



TODAY MON TUE
78°/57° 80°/59° 80°/61°

Complete forecast, B10

CAMPAIGN 2016

Pence to visit Wilmington

WILMINGTON — Republican vice presidential candidate Gov. Mike Pence (R-Indiana) will visit Wilmington Tuesday for a campaign stop. According to a post on Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's website, Pence will speak at 2 p.m. Tuesday at the Coastline Conference & Event Center in downtown Wilmington. Tickets for the event were available at www.DonaldJTrump.com.

LOCAL

'Water Man' ready to retire

For 22 years, Mike Richardson was the county's "water man." This month, he hands off the title. Richardson said his mission was to "make sure the city can brush and flush." **A2**

WORLD

Blood drops from sky

Drones carrying lifesaving blood to rural medical clinics now soar through the skies over Rwanda. **A26**

LIFE

Great Pumpkin Patch is back

For nearly two decades, a pumpkin patch has materialized every September near the intersection of North College and Murrayville roads. **C1**

CORRECTION

HURRICANE MATTHEW AFTERMATH

Rebuilding once more



Kinston Mayor BJ Murphy records a video of floodwaters from the Neuse River washing over U.S. 70 East on Saturday. JANET S. CARTER/THE FREES PRESS

Kinston endured Floyd's flooding and sees water rise once again

By Adam Wagner
StarNews Staff

KINSTON — Standing on the banks of the Neuse River this week, watching water creep ever-closer to the bottom of the King Street Bridge, crowds of people continually compared what was happening to what Hurricane Floyd wrought here 17 years ago.

Friday evening, Joella Wooten brought her daughter and a friend to see the flooding first-hand. The river had seeped past Floyd's 27.71-foot record and was near its 28.31-foot crest.

"This is something they need to see," Wooten said, later

adding, "This is worse than Floyd."

Floyd and last week's Hurricane Matthew both caused at least 500-year floods in Kinston and catastrophic flooding throughout North Carolina, but they are not the same storm.

Floyd came slowly and then all at once, dumping rain across the region before flash flooding during a 12-hour period forced the sudden evacuation of residents throughout Kinston and Lenoir County, with some remembering drifting on boats out of Lincoln City by a cemetery in the night. The storm caused 500-year-flooding on the Contentnea Creek and 100-year flooding

on the Neuse River at Kinston.

Matthew's floodwaters rose steadily during the blue-skied days that followed in hurricane's wake. The Lumber River devastated Lumberton and the Black River washed residents out of Pender County as the water that would eventually lift the Neuse steadily worked its way downstream, toward the Pamlico Sound.

Kinston 2016

Perhaps most important, the Kinston of 2016 is not the Kinston of 1999.

The Kinston of 1999 had Lincoln City, a vibrant black community that flooded during Hurricane Fran in 1996 and flooded worse during Floyd in 1999, after which FEMA bought and razed nearly 800 homes

so future flooding would wash away tall grass and trees rather than people's homes.

The 1999 flooding was quickly followed by nearly 1,200 layoffs at Lenoir County's DuPont plant, a decision that claimed middle class jobs and led to many fleeing the area for good. Kinston had 24,729 residents in 1999, according to U.S. Census data, but the population had slumped to 21,212 by 2014.

On the banks of the Neuse, civic leaders and restaurant owners have just begun to establish Kinston as more than a place vacationers from Raleigh breeze past when they're taking U.S. 70 to the beach. Mother Earth Brewing and the Chef and the Farmer

Waiting for water to recede

By Cammie Bellamy
StarNews Staff

WILMINGTON — When Pete Bridgen was a young boy in 1945, a dam near his Fayetteville home burst and forced his family to flee. He would not experience such severe flooding again until last Wednesday, when the rising Black River drove him from his Currie home.

Standing outside an American Red Cross shelter at Burgaw Middle School Saturday, Bridgen he feels lucky.

"We didn't have assistance then like we do now," he said. "You were on your own."

This time around Bridgen has found help in the form of hot meals and a place to sleep at the shelter, an air-lift from his flooded home and the rescue of his pets by the Pender County Sheriff's Office.

"I had to leave in a hurry and had to leave my little dogs in the house and it was all surrounded by water," he said. "(Sheriff Carson Smith) was kind enough to get my little dogs, and he did not have to do that."

Bridgen was one of 21 Pender County residents staying at the shelter Saturday afternoon. On Sunday those people will be relocated to Riley's Creek Baptist Church in Rocky Point to clear the school Pender County Schools resume classes

SEE FLOODS, A11

SEE WATER, A7

FLOODS

Continued from A1

restaurant anchor a burgeoning food scene, and the city's downtown features blocks that wouldn't be out of place in Charlotte's Plaza Midwood.

Matthew's flooding could set that revitalization back — the tops of hotels on the city's south side stuck out of the Neuse River on Thursday behind N.C. Gov. Pat McCrory as he gave an update on conditions in the region.

"You've got two floods of a century in less than two decades," said BJ Murphy, the city's mayor. "But I have a tremendous amount of faith in our entrepreneurs and capitalism and humanity to know Kinston will get back on its feet."

Twice in a lifetime

And then there are the dozens, possibly hundreds, of people across the county and region who have been affected by flooding, many of whom are only 17 years removed from starting from scratch after Floyd.

Sharon Whitfield remembers Floyd's floodwaters. She was living in Lincoln City, a low-lying area east of Queen Street and south of Lincoln Street, when the Neuse began to rise.

Emergency crews evacuated Whitfield and her family on boats back in 1999, and on their way out, they floated past Maplewood cemetery. Headstones in that same cemetery were underwater again Friday evening, and a basketball net dangled mere feet above the swollen river.

"It's only been 17 years," Whitfield said. "I did not think we would see this again and just to look at it and see the same scenario, but just a lot worse than it was before ... You would never think you'd see it twice in your lifetime."

Whitfield doesn't live in Lincoln City anymore. The house she lived in was one of about 800 FEMA bought countywide after Floyd's waters had receded, and her new home is a refuge for her daughter and grandson, who left their home when Yadkin Branch spilled over its banks. They're waiting for their water heater, washer and dryer to be repaired before returning home.

Open doors

Throughout Lenoir County, residents have opened their doors to family and friends who were forced out by flooding.

Tony Bowden swept hair from the floor of South Queen Street Barber Shop Friday evening. Bowden had been offering customers who could make it to the shop half-price haircuts, with the difference coming out of his own pocket.

Bowden's 16-year-old and 14-year-old son had come to stay with him when floodwaters affected the Tick Bite home where they live with their mother. The 16-year-old grasps the scope of what's happening around him, but the 14-year-old is artistic and



Members of the Church of Faith and Deliverance hand out bags of food at the Carver Courts apartments Saturday in Kinston. PAUL STEPHEN/STARNEWS

having a more difficult time.

"All he knows is that the power's out and that a big adjustment for him," Bowden said, "because he can't use his iPad, the TV's not on and he can't use his fan."

Bowden remembers the days after Floyd, when the community rallied together to help clean up and do something as seemingly simple as feeding each other. He wants his sons to appreciate how people are banding together, but also to see how quickly everything they have can be taken away.

Earlier this week, he took the boys to the corner of Adkin and Caswell streets, where a group was providing free meals to anyone who needed it.

"Come here," Bowden told his sons. "This is life. These things happen."

'Going to happen again'

Kinston and Lenoir County are particularly vulnerable to things like catastrophic floods happening, said Rick Luettich, the director of the University of North Carolina Institute for Marine Sciences.

When a storm like Matthew or Floyd dumps rain across the Piedmont area, the rainwater runs downhill toward the coast, Luettich said. Once it reaches the coastal plain — which has cities like Burgaw, Greenville and Kinston — that water slows down.

"The land surface flattens out. It hits the coastal plain and all of a sudden it's flat so it doesn't flow downhill as rapidly," Luettich said.

Luettich also pointed to the impact of climate change. The geography combined with the increased frequency of large storms could leave residents across the Coastal Plains once again scrambling to fill sandbags and rescue prized possessions.

"This is going to happen again," Luettich said, later adding, "Events like this are probably going to happen again in people's lifetimes and in their mortgage time frames and even typical business cycles."

Buying out the flood zone

After Floyd, Kinston prepared in several ways, overhauling emergency response standards and improving communications between city and county



Dewey Price and his dog Bandit sit on the back of his pickup truck Saturday while they stay at the Red Cross shelter set up at Lenoir Community College. JANET S. CARTER/THE FREE PRESS

officials. For instance, the city and the county had identical 9 p.m. curfews throughout Matthew, and the governments had a joint emergency operations center on Rhodes Avenue.

A key step, though, was city and county leaders' efforts to purchase land along the Neuse's floodplain using FEMA Hazard Mitigation and Housing and Urban Development Disaster Recovery Initiative funds.

The area most affected by the buyouts was Lincoln City. "Everybody was close-knit. It was just like family. Everybody's kids knew everybody," Whitfield said, adding the former residents of the area continue to have an annual reunion.

Like many residents, Whitfield understands why her neighborhood was destroyed, but also has difficulty reconciling that logic with the strong sentiment she holds for the place she once called home.

"It's not a yes-or-no situation," Whitfield said of the buyouts. "If they hadn't, then it would have been right back to the same thing again, people would have tried to rebuild (after Floyd). They would have just turned around and lost everything all over again."

Officials are quicker to praise the buyouts. Even as the waters continued to rise, Roger Dail, Lenoir County's emergency services director, was thankful the homes were

no longer there.

"The one saving grace we have is we don't have those 800 homes," Dail said.

During the days following Floyd, Joe Hargitt remembers the stench of the floodwater, which ran through people's homes, picking up their belongings, sewage and whatever else was in the way.

Hargitt, the owner of King's Restaurant in Kinston, believes the buyout program at least helped Kinston escape an odor problem during Matthew's flooding.

"Everything that was in the way in Floyd isn't there now," Hargitt said, "so the water is basically running over clean land."

King's is one of Kinston's most recognizable restaurants, a barbecue shop that can seat 800, has two satellite stores and has been featured in Southern Living and on the CBS Early Show. It also sits on U.S. 70 just south of the Neuse River and has been underwater for days.

Hargitt plans on reopening the restaurant in the coming days, chopping pork at the takeout stores in the meantime.

"I don't have anything else to do," Hargitt said. "If I don't open my restaurant back up, I'd have to go work for someone else and I don't want to do that."

The restaurant withstood Floyd and will reopen again after Matthew, but Hargitt is already thinking about the possibility of it flooding again.

"We've had probably eight or 10 hurricanes come through since Floyd," Hargitt said. "I'm just wondering: If every time one comes through, am I going to have to worry about it happening again?"

Ideally, Hargitt said, he would be able to build a platform so the restaurant could stand higher than it does right now. He said he also would consider moving away from the U.S. 70 corridor to higher ground.

Nearby King's stands

By the numbers

- 2,333:** Water rescues during Hurricane Matthew
- 1,136:** N.C. National Guard reservists activated
- 660:** Roads that remain closed in eastern and central North Carolina
- 26:** Storm-related deaths
- 28.31 feet:** Neuse River's crest, Friday at 2 p.m.
- 27.6 feet:** Neuse River's depth at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday
- 11,219:** power outages statewide Saturday

what N.C. Gov. Pat McCrory called "one of the state's best stores." The Neuse Sports Shop took the warnings about Matthew very seriously, mobilizing a staff of about 60 people to clear most of its wares — including clothes, guns and home décor — into tractor-trailers that were driven to high ground.

"All those people are ready and waiting to scrub 'Neuse Juice' — that's what we started calling it after Floyd — off the walls and fixtures and clean the store up," said Russell Rhodes, Jr., the store's president.

By Tuesday or Wednesday, Rhodes hopes to have his staff back in the store cleaning. After three days of scrubbing and sterilizing, he hopes to start moving merchandise back in by the fourth day.

"The spirit of the people in Kinston is amazing. They will rebound, they will rebuild and businesses will be back on," Rhodes said. "It's an unfortunate thing to learn the quality of your neighbors in this way."

Kinston's spirit becomes clearest when it is responding to a disaster, said Bowden, the barber who took his sons to see relief efforts first-hand.

"It's like everybody's one," he said. "And there's a lot of us here who wish it would continue."

— Reporter Adam Wagner can be reached at Adam.Wagner@StarNewsOnline.com.

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