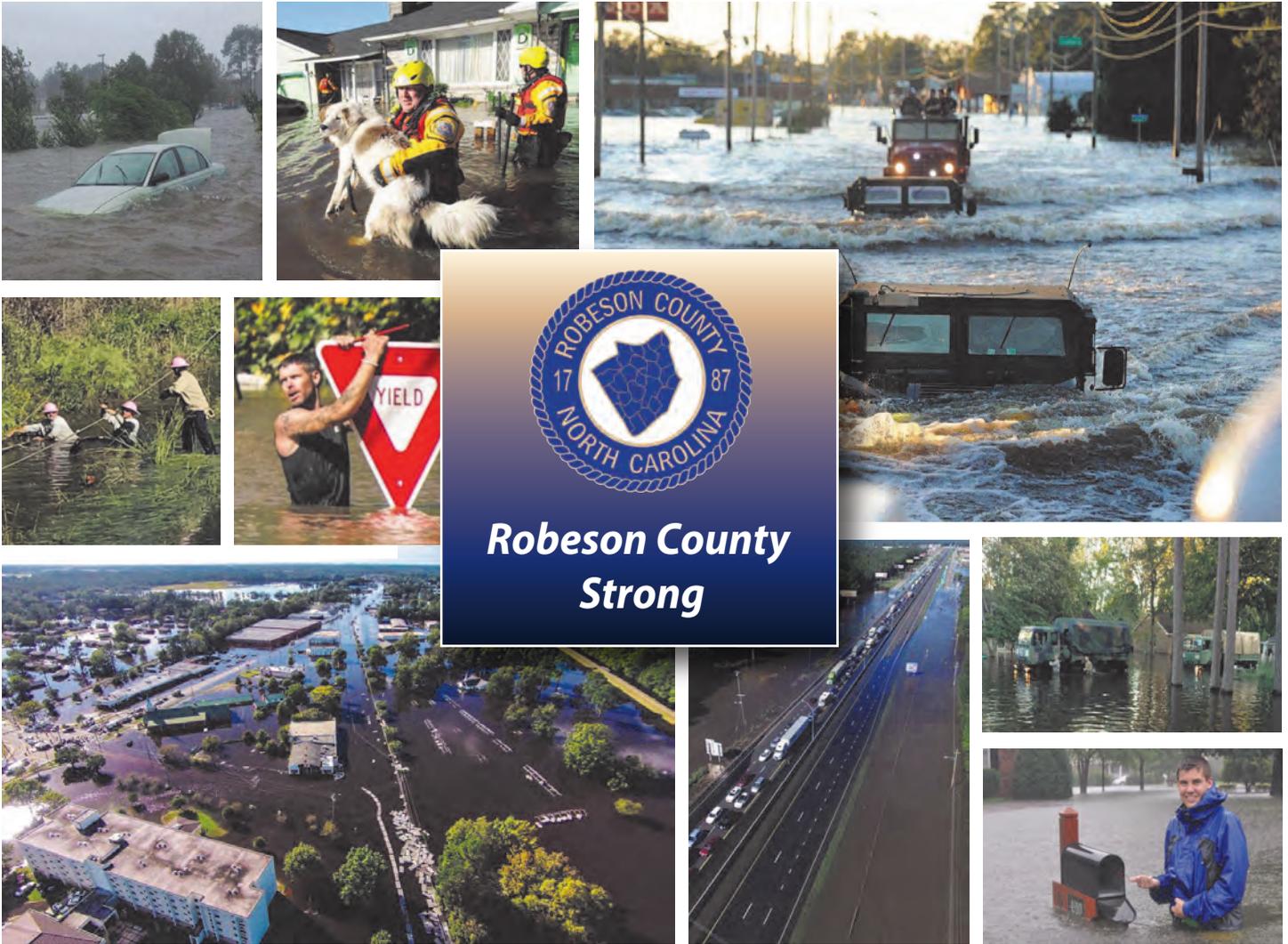
environmental protection and public housing won’t help in the long haul that is disaster recovery.

What is certain – from the West Lumberton resident who guarded his neighborhood and saved at least seven people from Matthew’s floodwaters to the regular folks of the “Cajun Navy” who hauled their boats to Texas to help with rescues there – is that communities must take care of themselves. We saw through Hurricane Matthew that Robeson County can do just that. When the world gives us its worst, we must give each other our best.

Sarah Willets is the former managing editor of The Robesonian and is currently a staff writer at INDY Week in Durham, North Carolina.



Courtesy photo | James Bass
Hurricane Matthew dumped nearly 15 inches of rain on Robeson County. The torrential rain caused floodwaters to rise quickly and flow swiftly.



**Robeson County
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Dear Robeson County,

October 8, 2016 is a day that will be etched in the hearts and minds of every resident of Robeson County. In the aftermath of the worst natural disaster that Robeson County has ever recorded, Hurricane Matthew has proven to be unprecedented in damage and overall need.

Multiple agencies from the federal, state, local and non-profits have worked diligently to provide assistance to individuals and families who have been affected by Hurricane Matthew.

Robeson County Administration would like to thank everyone that took part in the emergency response, recovery and rebuilding after Hurricane Matthew. May each day be brighter to know that we are...

Robeson County Strong!

Tom Taylor

Tom Taylor, Chairman
Robeson County Board of Commissioners



Matthew brought out worst in Lumber River



Scott Bigelow | The Robesonian

Hurricane Matthew's rain sent the Lumber River rushing over its banks and unleashed a watery beast the likes of which Robeson County residents had never seen.

By Scott Bigelow

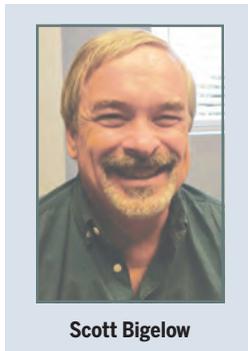
Bigelow@yahoo.com

LUMBERTON — The Lumber River is a lazy coastal waterway, a nationally designated Wild and Scenic River. It's a 113-mile black water river that begins as Drowning Creek and meanders through the many wetlands of Hoke, Scotland, Columbus and Robeson counties.

Over the course of its history it was a highway for American Indians and timber destined for mills, and was a cool refuge during hot summers. It is a scenic river that inspires poetry. It provides sustenance, recreation and wildlife for Robeson County and Lumberton, both of which would be vastly different without its nourishment.

But one year ago, it showed its wild side, one that will never be forgotten.

On Oct. 8, 2016, the



Scott Bigelow

region braced for rain and wind from Hurricane Matthew. By past standards, it was predicted to be a tropical storm that would brush past.

Matthew hit Wilmington with 70 mph winds, or half its earlier strength. Then, it moved inland without warning.

When the rain began falling on Robeson County on Saturday morning, it did not stop until nearly 15 inches had fallen. For a full hour, it rained so hard visibility was a few feet.

The amount of rain was the first surprise. The second surprise came when water backed up from all directions into every low-lying area in the county. It closed nearly every transportation artery in the county, including Interstate 95 and U.S. 74.

Disbelief and shock followed as the power failed, and Lumberton's water treatment plant went under water. Water rescues began and refugees filled available shelters.

Bruce and Barbara Mullis, who were trying to get from North Lumberton to

West Lumberton to reach her parents, found themselves on Alamac Road with water on both sides of the road and dazed people standing along the road watching their homes drown.

"That's when I realized what had happened," Barbara said.

The county has known for four decades about the 100-year flood plain, but thousands of homes and business were built on that land before federal flood insurance became available. Whole sections of Lumberton that were in the flood plain felt safe behind the Jacob Swamp Dike.

Years ago, the dike's builders had offered a dire warning. In the event of a 100-year flood, the dike would not protect Lumberton. It was designed with an opening for a CSX rail line.

The dike's engineers also noted that water building up behind it would have no place to go in a major rain event. It was a one-two punch, and their prediction was spot on.

The dike was not the only issue. Water

backed up in drainage ditches and swamps to flood homes in North Lumberton. At N.C. 211 and I-95, water flowed so fast it ripped clothes off two people clinging for their lives to utility poles.

According to meteorologists, it was a bad time for more rain, because heavy rain had fallen on the region six weeks before the hurricane. It pushed the Lumber River about a foot above flood stage of 13 feet in Lumberton.

This was the critical condition for catastrophic flooding of the Lumber River basin, said Steve Path, of the National Weather Service in Wilmington.

“It was the combination of heavy rain and ground that was already soaked”

“It was the combination of heavy rain and ground that was already soaked,” he

said. “The rain went right to runoff.” In the month before Hurricane Matthew, Robeson County had received 200 percent of its normal rainfall.

“Matthew became a perfect storm even though it was only a category one,” Path said.

With the ground saturated and the swamps full, 60 mph wind gusts blew down huge trees that survived much stronger winds from Hurricane Fran. Falling trees helped shut down the electrical grid for several thousands of people, and it took more than a week to restore power.

Eventually, the Lumber River crested at 24.23 feet in Lumberton to set a record. Water reached within two feet of the Second Street Bridge, and it flowed through the gap in the Jacob Swamp

Dike so fast, it carried tons of river sand with it.

Twenty-eight people died in North Carolina, four in Robeson County, and billions of dollars were done in North Carolina.

Two thousand homes were flooded and about 2,000 people landed in area hotels, some staying for 10 months. Before that, hundreds of refugees camped out in the Bill Sapp Recreation Center and several other sites.

The Lumber River and its tributaries have returned to peaceful ways.

As Lumberton novelist Jill McCorkle noted after the hurricane: “There’s the constant trade-off of the river giving and taking away. It’s a really beautiful, beautiful river — until it crests banks and goes out of control.”

Scott Bigelow can be reached at 910-416-5649.



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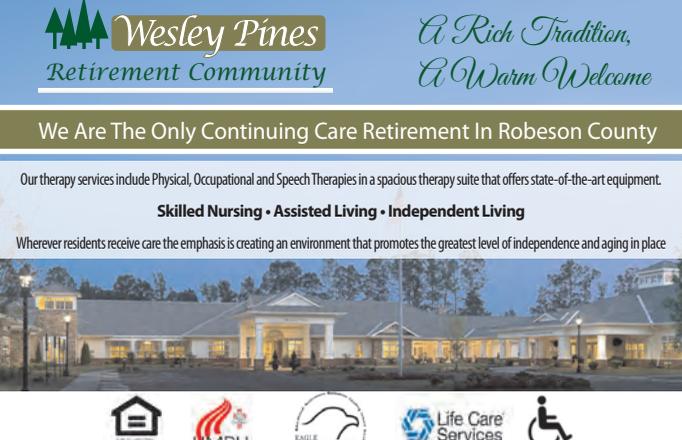


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Courtesy photo | Roy Barnhill

Soldiers brave floodwaters in order to render aid to Hurricane Matthew victims.



Courtesy photo | Tommy Maxwell

Floodwaters cover the Mayfair subdivision of Lumberton.



Courtesy photo | Brian Bell

The drivers of this truck and car got just over Interstate 95 at Exit 19 along Carthage Road in Lumberton before being stopped by the floodwaters generated by Hurricane Matthew.

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Courtesy photo | Amy Jones
N.C. 211 approaching Fuller's Old Fashion BBQ restaurant



Courtesy photo | Roy Barnhill
This overhead view shows Fuller's Old Fashion BBQ on N.C. 211 in Lumberton surrounded by floodwaters produced by Hurricane Matthew.

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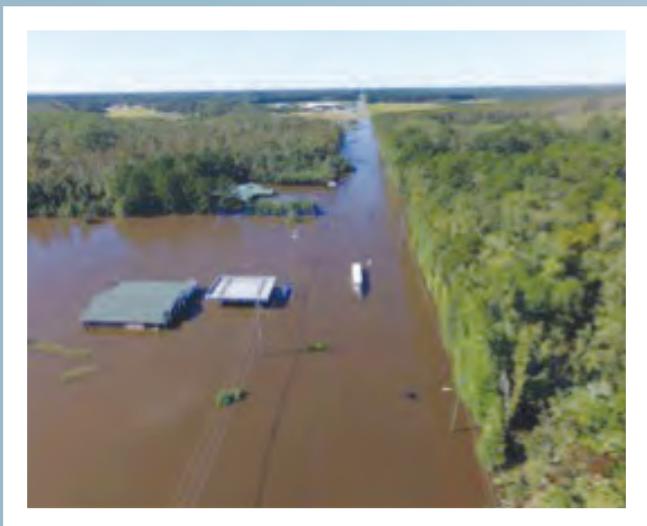
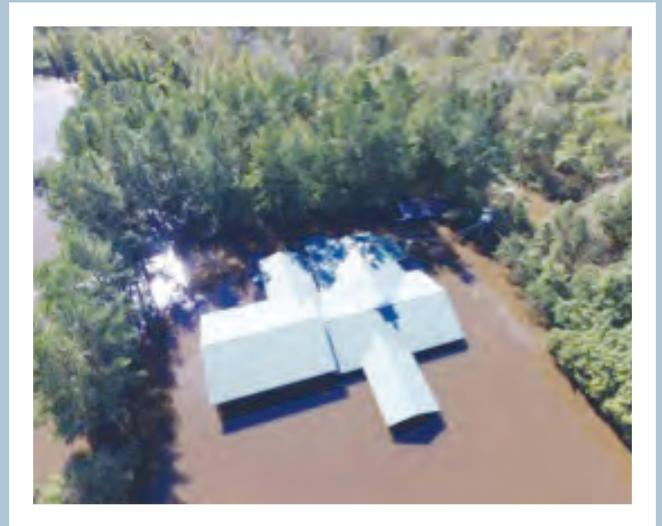
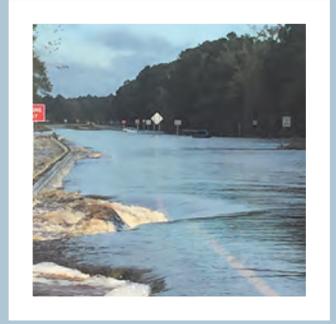


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Damage estimate hard to access, recovery money still creeping in



Courtesy photo

Hurricane Matthew, in all its fury, pushed water into Robeson County businesses, toppled trees and left neighborhoods looking as if they were in a war zone.

By Bob Shiles

bshiles@robesonian.com

LUMBERTON — It's a difficult equation to determine with precision how much damage a single county suffered from Hurricane Matthew and how much in financial assistance has made its way into a county to help with long-range recovery efforts, recovery officials from Lumberton to Washington, D.C., say.



Bob Shiles

"It's not as easy as it sounds to find that specific information," said Julia Jarema, an Emergency Management spokesperson. "The information is stored in so many different programs."

Estimates from the North Carolina Emergency Management put the total damage by Hurricane Matthew to the state at about \$4.8 billion — with best guesses being that Robeson's was around \$1 billion.

Damage estimates in Robeson County are sketchy, as is the total amount of financial assistance that has already reached the county or is expected to become available soon. Records of individual and public assistance grants and loans received so far from such agencies as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, N.C. Emergency Management, the state Golden LEAF Foundation, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Small Business Administration provide only snapshots of how devastating Hurricane Matthew was to Robeson County.

Regardless of the total cost of damage, Lumberton and Robeson County officials, and individual storm victims have said repeatedly over the past few months that the flow of recovery money is too slow. The need to get recovery funds to Texas, Georgia and Florida because of hurricanes Harvey and Irma has slowed the Matthew recovery process even more.

Jimmy Gilchrist, the leader of Robeson County's chapter of the Black Caucus, has questioned why recovery money has not gotten into the hands of property owners who need financial assistance to rebuild their damaged homes. John Cantey, a Lumberton councilman whose district in South Lumberton was virtually wiped out, repeatedly has asked what he is supposed to tell his constituents when they ask when the promised assistance money will arrive.

As numbers provided recently to The Robesonian show, funds to support individual and public recovery efforts are finding their way into the county, even if it is at a snail's pace.

According to FEMA figures, as of Sept. 22 Robeson County had received \$25.8 million through FEMA's Individual Assistance Program — grant money given to individuals and households to reimburse them for home repairs, cost of renting somewhere to stay while their home is being fixed, replacement of damaged or destroyed personal property, and medical or funeral expenses.

The FEMA report also shows that Robeson County will receive more than \$18.2 million through FEMA's Public Assistance Program, which is provided to state, county and local governments to reimburse the cost of responding to the disaster. It also helps with such things as the costs of removing

debris, and repairing or replacing public infrastructure, such as roads, culverts, and bridges damaged or destroyed by the storm.

Certain nonprofits, such as schools or hospitals, also may be eligible for reimbursement through the Public Assistance Program.

The U.S. Small Business Administration has been helping Robeson County's recovery efforts by providing low-interest loans. According to figures provided *The Robesonian*, as of Sept. 22 \$14.9 million in home loans had been approved. Also, \$6.25 million in business loans and \$25,000 in Economic Injury Disaster Loans had been approved.

So far, the National Flood Insurance Program has paid \$20.47 million on claims filed in Robeson County.

Under FEMA's expedited Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, the applications of 100 property owners have been approved for "buyout," elevation work, or demolition of damaged structures, according to Lumberton City Manager Wayne Horne. More than \$13.3 million is available for this program, with an additional \$7.5 million having been approved for future distribution.

Horne said 300 more applications filed under the expedited FEMA program will be moved to the Community Development Block Grant — Disaster Recovery Program that is funded with HUD money. Horne said \$32 million will be available through this program.

The North Carolina Housing Finance Agency has approved a \$150,000 grant for Lumberton to assist with the renovation of three houses at \$50,000 per house, Horne said. Additional funding opportunities will be available after completion of those homes.

The state Golden LEAF Foundation has provided significant financial support for Lumberton's "infrastructure repairs and unmet needs."

A \$300,000 grant from Golden LEAF is being used to make drainage improvements in Lumberton's Tanglewood area. New storm drainage lines are being installed around Southeastern Regional Medical Center so the flow of stormwater will be redirected from Meadow Branch to the Lumber River.

Golden LEAF also has provided the city with \$2 million to fund "unmet needs." This money is being used to fill the gap that results when FEMA reduced its assistance for the repair to public buildings that were not covered by flood insurance. Among these buildings were the city's water plant, electric utility department, Parkview Recreation Center, South Lumberton Recreation Center, the Beach House at Luther Britt

Park, and the Dunn Road fire station.

According to Horne, Lumberton has received \$1.2 million from FEMA to build a berm around the water plant to protect it from future flooding, and an additional \$6 million for other projects, such as debris removal, emergency services, mutual aide, electrical system repairs, substation repairs, repairs to water and sewer lines, lift station, culvert repairs, repairs to sidewalks and public buildings, and overtime and miscellaneous costs.

There were 18,546 registrations countywide for the Individual Assistance Program, according to Dawn Gavasci, of the Robeson County Department of Social Services. There were 15,905 referrals to the Individual Housing Program, with 7,643 of these referrals eligible to receive assistance. The total amount paid out to those eligible was \$25.8 million, Gavasci said in a statement.

Included in the overall Individual Housing Program were 4,982 eligible referrals. These referrals received a total of about \$16.9 million.

According to Gavasci, under the Individual Housing Program there were 10,219 referrals for "other needs assistance" such as travel, medical, funeral and other. She said 5,190 of these referrals were eligible, resulting in about \$8.9 million.

Robeson County Assistant Manager Jason King said the county has submitted reimbursement requests for Public Assistance funding totaling \$2.5 million. So far the county has received \$915,000 reimbursement from FEMA, he said.

Reimbursement requests were made in three categories, Debris Removal, Emergency Protective Measures and Parks and Recreation, King said.

In July, Robeson County was told that it will receive \$1 million in FEMA money for roof repairs to four county buildings. The four buildings are the county administration building, courthouse and old BB&T building in downtown Lumberton, and the Public Works garage on Legend Road.

The Public Schools of Robeson County Board of Education is trying to figure out how to replace its destroyed central office, and when that happens it will know how many federal and state dollars will be available to help. There was also significant damage done at West Lumberton and W.H. Knuckles elementary schools.

Local officials say they expect the amount of money flowing into Robeson County for recover efforts to continue to grow for an unforeseen length of time.

Bob Shiles can be reached at 910-416-5165.



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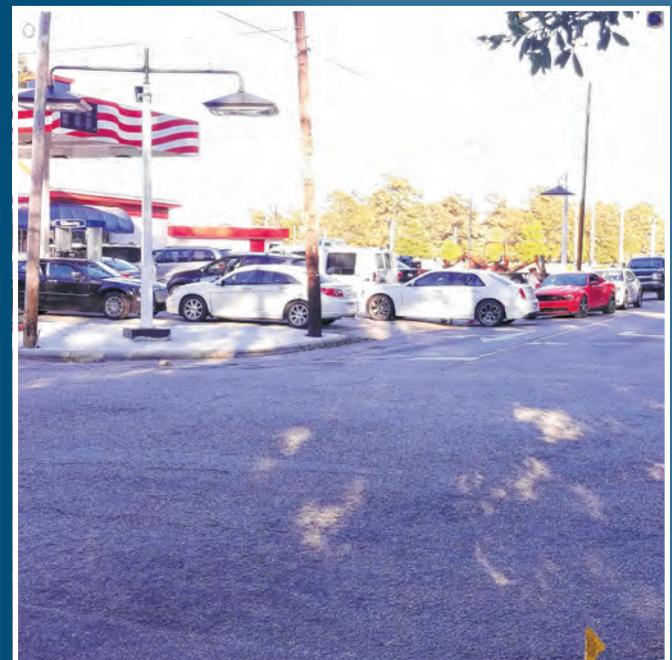
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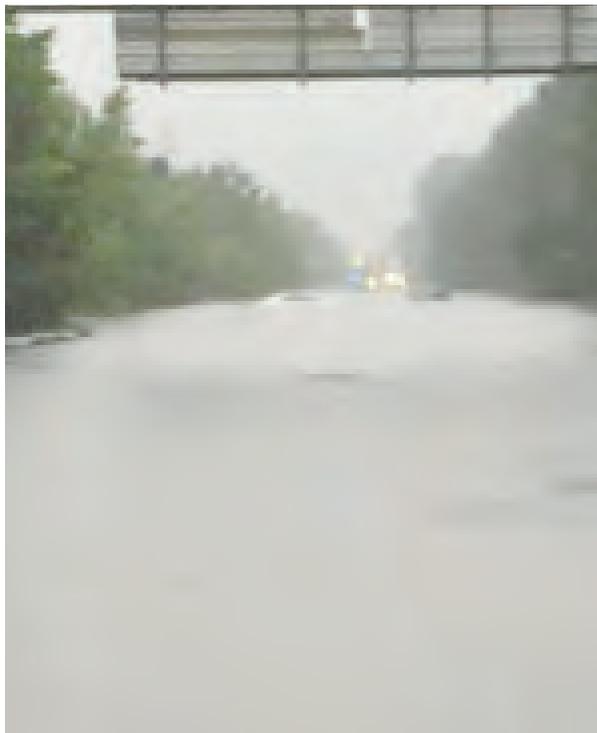
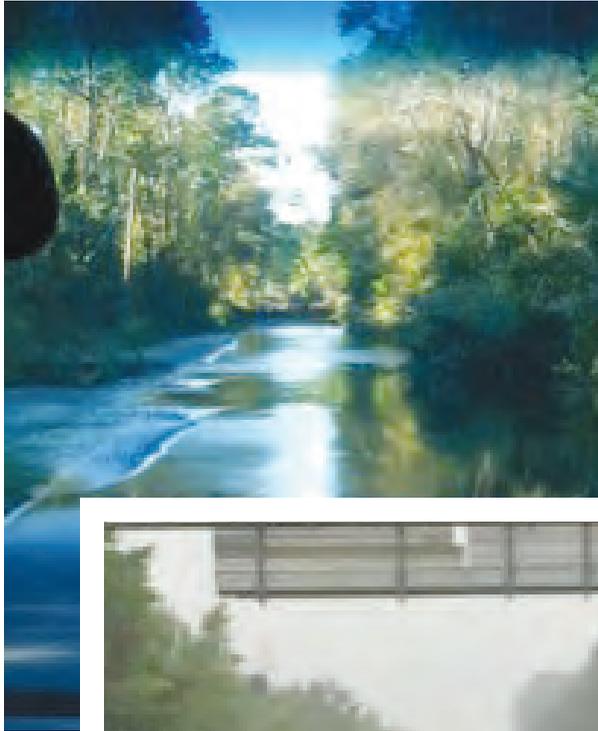
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Courtesy photo | Tommy Maxwell
Robeson County residents stand in line at DSS to get emergency aid.



Courtesy photo | Angela Carter
Cars line up on Oct. 10, 2016, at this convenience store at 24th and Elm streets in Lumberton to get gasoline. A witness said cars kept coming to the store until 11 p.m. that day. Some cars ran out of gas while waiting in line and had to be pushed to the pumps. Police officers were present to maintain order, but the effort to get gas was more like a social event. People laughed and talked while waiting to get to the pumps.



City's water plant fortified to prevent flooding again



Courtesy photos | Lumberton Public Works Department

Floodwaters spawned by Hurricane Matthew inundated Lumberton's water plant. The water caused more than \$1.98 million in damage to the facility and kept it out of operation for almost a week.

By Bob Shiles

bshiles@robsonian.com

LUMBERTON — As the Lumberton's water plant sat submerged under Hurricane Matthew's floodwaters, it seemed hopeless to many that the plant would ever again be able to operate at full capacity. But today, after months of perseverance, hard work, and more than \$1.98 million in repairs, city officials say the plant operating more efficiently than ever before.



It also is better prepared in the event of a similar disaster, they say.

"We're back to normal."

"We're back to normal. The standard of our water quality is up," said Paul Valenti, the plant's chief operator. "Our river source and all wells are back on line and equipment, including some valves and motors that were 15 to 20 years old, have been replaced."

The plant, built in 1992, is located at 1451 Lowery St. and has a capacity of handling 16 million gallons of water a day. It currently processes an average of 4 million to 6 million gallons a day.

The tremendous amount of floodwater that came into Lumberton and submerged the plant in the wake of the Oct. 8, 2016, storm was unprecedented in city history, said Rob Armstrong, city Public Works director.

"It took us by surprise," Armstrong said. "The water never came over the dike. It entered under I-95 at VFW Road."

Pumps were set up on Second and Fifth streets on the levee by the river, Armstrong said. About 700 million gallons of water had to be pumped out.

“We never had water of this magnitude come into the city,” Valenti said.

The Lumber River reached a level of 23.4 feet during Hurricane Matthew. During Hurricane Floyd, the last hurricane to severely flood Lumberton, the Lumber River reached a level 21 feet.

At the height of the Hurricane Matthew flooding all that could be done at the water plant was to “watch the plant become overcome with water,” Armstrong said

The plant had to be shut down for several days after becoming submerged in more than 4 feet of water. The floodwaters were too deep to allow crews to even get into the facility.

At the peak of the flooding, water reached the handles of the plant’s front door. Electrical equipment inside was damaged and offices were flooded.

To prevent damage to plant equipment should another flood occur, all motors, valves, pumps and other equipment have been raised to a higher elevation. Armstrong said some of the new equipment is replacing equipment that had been in operation at the facility for up to two decades.

“I guess you can say that’s one of the benefits of Matthew,” Armstrong said. “As a result we were able to get some new equipment that we have needed.”

Armstrong said the Federal Emergency Management Agency would not pay a significant part of the \$1.98 million to get the plant back on line because the city had no flood insurance on the plant. The city had not purchased flood insurance to cover the facility because the plant is protected by the levee.

However, FEMA is helping with funding for mitigation efforts, Armstrong said. The agency has committed to paying up to \$1.5 million to “help keep the plant safe in the future,” he said.

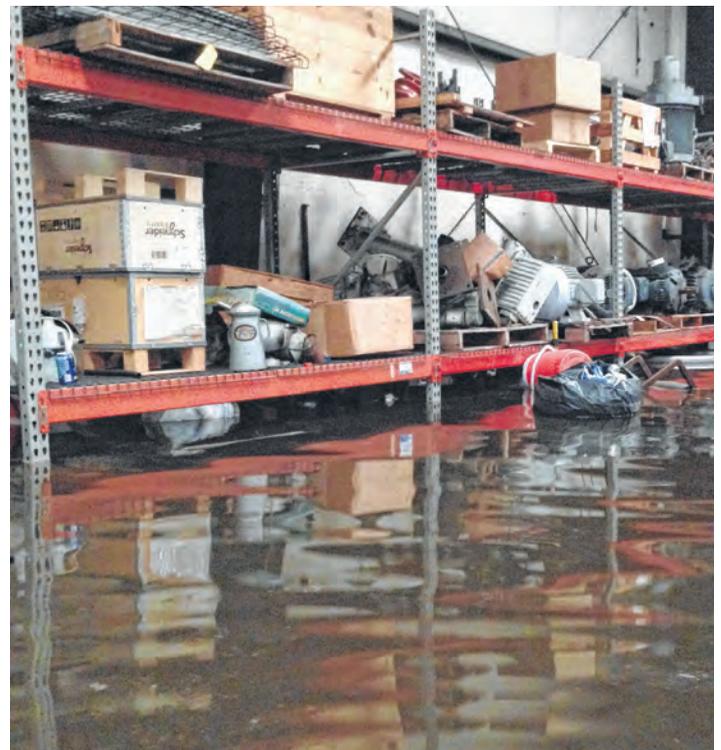
Plans are to build a berm or levee around 15 of the 20 acres where the plant is located, he said.

Armstrong believes that one way to ensure that another hurricane does not result in flooding like Matthew is for floodgates to be installed in the area of VFW Road. FEMA will not fund such a project so other sources of funding, such as the Golden LEAF Foundation, are being explored.

The N.C. Department of Emergency Management is currently paying for a \$200,000 study of the levee and that money should be available soon, according to Armstrong. He said the study is “sure to show that floodgates are needed” as a long-term protective measure against flooding.

“The cost of floodgates would be \$5 million or \$6 million,” Armstrong said. “That’s going to be a long-term project. I can see it taking three to five years to complete.”

Bob Shiles can be reached at 910-416-5165.



Courtesy Photos

More than 4 feet of floodwater rushed into Lumberton’s water plant. The water was so deep crews couldn’t get into the plant to start making repairs until days after Hurricane Matthew left the area.





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Courtesy photo | James Bass

A Lumberton police officers struggles to serve the public during Hurricane Matthew's fury.



Courtesy photo | James Bass

The only way to get some people help in the days after Hurricane Matthew struck was through the use of boats.



Courtesy Photos

Many Robeson County residents could only watch helplessly as rain from Hurricane Matthew sent floodwater seeping into their homes.

Charity helped ease the pain for a community suffering loss



Tomeka Sinclair | The Robesonian

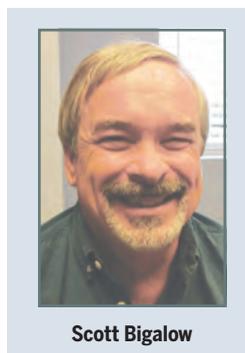
Stant Locklear helps Elizabeth Locklear load a truck bed full of donated furniture from the City of Lumberton warehouse. She said that household consists of a family of eight with five children and four adults.

By Scott Bigelow
Bigelow@yahoo.com

LUMBERTON — The disaster relief work accomplished by Lumberton's Hyde Park Baptist Church in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew stands as a shining example of how volunteers, nonprofits and governments came together to help thousands of flood victims in Robeson County.

The hurricane that brought immense pain was followed by floods of aid from near and far. Those who saw it firsthand, like Hyde Park's Pastor Jeff Blackburn, called the relief effort something just short of a miracle.

"It seemed like every time we were running low on water, a truckload showed up," Blackburn said.



Scott Bigelow

Rescue squads, fire departments, volunteers and federal agencies rescued thousands from flooded homes and apartments. Public school buses transported evacuees to shelters at Lumberton's Bill Sapp Center and at public schools across the county. Many of the refugees lost their homes and all of their possessions, and all of them needed immediate help

The Christian Aid Ministries, a project of the Amish and Mennonite communities, served up to 1,800 meals at a time in the Sapp Center. The Baptist Men and Women on Mission brought Manna I, its tractor-trailer kitchen, to Hyde Park Baptist Church.

The city of Lumberton got the loan of a warehouse and so did the Robeson Church and Community Center. Robeson County set up a distribution

Continued on page 44



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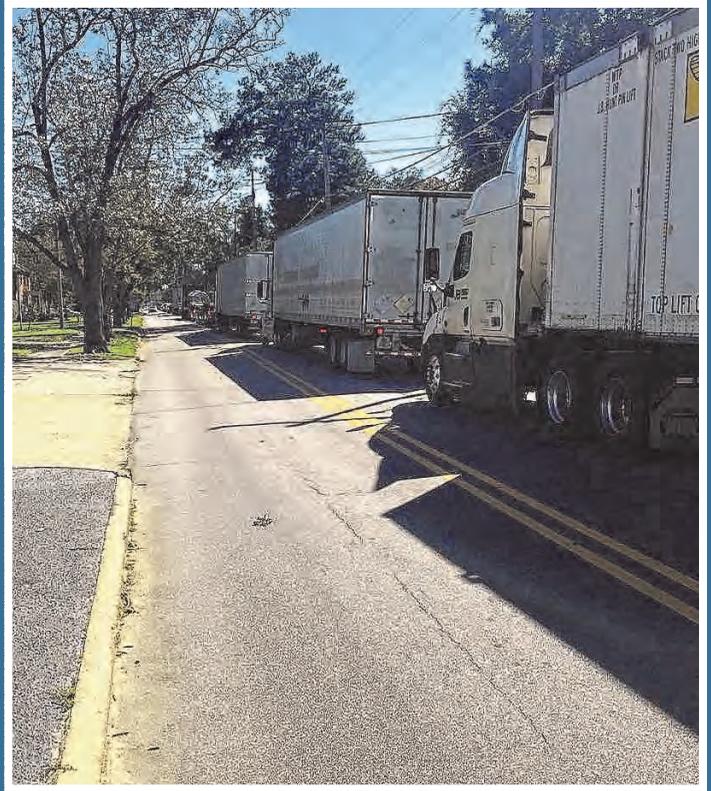
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Hurricane Matthew left this stretch of N.C. 211 a virtual lake.

Courtesy photo



Courtesy photo | Susan Walker

It wasn't long after Hurricane Matthew left the area that relief supplies began pouring into Lumberton.



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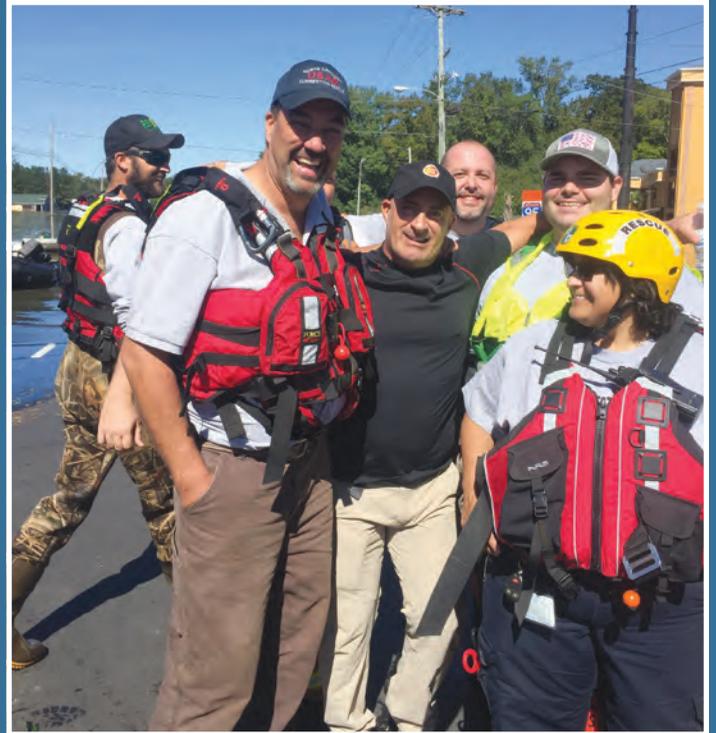
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Courtesy photo | Roger Taylor

A helicopter is used to search for the vehicle of drowning victim behind Fuller's Old Fashion BBQ in Lumberton.



Courtesy photo | Roger Taylor

Weather Channel's Jim Cantore visits Robeson County to assess and report damage.

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One of the most volunteer groups was one of the most damaged by flooding — West Lumberton Baptist Church. Members of the congregation stood in the parking lot of their destroyed church handing out water and supplies.

As the huge warehouses collected water, diapers and sanitary supplies, they emptied almost as fast.

The enormity of the aid that came to Robeson County after the hurricane could not be measured. West Lumberton Baptist Church listed 150 businesses, churches and governments that came to its aid. The Robeson Church and Community Center has a list nearly as long.

Hyde Park Baptist Church has a three-ring notebook with names of more than 1,000 volunteers who unloaded trucks, handed out water and did whatever they could. The church has a congregation of about 500, and those who were able volunteered.

The church, located on Roberts Avenue in East Lumberton, was a center of hurricane relief for seven months. During the immediate aftermath, the Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Baptist Men were working out of their campus.

Up to 130 people slept at Hyde Park at a time. On the day the Baptist Men and Women opened its huge kitchen, 15,000 meals went out the door. During the busiest week, more than 150,000 meals were served.

“We all worked 18 to 20 hours a day, for weeks and weeks,” Pastor Blackburn said. “I didn’t know what I was getting into.

“We threw out our ministry calendar and said this is our mission. We were all about the disaster.

“This congregation understands that a church is not a building,” Blackburn said. “This is a congregation of believers in Christ, and there was never a doubt about opening our doors.”

Before the doors opened, Blackburn had to get the Baptist disaster relief caravan, including kitchen, showers and laundry, into Lumberton. It was a city that became an “island” after the water rose and roads closed one after another.

“When I checked on the church on Sunday, my phone was blown up.” Blackburn said. “The Baptist Men were at South of the Border and needed to get here.

“They called Hyde Park because we already had a relationship. We had been scheduled to do a disaster training session with them.”

Blackburn and the North Carolina Highway Patrol found a route along the back roads of Robeson County. As they plowed through rising water on Pope’s Crossing Road, the Highway Patrol closed it behind them.

While he was guiding the Baptist relief caravan, the pastor

also was tending to his church and his flock, including worship minister Bobby Craig.

“The first couple of days, I was stuck in Mayfair with my family,” Craig said. “I was surrounded by water.”

With a wife and three children, Craig waited to be rescued. Then none other than Pastor Blackburn showed up in his boat. Besides helping neighbors remove fallen trees, Blackburn had joined the Robeson County volunteer navy.

Craig, Blackburn and the church staff quickly began organizing volunteers and getting the church ready for the onslaught of refugees.



Tomeka Sinclair | The Robesonian
Stant Locklear helps Elizabeth Locklear load a TV to bring back to her home at the City of Lumberton warehouse. Locklear, of Lumberton, said that the entire roof on her home was damaged due to Hurricane Matthew.

“We have a food pantry, and we had enough food to give away during the first week,” Craig said. “We routed cars to the hot meals and then to the pantry, where we gave them water, food, diapers and personal hygiene items. Mostly, it was water. We had a fork lift, and we worked all day.

“It was a tough job. We were trying to care for our own at the same time.”

Blackburn said the water, food and volunteers never ran out.

“We never asked anybody for anything — truckloads showed up,” he said.

As the need for immediate aid slowed in November, the Baptist Men transitioned to recovery work, and later to rebuilding, which continues today. In May, after almost seven months at Hyde Park, the Baptist Men opened their own facility that can sleep, feed and shower more than 120 volunteers at a time.

As the church and its members recover, it is a time for reflection. On Oct. 8, one

year to the day from Hurricane Matthew’s wrath, the church marked the anniversary with a special service of testimonials and prayer.

“About half of our members had flood damage, and some lost everything,” he said. “Yet, they were out here serving others. It was a beautiful thing.

“Serving helped with healing. When you serve others, you don’t have time to think about yourself.”

Craig and the church staff spent a lot of time at church after the hurricane helping to hand out water and keeping things organized.



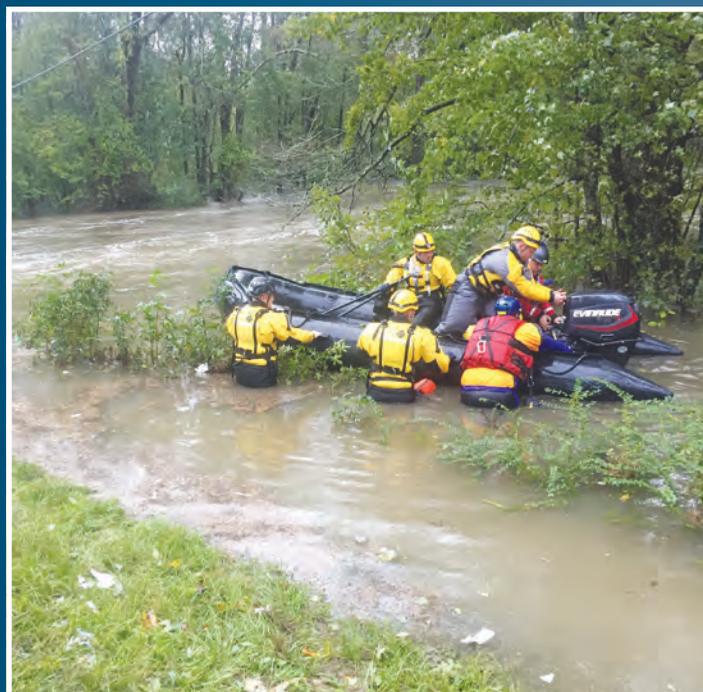
Elizabeth Locklear prepares to drive home with her truck full of furniture from the City of Lumberton warehouse. The warehouse still receives donations for Hurricane Matthew victims.

Tomeka Sinclair | The Robesonian

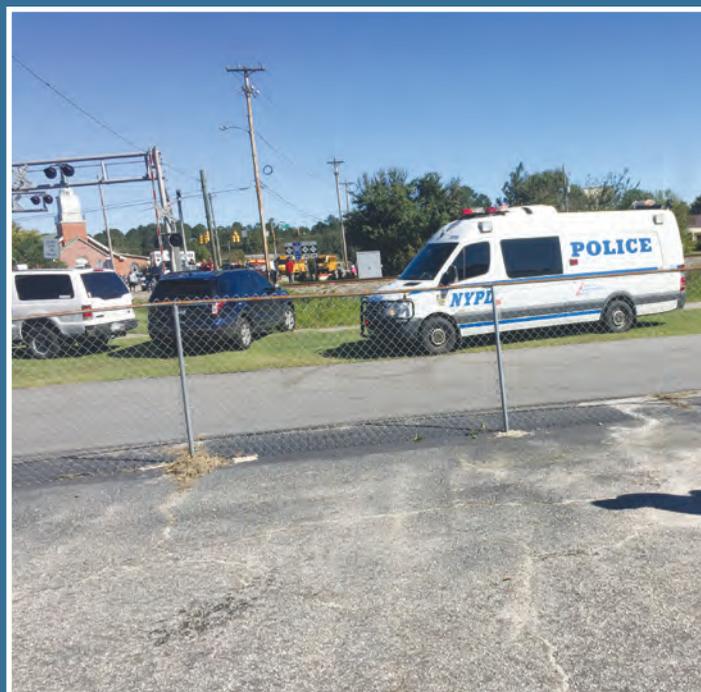
“The Baptist Men were surprised to see how many volunteers showed up,” Craig said. “A total of 75 other churches from all over, but many from Robeson County, helped us.

“As a church, we realized how much we can accomplish when we work together. I see us as a closer church community today.”

Scott Bigelow can be reached at 910-416-5649.



Courtesy photo | Roger Taylor



Courtesy photo | Roger Taylor

Hurricane Matthew claimed the life of Charles Ivey among others

By **Scott Bigelow**
Bigelow@yahoo.com

LUMBERTON — Watching helplessly as floodwater from Hurricane Matthew surged through the Jacob Swamp dike destroying his church and his home, Charles Ivey made a desperate decision that likely cost him his life.

His survivors are left with a bunch of what-ifs.

Ivey was one of four people in Robeson County who died during Hurricane Matthew and its aftermath. It was a big loss for his family and the West Lumberton community, where he was known for his civic work.

“If you look up Lions Club in the dictionary, Charles picture is there,” said Jim Kirkland, secretary of the Lions Club. “It was a real tragedy.”

Beginning at McKenzie Supply, Ivey worked in plumbing and electrical supplies all his career, including owning his own business for a time. He was still working at Lumber River Trading Company at the time of his death. He was 76.

Hurricane Matthew and the subsequent flooding caught the county unprepared, and Ivey was at the center of the worst of it in Lumberton. He and his wife, Wanda, lived on West Fifth Street at the point where the water surged through the opening in Jacob Swamp Dike at the VFW Road.

Water covered West Lumberton, and left 2-foot piles of sand at Ivey’s front door from the powerful current flowing through the gap in the dike. At its peak, the water was more than 5 feet deep at his house.



Courtesy Photos

Charles Ivey, shown with daughters Barbara Mullis, left, and Elizabeth Cody, was the only Robeson County resident to die in the midst of Hurricane Matthew’s fury.

After 15 inches of unexpected rain on Oct. 8, the water began to rise, but no one knew how high it would go. Wanda had grown up in the house and had seen many floods, but had no idea what was to come.

With the power out on Sunday night, the water crept higher as the couple slept. Phone calls between the Iveys and their daughter Barbara and her husband, Bruce Mullis, became increasingly urgent.

“I had asked our son Travis to check on his grandparents on Sunday, but the traffic was being routed off I-95 through Lumberton made it impossible,” Bruce said. “Travis couldn’t make it.”

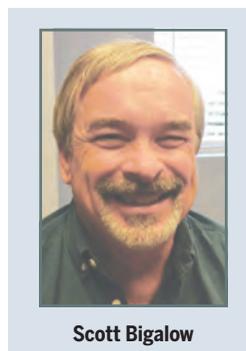
“We decided to go get them on Monday,” Bruce said.

“As we got to Alamac Road, mom called to say daddy had died,” Barbara said. “Driving down Alamac Road with water on both sides of the road, water up to rooftops and people standing by the road, it set in.”

“A 10-minute drive took us an hour, and by the time we got to the traffic light at the Food Lion on West Fifth Street, they stopped us,” Bruce said. “I have 20-inch tires on my F150, and I thought I could make it, but they said no.”

Ivey had decided to drive out in his SUV. He waded in waist deep, swiftly running water to his vehicle, sat on the tailgate and fell face first into the water.

“There is no way he could have driven out,” Bruce said. “We don’t know if he had a heart attack or slipped and fell. The death certificate states drowning as the cause of death.”



Scott Bigelow

“There was a lot of stress watching the water and the church,” Barbara said.

The family are staunch members of West Lumberton Baptist Church, which suffered more than \$1 million in damage.

When the power went out, Ivey could not use the oxygen that he used at night for a respiratory issue.

“My mother saw him fall, and with the help of neighbors, she got him out of the water,” Barbara said. “They tried CPR, but could not revive him.”

The danger did not end there. Sheriff’s deputies took Bruce and Barbara to the house in a Humvee.

“Hollis McNeill was driving,” Barbara said. “At one point, he said he could not feel the road. He drove off the road and up on higher ground at Pates Drive-in at one point.”

Bruce and Barbara were desperate. They had no contact with their mother since the accident, but thanks to the sheriff’s department Wanda and Charles’ body were evacuated.

At the hospital, Ivey lacked identification. He had left his wallet in the house, so he was taken in as a “John Doe.” Barbara identified the body later.

When Bruce returned to the house on Wednesday to retrieve some personal belongings, he found the wallet in a pair of pants on the bed.

“That’s when I broke down,” Bruce said.

Since the flood, Wanda suffered a life-threatening fall, followed by surgery, a lengthy stay in intensive care and rehabilitation. She remembers nothing about her husband’s death. Repairs to the family home are on hold. Vandal have hit it more than once.

Ivey left behind a wife and two daughters, Barbara and Elizabeth Cody, and a community that will remember him for

his good works, good humor and humility.

Ivey lived a life in perfect balance — family, work, church and civic engagement.

“Daddy loved people, and he loved work,” Barbara said. “He was working Saturday when the hurricane came in.”

During rededication ceremonies of West Lumberton Baptist Church recently, the Rev. Rick Foreman remembered Ivey as a pillar of the church.



The rebuilt playground at West Lumberton Baptist Church in Lumberton was named in honor of Charles Ivey during a recent re-dedication ceremony, and he was remembered as a pillar of the church.

Courtesy Photos

“I never had to worry about whether the church was open for Sunday or Wednesday services,” Foreman said. “Charles was always there.”

Ivey served the church as a deacon and Sunday School superintendent. The rebuilt playground on church grounds is named in his honor.

Ivey’s civic engagements were lifelong and legendary. His work with the Lumberton Jaycees led him to 52 years of volunteering with the Robeson County Fair.

“When the fair was out on West Fifth Street, I remember him under a beach umbrella taking money for parking,” Barbara said. “The Jaycees were a family affair then.”

The 2017 Robeson Regional Fair program is dedicated to Ivey. It notes: “Charles assumed a very humble role as a valued fair board member. He was well respected because of his calm demeanor and tremendous dedication to the fair. He loved the fair and could be found in the parking lots every night. He loved every minute of it.”

Ivey was a 40-year member of the Lumberton Lions Club, and earned every major award the club had to offer. He headed up two of the club’s three major fundraisers annually.

“He was a Lion extraordinaire,” said Kirkland. “His favorite saying about raffle ticket sales was: ‘You can’t sell ‘em, if you ain’t got ‘em in your pocket.’”

Scott Bigelow can be reached at 910-416-5649.



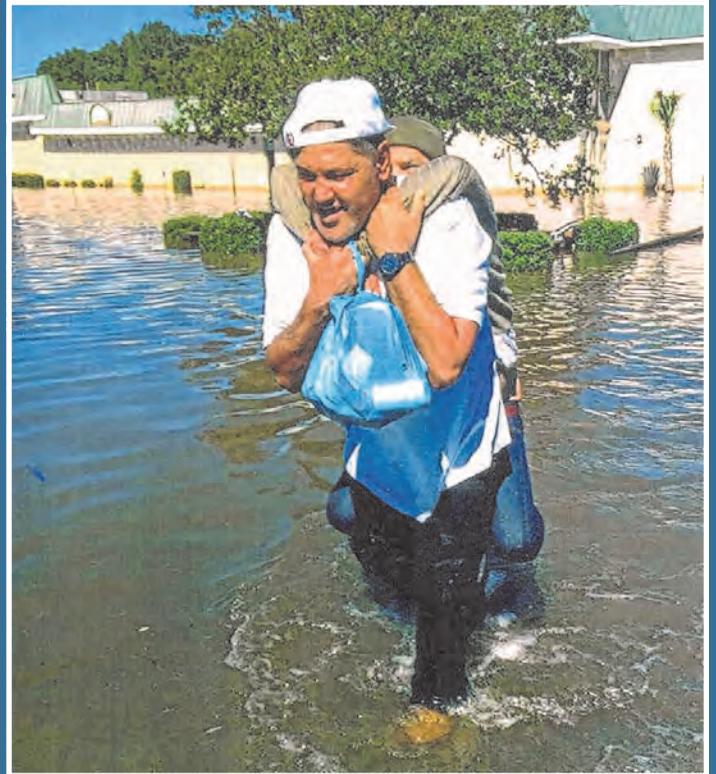
Courtesy photo | James Bass

Shown is just one example of neighbors helping neighbors escape the floodwaters generated by Hurricane Matthew.



Courtesy photo | Joy A. McGugan

Joy Atkinson McGugan and Nila Chamberlain created a four-paneled mural in the style of Picasso's Guernica to commemorate memories of Hurricane Matthew. People were invited to share memories by writing into parts of the artwork.



Courtesy photo | Ron Stansel

Ed McKaughen is carried by an unidentified man from the Econolodge in Lumberton on the Sunday after Hurricane Matthew struck Robeson County.



We applaud the resiliency demonstrated by our employees and the entire community during recovery from the devastation caused by Hurricane Matthew.



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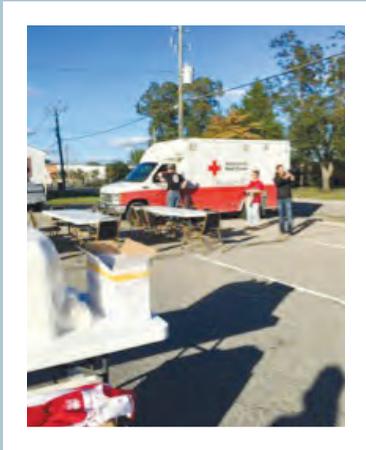
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Courtesy photo
 Kyle Britt, Capt. David Johnson, Capt. Seth Hutchinson, Capt. Johnathan Inman, Jarrod Hendren, Lt. Rendall Thompson were among the emergency services personnel helping evacuate residents on Lumberton Assisted Living on Bailey Road.

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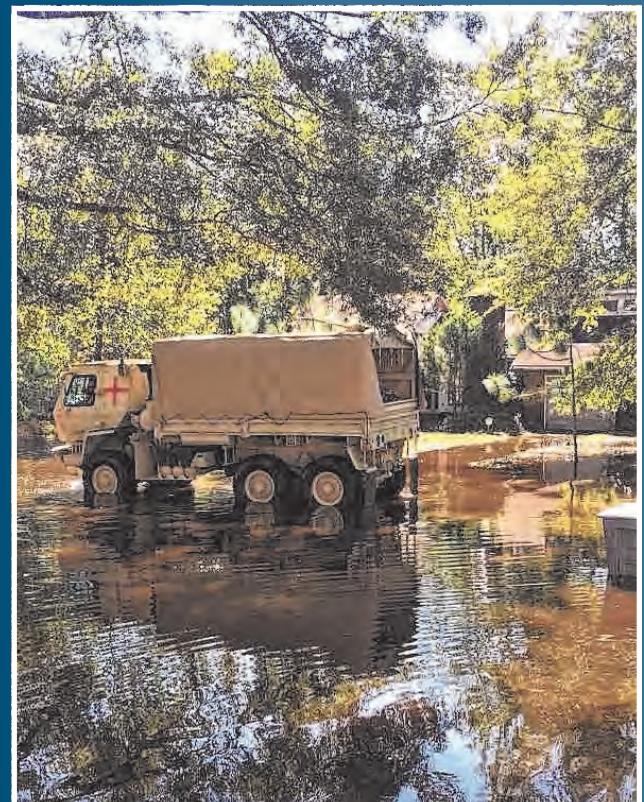
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Courtesy photo | Tommy Maxwell
 National Guard troops came to the Mayfair subdivision of Lumberton to help Hurricane Matthew victims.

Newspaper staff hit hard by Matthew

By Editor Donald Douglas
ddouglas@robsonian.com

It was 1996, I was at another newspaper, and Hurricane Fran was knocking on the door.

I gave my reporters their assignment: "I need you to risk your lives going out into a storm to write stories that no one will read to put in a newspaper that will not be delivered."

And that is what happened.

I use that anecdote mostly to relate how useless newspapers really are when a hurricane hits. Or were, at that time, before the Internet was widely used as a delivery system for information.

Matthew changed my perspective — and so much more.

I don't like hurricanes, as a person and a property owner, and I like them less as a journalist tasked with covering them. We must go to work before, during and after hurricanes.

My disdain for them grew on Oct. 8, 2016, and in the days, no, make that months, that followed. There were several "oh-no" moments for me during Hurricane Matthew.

The first came hours after it arrived, on a Saturday afternoon. A text from a reporter said simply: "Water is coming into the building."



Courtesy photo | Susan Walker
As Hurricane Matthew howled its way across Robeson County, floodwaters filled the parking lot at The Robesonian on Roberts Avenue in Lumberton. It wasn't long before the water entered the building.

I knew then my life had changed, and not for the better, but I underestimated how much worse.

The next oh-no moment was about nine hours later, as I sat in my home, with no electricity, still fearing a tree would drop on my house. I got a phone call from a friend who works as a St. Pauls firefighter.

"We have pulled 40 people from their homes in boats," he said.

That told me the extent of the damage being done by the relentless rain.

The third oh-no moment was the next morning, which was a beautiful and crisp fall Sunday, except for the fact the Lumber River was in everyone's yard. There was an elderly couple parked in my subdivision, and they told me they were out of gasoline, could not find any, and Interstate 95 was closed, blocking their path to their home in High Point.

I told them to stay put, I would find them gasoline and a route.

When I got near I-95, a Highway Patrol trooper stopped me.

"The nearest gas is in Rockingham," he said.

I checked and saw I had half a tank.

I made my decision. I rushed home, tossed some clothes, toiletries and a laptop in the car, and fled, west on U.S. 74, but I didn't stop until I

got to Charlotte. Along the way I called my boss, who gave me his blessing, and I also called as many of my staff as I could, and slowly began to understand that whatever coverage we would be able to provide, at least in the short term, would be with limited resources, basically one reporter, perhaps two, and without a means to publish the paper or deliver one if we could, and that robsonian.com and Facebook would be our message platforms.

That night I published a photo of our flooded building on Roberts Avenue on robsonian.com and Facebook, and our intent to provide need-to-know news as best as we could. That earned a tweet from Rachel Maddow, who said, "God bless The Robesonian in NC — paper's offices flooded catastrophically but these heroes are still publishing."

It was nice and appreciated sentiment, but I didn't feel heroic. I felt duty-bound.

The next morning, as I would do for six straight, I got up at 6 a.m. and went to my personal Facebook page and typed,



Editor
Donnie Douglas

“Good morning Robeson County. Tell me what you need to know.”

I was beginning to understand how few tools we had to provide coverage. Two reporters had lost their cars in the flood and were in shelters, another had fled to higher ground, near Raleigh, leaving me mostly with Sarah Willets, my managing editor, who was the hero of this story.

We not only lacked bodies, but we had lost all our electronics, computers, cameras, you name it, to water that had reached 18 inches high in our office. Our press was spared literally by an inch, but would be out of commission for 17 days.

Our work, however we could manage it, was beginning. But most of The Robesonian staff, receptionists, clerks, department heads, sales people, carriers, press room personnel and inserters, were idled. The best news of that week came on Thursday, when I read an email from the CEO of the company saying everyone, whether working or not, would be paid a full wage.

And so began six straight days of 14-hour days, during which Sarah provided the only boots on the ground, with some occasional assistance from another reporter, Mike Gellalty. She and he were able to cozy up to emergency officials for Lumberton and the county, who were plenty accommodating and also provided power needed for laptops, cell phones, essential for what we were trying to achieve in delivering some news.



Courtesy photo | Cristal Graham
The Robesonian's office building on Roberts Avenue in Lumberton was filled with 18 inches of Hurricane Matthew floodwater. The newspaper lost almost everything it takes to produce a modern newspaper. It's staff was forced to work for eight months out of a trailer parked in the newspaper's parking and a building near Pine and Fourth streets.

One of the first decisions we made as a newspaper was whether to “publish” a print edition, even though it would not be delivered. In other words, an E-edition, which can be subscribed to and is essentially an electronic version of the print edition. It would require additional work, but we decided to, mostly for posterity's sake — as sort of a permanent record of what the county was enduring.

But because the paper was not going to be published, there was no deadline for each day's edition. It could always wait. That was nice.

During that week, I received more than 200 friendship requests from all over the country, coming from people I didn't know, but desperate for information about Robeson County and most often their loved ones. One morning I awakened to 111 Facebook notifications, including dozens of messages. I tried to acknowledge them all, but was constantly frustrated by an aged laptop that was often stuck in spin cycle.

Most people wanted information, where was shelter, food, water, but others wanted to know how they could help. I sometimes found myself playing the role of a traffic cop, trying to help people find a path into Robeson County so they

could deliver what was needed.

I didn't know it at the time, but was told often and by many later that robesonian.com and Facebook, the newspaper's page was worked hard by Willets and Gellalty, were their only sources of information concerning Robeson County and Matthew.

And so it continued until Saturday, Oct. 15, when my last duty in Charlotte was writing an Our View imploring President Obama to come to Robeson County to shine a light on what we were enduring. I remain disappointed that he didn't.

Sunday was reboot day and a time to access damage to my home, which was minimal, thankfully. Monday was a reunion with what staff was slowly returning to work. I learned what they had been enduring — much more than I had — and the extent of damage to our facilities, and the challenges we faced going forward, not only with the coverage of Matthew, but all else that was happening in a county as newsy as is Robeson.

For the next eight days, our newspaper was published in Mt. Airy, a five-hour drive one way, forcing a much earlier deadline for a somewhat timely delivery. It was on Oct. 25 that our press would again roll, an important step toward normalcy.

Soon, rehabilitation work would begin on our building, a job that would take eight more months to complete. In the interim, most of our staff worked out of two offices, a trailer stationed

PRIDE IN THE CAROLINAS



Continued from page 53

beside our building on Roberts Avenue, and a temporary location downtown. But many of our employees worked out of their homes, including me for the most part, and at sister newspapers in the region who provided room.

We just did the best we could.

When being interviewed by Lee Ringer, a meteorologist for Spectrum for a story about Matthew, in our beautiful new building, I was asked this: “Knowing what you know now, what would you have done differently on Oct. 7, the day before the storm hit?”

I thought, and thought some more.

But I was without words, which doesn’t happen often.

In that regard, trying to cover a hurricane is not much different than living through one. Hurricanes, and the water they produce, do as they please — and we are left to react and deal with it to the extent possible.

Finally I said, “Made sure I had a full tank of gasoline.”

If I had not had the half tank, our post-Matthew story would have been much different, but in one way exactly the same.

We would have done the best we could, as did everyone else.

“we are left to react and deal with it to the extent possible”

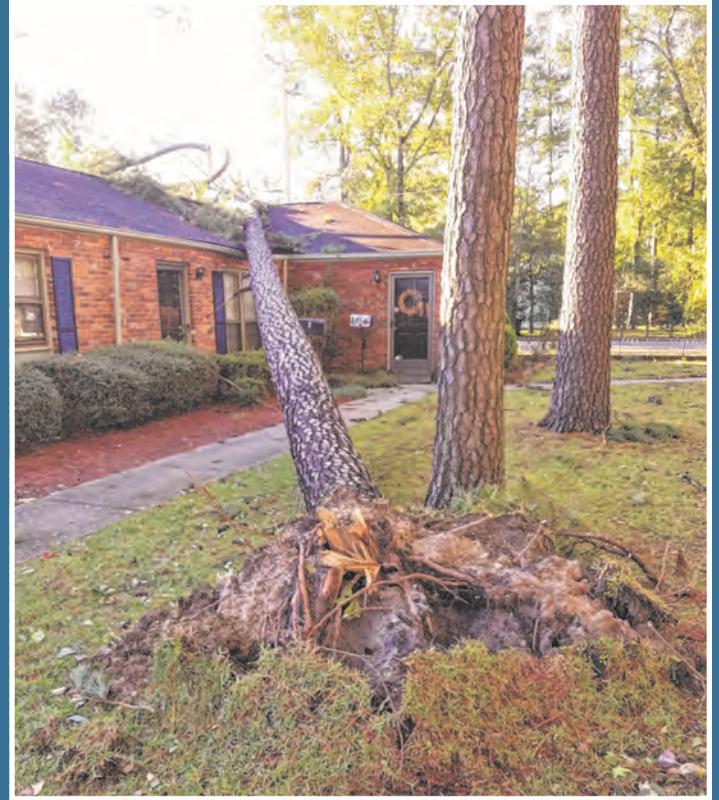


Courtesy photo | Cristal Graham

The Robesonian building was swamped with 18 inches of water in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. Still the staff members who could did what they could to keep area residents informed in the days after the storm struck.



Courtesy photo
Interstate 95 and its frontage roads in Robeson County were not immune to the rain and flooding produced by Hurricane Matthew.



Courtesy photo | Angela Carter
Tanglewood Terrace Apartments was one of the many building damaged by fallen trees during the hurricane.



Courtesy photo | Roy Barnhill
Looking north along Interstate 95 as Hurricane Matthew makes its furious presence felt.

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Rescue units went out into the storm to pull people to safety



The men and women of the St. Pauls Fire Department used this 5-ton truck to rescue 50 people stranded by Hurricane Matthew's floodwaters.

Scott Bigelow | The Robesonian

By Scott Bigelow

bigelow@yahoo.com

LUMBERTON — Among the heroes of Hurricane Matthew were the men and women who were forced out into the middle of the storm to rescue people from the rising waters in the immediate aftermath of Robeson County's most catastrophic flood ever.

After as many as 17 inches of rain fell, rising water affected all parts of Robeson County. Lumberton, with its proximity to the Lumber River, was hit hard over several days. In St. Pauls, which is far from the river, water flooded low-lying areas.

Over several days, the Lumberton Rescue Squad carried hundreds of people, some in danger of being swept to their deaths by fast moving water, to dry land. The St. Pauls Fire Department, with

help from the Big Marsh Volunteer Fire Department, rescued 50 people during the torrential rainfall on Saturday, the night of the storm.

Both units are comprised of volunteers who were stretched to their physical limits, and performed remarkably well.

"We knew we were on our own through this event," St. Pauls Assistant Fire Chief Chris Jackson said. "We're used to it."

Jackson said the St. Pauls Fire Department, which consists of 30 volunteers, hunkered down and waited as it rained. The calls came quickly on Saturday. St. Pauls, like most of Robeson County's communities, borders several swamps and parts of the town are in the flood plain.

By nightfall on Saturday, 50 town residents had been rescued by boat and high-water truck. There were no fatalities. St. Pauls High School took in evacuees.

"The water came up real fast," Jackson said. "We were fortunate that the water was not running."

Chapel and Elizabeth streets flooded,

and the water was deep at Woodside Trailer Park, where about 40 mobile homes are located.

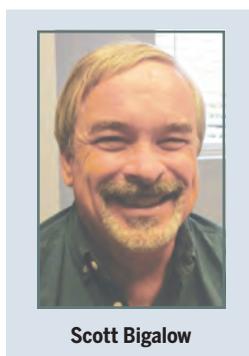
The town's fire department had a number of things going for it — dedicated volunteers, a high-water truck and boats from Big Marsh.

"We had 15 to 20 people working around the clock through the hurricane," Jackson said. "Some of the members slept here all week. After the water rescues, we cleared roads and cut fallen trees."

The high-water truck did the majority of the rescue work. The truck was donated years ago by the North Carolina Forestry Services. It is called a five-ton truck, because it can carry five tons of water to a forest fire.

The truck, with 5-foot-tall wheels and a custom paint job, plowed through water 6 feet deep. While the truck was working, Big Marsh's boats were slicing over the top of the water.

"We learned a lesson from Hurricane Matthew," Jackson said. "None of us had done anything like this before, and I hope



Scott Bigelow

for the citizens' sake, we never do it again."

St. Pauls' experience has given the department an air of confidence. They are battle-tested veterans of a major natural disaster who took care of their own.

In Lumberton, there was a very different story. Water rose fast, and in places, it moved very fast. There was considerable confusion and far too many calls for help while the water rose over a span of several days.

"We took some hits, but we were prepared," said Roger Taylor, who was squad commander for the Lumberton Rescue Unit. "Two years ago, we did swift water training. People thought it was crazy at the time, but it really paid off."

By virtue of that training, rescue squad members were called on by the state response team to assist in emergencies on the Outer Banks and in New Orleans. It was all valuable experience as the flood waters from Matthew began to rise.

"We had a briefing at 8:30 on Saturday morning and got our first call at 9:38 (a.m.) from Wesley Pines," Taylor said of the senior living center. "It went crazy from there. We didn't realize where the water was coming from."

The rescue squad successfully completed active rescues "over and over and over," beginning along Chippewa Street. But they were over-matched by the unpredictability of the hurricane and the rising water.

"The state had deployed its teams to the beach, where the hurricane was predicted to do the most damage," Taylor said.

On Saturday night, squad members sat down to prepare to evacuate South Lumberton. They started along Page



Turnout gear in the St. Pauls Fire Department hangs ready for the next emergency.

Scott Bigelow | The Robesonian

Street near the Lumber River and brought in 10 to 12 people at a time.

"We needed more help," Taylor said. "We could not continue at the pace we were going."

Meanwhile, flooding was breaking out along Alamac Road. A call to the state found rescue teams from New York and Missouri at Fort Bragg. A team from Charlotte was on the move too.

The Rescue Squad had no model to understand the amount of water that was headed to Lumberton or what areas would be hit. They pre-staged at the old Lumberton Motors (currently the location of the Robeson Church and Community Center) on Saturday, and it was flooded by Sunday night.

Evacuees were piling up at the edge of the water with no place to go, but some quick work solved the problem. Lumberton City Councilman Eric Hackney called schools Superintendent Tommy Lowry, who rounded up bus drivers.

"There were so many little stories," Taylor said. "On Monday morning we got calls from the Days Inn and Mayfair areas at (N.C.) 211 and I-95.

"A highway patrolman called us to say his daughter was stranded in her car at 211, so we went," he said. "When we got there, we heard screaming.

"A woman was hanging on to a utility pole in fast moving water," Taylor said.

"The water was moving so fast, it pulled her clothes off.

"We rescued a man who was hanging onto a tree branch," he said. "The water had pulled his pants off."

Taylor noted this was the location where a woman lost her life after being trapped by water inside her car. She and her husband made a deadly decision after exiting I-95.

"We would not have saved these people, if we had not received a call from the Highway Patrol," he said.

On Monday, a FEMA team arrived with high-water trucks, and Taylor and his team breathed their first sigh of relief.

"We'd heard stories about how they come in and take over. They had all these resources but asked us to direct them," Taylor said. "We laid out the maps and showed them the way."

Taylor unexpectedly got his 15 minutes of fame. When he was at Days Inn, he was approached about a man who wanted to talk to him.

It was Jim Cantore, the Weather Channel's celebrity storm reporter. He asked Taylor for a ride into Mayfair in a Rescue Squad boat. Taylor agreed.

"He tried to get into my boat without a life jacket, and I said 'no way, you see me with a life jacket,'" Taylor said. "Later, he thanked me, and said I was the first person ever to tell him to put on a life jacket."

On ads for the Weather Channel's storm coverage, Taylor can see himself piloting Jim Cantore through Lumberton flood waters, with a life jacket.

Scott Bigelow can be reached at 910-416-5649.



Rain and floodwater covers the parking lots of The Robesonian and Del Sol restaurant on Roberts Avenue. Courtesy photo | Susan Walker



Courtesy photo | Candice Sampson
Candice Sampson, five months pregnant at the time, and her husband, a Robeson County wildlife officer, stand in the floodwaters caused by Hurricane Matthew at their home on Beulah Church Road.



Courtesy photo | Mr. Jones
The storm left this street in South Lumberton looking like a war zone.

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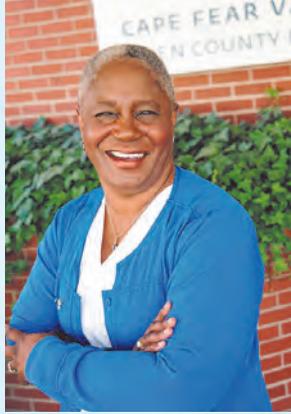
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