



NC Arts Organizations Come Together To Help Their Neighbors After Hurricane Helene

From the North Carolina Arts Council

Few could have imagined the effects of Hurricane Helene on western North Carolina in September. “The devastation was beyond belief,” Governor Roy Cooper remarked during his September 30 visit to the area. “And even when you prepare for something like this, this is something that’s never happened before in western North Carolina.”

The region’s vibrant arts community was among the hardest hit. Yet, as has been the case during previous upheavals, the arts community has also emerged as a beacon of hope and support.

A safe place after the storm

At Penland School of Craft in Mitchell County, staff members opened their doors to a whitewater rescue crew in need of shelter after the storm. “They needed a place to sleep and a warm meal,” Penland’s executive director, Mia Hall, told NBC News. She emphasized the essential role of arts organizations in communities, saying, “Organizations like ours are crucial for these small communities because it’s often the glue that holds this creative community together.”

Across the west, many arts organizations have transformed their spaces into shelters and resource centers. The Lost Province Center for Cultural Arts in Ashe County and the Watauga Arts Council quickly invited people to gather at their sites for safety, internet access, meals, and other essential needs. In Asheville (Buncombe County), the Wortham Theatre has been converted into a FEMA site and Brevard Music Center in Transylvania County has been offering temporary housing for visiting work crews and displaced families.

The Blowing Rock Art and History Museum in Watauga County, though itself



View of rolling hills and valleys from Cowee Mountain Overlook on Blue Ridge Parkway at sunset.

spared from damage, saw an opportunity to help. Executive Director Stephan Dragisic told NBC News, “We’re at a vulnerable point where any act of kindness is so appreciated, any act of humanity is so necessary.” Museum staff visited shelters for displaced residents and delivered art kits to families. Dragisic added, “The museum exists to do this kind of work, where we reach beyond the walls.”

In Buncombe County, Laura Mitchell, an A+ Schools of North Carolina Fellow and county arts education specialist, also made “creativity kits” to give kids a healthy distraction from the trauma surrounding them. To date, she has delivered more than 160 kits, with a goal of making 500 more.

Supporting recovery

Beyond immediate relief efforts, artists and arts organizations across the state are focusing on fundraising for recovery. Arts AVL, Asheville’s local arts council, sprang into action immediately, conducting area-wide needs assessments and establishing emergency funds for creatives. Within a week, organizations statewide began organizing concerts, art sales, and auctions to raise money for recovery and relief efforts.

These efforts included:
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- A “Concert for Carolina” in Charlotte featuring Luke Combs, Eric Church, James Taylor, Billy Strings, and more. Residents in affected areas were able to stream the concert for free.

- Eric Church, a North Carolina native and Appalachian State University alumnus, donated the rights to his newest single, “Darkest Hour,” to the state for recovery funding.

- The City of Wilmington, with support from Live Nation, the Wilmington Arts Council, and the NC Music Office, hosted “From Wilmington, With Love,” at Greenfield Lake Amphitheater featuring Ben Folds with musicians from western North Carolina and other special guests.

A list of upcoming events can be found at (https://www.dncr.nc.gov/programs-services/north-carolina-music-office/hurricane-helene-benefit-concerts?fbclid=IwY2xjawF_XLxleHRu-A2FibQIxMAABHWDjbcTMRdDun-fq1-sUglZRG1SkLYhvbxFH0q11JvMfxCkX-BWpIbyJpSWQ_aem_0VnvnKzcl6Jjq7o-kP8tpA). Many have taken place, more may be added to this list.

Offering a sense of belonging

Rhonda Bellamy, president & CEO of the Arts Council of Wilmington and New Hanover County, is an arts leader who has found herself and her organization in a similar situation. In 2018, Hurricane Florence devastated Wilmington. Speaking with the *Wilmington Star-News* at the time, Bellamy said “I think that, very often, the arts lead that recovery. People are looking for a common language, an expression of what

they’re going through.”

Reflecting on the current situation in western NC, Bellamy expressed her shock: “I’m so overwhelmed by what I’ve seen with Hurricane Helene. This is a Katrina-level storm. Some people have lost everything, including the loss of life.” Her advice to those affected: “As soon as you’re able, given the situation with having safety, electricity, and internet access, be the convener in your community - offer a sense of place and belonging to those who have been affected by the storm.”

As the state arts agency of North Carolina, we will continue helping the western arts community recover in the next months and years. You can help by sharing the following resources:

- Arts NC, a state service organization funded in part by the NC Arts Council, continues to update its library of resources for artists and arts organizations affected by Hurricane Helene at (<https://artsnc.org/arts-emergency-resources/>).

- The NC Department of Public Safety has compiled county-by-county relief and recovery resources at (<https://www.ncdps.gov/our-organization/emergency-management/hurricane-helene>).

- Make a direct impact by donating to the NC Disaster Relief Fund at (<https://pay.gov/payitgov.com/ncdonations>). 100% of the funds will help our friends in the west rebuild and recover.

The North Carolina Arts Council is a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, a state agency. For further information visit (<https://www.ncarts.org/>).

Craft Futures Fund Surpasses \$1 Million in Support of Western North Carolina Artists

The Center for Craft in Asheville, NC, is thrilled to announce that the Craft Futures Fund has raised over \$1 million to support craft artists in Western North

Carolina affected by Hurricane Helene. Since reactivating the Fund, the Center for Craft has quickly mobilized resource-

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