



**March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Today, March 27<sup>th</sup>, marks six months since Hurricane Helene made its devastating impact on Western North Carolina. In the days ahead, we'll be sharing stories of the incredible heroes at Cleveland County Government who stepped up when we needed them most—showing courage, compassion, and resilience in the face of adversity.

### **Cleveland County EMS Special Operations Team**

Hours before Hurricane Helene's arrival, the Special Operations Team established an operations center and meticulously prepared for swift water rescues and technical emergencies anticipated during and after the storm. Throughout the night, team members diligently monitored storm conditions and flood sensors, despite some sensors losing communication. In anticipation of potential risks, they proactively patrolled low-lying areas around the Broad River basin.

As the storm intensified and power was lost at the operations center, the team faced additional challenges when the backup generator failed. Undeterred, they switched to secondary generators, chemlights, and headlamps, staying fully committed to their mission. Despite his own home suffering catastrophic damage, Special Operations Paramedic Gabe Wilson remained steadfast with the team.

“On the day of the storm, I was glad to be on duty and ready to provide aid to the members of the community. It was great to be on duty with other team members who were just as dedicated and eager to help,” said Shawn Elliot, a Special Operations Paramedic. “When

the call came in that people needed assistance, everyone was ready to provide whatever was necessary.”

During this time, the Cleveland County Sheriff’s Office requested assistance to evacuate residents in a rapidly flooding area along the Broad River. The team navigated numerous obstacles, including downed trees and power lines, to reach the affected location. Deploying their swift water team, they courageously rescued seven adults, three children, and two K9s from the perilous conditions. Their flawless execution of the mission stands as a testament to their training and dedication.

“Once we had a successful mission with multiple rescues, roadways cleared, and food brought to people, it was a really good feeling to be helping our community,” said Gabe Wilson. “It was especially rewarding to hear about all the incredible rescue efforts in Asheville—amazing people sacrificing their time to help their neighbors.”

A special thanks to Lt. Randall Lockhart for sharing this story. We are deeply grateful to the entire EMS Special Operations Team and the Sheriff’s Office for their outstanding efforts in making this rescue a success.