

# Hurricane Laura floods county with traffic, not much else

By **BRYAN BARROW**  
SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

On Wednesday, Aug. 26, as Hurricane Laura approached the Gulf Coast as a Category 3 storm, residents from southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana began the trek north to get out of harm's way.

Cherokee County witnessed an increase in traffic and folks stopping for food and fuel along their evacuation routes. Numerous evacuees told the same story as they pumped fuel or stood in line at Whataburger on Highway U.S. 69 in Rusk – after taking into consideration the severity of the forecast, they were evacuating for safety.

Tommy Fruge from Lake Charles, La., said he and his family, along with their pets, were headed to Grapevine to ride out Laura.

They chose Grapevine for the simple reason they found a hotel that would accept pets.

Tommy stated they didn't have any issues finding a room.

Don Page from Orangefield, Texas, was headed to Chickasha, Okla.

"This isn't my first time evacuating,"

he admitted – something that was really clear as he was pulling a trailer loaded with a deep freezer, generator and extra fuel. They were headed to Oklahoma because they have family to stay with.

Lake Charles, La., resident Leslie McInnis said this was her first time evacuating on her own but was traveling with family in separate vehicles. They were headed to Fort Worth and expected to stay through Friday.

Hurricane Laura made landfall near Cameron, La., as a category 4 hurricane with winds clocking in at nearly 150 miles an hour.

While Cherokee County was predicted to feel much more of the storm, local areas only saw a slight increase of winds overnight, as the storm stayed east of the area.

In an effort to be safe and not sorry, cities, schools and other officials across Cherokee County made the decision at various times through Wednesday, Aug. 26, to cancel classes, close doors and otherwise batten down the hatches on Thursday in anticipation of Hurricane Laura.

"We do not want to jeopardize buses being on the roads, kids in portable



PHOTO BY BRYAN BARROW

**▲ Evacuees fleeing Hurricane Laura last month line U.S. Highway 69 N in Rusk. While numerous families passed through Rusk and Cherokee County, on their way to the location they chose to weather the storm, Hurricane Laura took a last minute detour and made landfall further east than expected -- sparing much of East Texas, including Cherokee County, of her wrath.**

buildings, or staff members traveling to and from work," Alto ISD district officials posted on the school's Face-

book page on Wednesday, Aug. 26. Alto was the first school district to cancel Thursday's classes.

All entities that shut down for Thursday were back to their regular schedules on Friday.

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and will be evident to anyone he talks with.

"As I talked with several candidates about this important role within our company, John quickly stood out. He already knows the issues of the community.

"He also understands the struggles of the media landscape but most importantly he brings a genuine desire to reach out and engage readers and advertisers.

"A newspaper should mirror the community and reflect our long-standing tradition of

coverage that can be counted upon.

"We are confident in John's direction to forge ahead and begin growing our relationships and broadening our options.

"We've diversified our programs to better serve our community, including a complete digital program to complement our coverage.

"I look forward to the accomplishments of the team and the expansion of our publication.

"John brings community connections and a wonderful background

in media, including the voice of Rusk's former radio station. Every conversation with John highlighted his experience and solidified this was the best course for the newspaper in one of our key markets.

"We would also like to wish Megan a hearty congratulations in her endeavor with Citizen's 1st Bank. We know she will have much success."

Hawkins's association with the Cherokeean Herald began nearly 38 years ago, when he worked side by side with

the paper, when the late Emmett and Marie Whitehead hired him on as the morning dee-jay of their local radio station, KWRW/KTLU.

"In those days, everybody had to pitch in wherever Emmett needed, from radio to newspaper or cable company and farm," Hawkins said. "We did it all."

Hawkins remembers Whitehead once told him he'd always have a place, to which he said he replied, with a laugh, "Boss, you've hired me three times and there

won't be a fourth."

Never say never, as they say. After the Whiteheads' daughter Terrie and her husband Robert Gonzalez took over the operation of the paper, Robert Gonzalez managed to talk Hawkins into returning to host the popular morning radio show Talk Time once more.

After Lewis County Press acquired the Cherokeean and the radio station in 2016, Hawkins continued to host Talk Time until its demise in 2018.

"I have a deep love for East Texas and in particular, the Cherokeean Herald," Hawkins said. "Not only is that where I met my wife, Penny, more than 32 years ago, but also the heritage of Texas' oldest weekly newspaper.

"Our community relies on the local paper to keep everyone informed of what's happening in Cherokee County and to give advertisers a way to reach their customers.

"I plan to continue that tradition and add to that heritage."

# Johnny Helm hit the CCT stage as newest production gets underway

By **MARY BETH SCALLON**  
SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

Fans of longtime Jacksonville singer and songwriter, Johnny Helm, gathered Saturday night at Cherokee Community Theater in Rusk, for the debut of his new CD, "Foolish Man."

Accompanied by a band of his fellow musicians, Helm continued his tradition of bringing his style of music to an enthusiastic crowd.

His musical career began in the '70s during the "Jesus rock band" era, commencing with Damascus Road, a band that brought gospel music to a new genre, one with a fast tempo and guitars, both acoustic and steel.

When Damascus Road split, Helm and his brother, Tommie Helm, continued their pursuit of performing and presenting their music with their Spirit & Understanding label.

Since that time, the brothers and some of the original band members, have reunited for a variety of performances, including gigs at the Tomato Fest, Tomato Bowl

and Roland's Next Door, all in Jacksonville.

Saturday night's performance included band members Jeff Shelton on drums; Alex Blair, on bass and harmony vocals; Don Elbert on keys; and Steve DeVries, with acoustic and electric guitars, mandolin and harmonica, as well as Johnny Helm on vocals and electric guitar.

All the songs performed were written by Helm, with the exception of the lyrics in "The Pledge of Allegiance," and some takeout scores in "This Ol' Boy Can Still Rock."

Leading the program with the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag, Helm displayed his patriotism and pride in America, and also his spiritual heritage, ending the performance with his creation, "Praise to You, Jesus, Praise."

Social distancing protocol was practiced at the theater, and ticket sales and donations were divided between Helm and CCT's "Raise the Roof" Fund.

For more information or to purchase Helm's

new CD, call (903) 589-0959.

CCT's next production is Borrowed Time by Kevin Stone, directed by Josie Fox and produced by Amy McCalister.

Cast members are:

- Jürgen Metzger - Kaleb Ward
- Young Jürgen - Lucas Everett
- Ryan - Atticus Belota
- Jessica - Abigail McCalister
- Old Jessica - Harley Barrow
- Roberta - Gwyneth Wilder
- Old Roberta - Brenda Hendrickson
- Kathleen Metzger - Meg Kovacs
- Young Kathleen - Rachel Coleman
- Mailman - May Woods
- Offstage voices - Deakon Harper

Borrowed Time hits the stage at 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday, Oct. 16-17; and 2 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 18, at the theater, 157 W. Fifth St., Rusk.

Theater memberships are still available. Call the box office, (903) 683-2131 to find out how to become a member of the Cherokee Civic Theatre.

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