

Living With Floyd: 1 Year Later

On Sept. 16, 1999, Hurricane Floyd swept across eastern North Carolina and was gone in hours. But those in its path are still picking up the pieces.



DTH FILE PHOTO

An apartment is in ruins (above) just days after floodwaters receded at Tar River Estates in Greenville. One year later, signs warn residents to stay out of the complex's units (right).



DTH/VALERIE BRUCHON

ECU Community Reflects on Year of Recovery

By **LUCAS FENSKÉ**
Assistant State & National Editor

GREENVILLE — Time has masked the damage Hurricane Floyd inflicted on East Carolina University a year ago this weekend.

The parking lot where an ECU student, 18-year-old Aaron Childe of Leland, drowned while swimming in floodwaters is now dry.

Campus sidewalks covered with leaves after the storm were cleared long

ago. Chunks of road and sidewalk torn from the ground by the rampaging floodwaters have been repaired.

But the hurricane still lingers in the memory of many students who were forced to carry their soggy belongings from mud-covered apartments.

Greenville, located on the Tar River, was one of several N.C. cities hit hard by the flood. ECU classes were canceled for nine days, the longest in recent memory. The school suffered more than \$4 million in physical damages.

ECU sophomore Michael Rowcliff of Chapel Hill said he remained on campus during Floyd until he was forced to evacuate. "No one wanted to go to sleep (that night)," Rowcliff said. "Everyone wanted to see what would happen."

He said his residence hall lost power about 3 a.m. when the hurricane's eye was overhead, setting off the fire alarm. "We were standing outside in the rain and wind," Rowcliff said. "Tree branches were flying around. It was total chaos."

He said Floyd itself was not a major problem for students, but the subsequent floods were devastating and turned his residence hall, located at the top of a hill, into an island.

"There was no way on or off except by boat," Rowcliff said. "The commuter parking lot was a lake. All you could see was a sign that said 'Caution: Lot Prone to Flood' sticking out of the water."

He said the effects of Floyd — and the smell of mildew in some classrooms — lingered for the rest of fall semester.

Rowcliff said possessions and apartments damaged by the flooding, combined with the loss of vacation days, made it hard for most students to devote the necessary attention to their studies.

"No one was motivated," he said. "More students were on academic probation than could fit in the auditorium."

Despite the academic, emotional and physical effects of the storm on campus, the damage wrought by Floyd is more visible in the city of Greenville.

Faded police caution tape litters the ground around Darryl's, a restaurant and once-popular student hang-out that is now locked. A cobweb-covered bench, with its seats folded up, states, "Welcome to Pirate Country."

Tar River Estates, an apartment complex located next to the river of the same name, still has about a dozen buildings with gutted interiors bearing signs warning "condemned" or "building unfit for human habitation."

Fish chase minnows around the complex's abandoned swimming pool, where weeds and algae have started to grow. Insulation, heart-shaped key-chains commemorating a blood drive and pieces of an artificial Christmas tree litter the floor of the nearby clubhouse.

ECU senior Jacob Parrish of Louisburg said he lived in Tar River Estates during the flooding.

Parrish said he went home during Floyd after receiving a warning from the police and could not return to the apartments until several days later. "Even the beer truck couldn't get into Greenville."

When Parrish was finally able to return to the apartment weeks later, he said fungus was growing on the walls and the floor was covered with mud.

Parrish said he and his roommate, Bradley Cash of Louisburg, received about \$5,000 in rent aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Parrish said other university officials were equally attentive to student needs —



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The Tar River Estates clubhouse, littered with debris, has sat deserted for a year after being almost completely inundated.

perhaps overly so. "This one lady kept asking me 'Are you OK?'" he said. "Yes. 'Are you in denial?' No."

Despite offers of support, Parrish said professors expected too much of students harmed by the flood, causing his grades to drop.

He said many students were depressed by the flood and its impact on them and their families, but an ECU football game, played while the campus

was still closed, boosted their morale. Parrish said the blowout victory against the fittingly named Miami Hurricanes lifted students' spirits.

He said a crowd of students, himself included, rushed the football field and tore down the goal posts. "That win helped more than anything."

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.



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Greenville's Tar River Estates' swimming pool is filled with schools of fish, algae and miscellaneous debris, a year after Hurricane Floyd.

Floyd Creates Emotional Turmoil For Some UNC Students, Families

By **KIM MINUGH**
University Editor

Students recovered from hurricane parties. Administrators returned to their offices. The University's daily grind quickly resumed.

The relatively mild storm that hit Chapel Hill on the morning of Sept. 16, 1999, didn't prepare the UNC community for the nightmare that Hurricane Floyd would leave in its wake elsewhere — least of all the students whose families in eastern North Carolina were to endure countless trials for months to come.

Sophomore Erin Coburn said her hometown of Windsor, located in northeastern North Carolina near the Pamlico Sound, prepared for the worst without ever imagining what that would really entail.

"Everyone was buying canned food and water; grocery stores were out of food," she said. "It just hit us harder than we thought it would. Nothing of this sort has ever happened."

And as Floyd's imminent danger passed from the minds of many UNC students, Coburn still had her family to worry about.

"I was so scared, and the next day (after Floyd hit Chapel Hill) we were back at school — and my parents were still at home," she said.

Coburn's own home sustained little damage in comparison to Windsor's downtown area, which felt the full destructive brunt of Floyd's floodwaters.

She said all of her tight-knit community felt the storm's repercussions.

"It bothered me how everyone was like, 'It's not going to hit us,' and my family was at home preparing for the worst."

And Coburn wasn't alone. There were other

students like her who struggled under the weight of the emotional burden Floyd forced them to shoulder. Others feared the havoc Floyd wreaked on their families' finances.

Some of those students received aid from the University in the form of donations and contributions.

The Office of the Dean of Students collected food, clothes and other gifts for the family of one work-study student in the office.

Sylvia White, an employee there, said the student's struggle was visible.

"She just felt so guilty for being here. She felt like she needed to be there helping, but it was better for her family for her to be here," she said.

LaEula Joyner, who works with White, said delivering the collected items to the family was a meaningful yet emotional experience.

Joyner expected laughter, excitement and happiness upon her arrival with the donations.

But the destruction Floyd left in its wake humbled families across the state — leaving them financially bound and emotionally broken.

"I'll never forget the look on (the student's) sister's face. She just looked so sad, and so remote. I got back to my car and cried and cried," she said.

The work-study student finished the semester but then went home to help her family rebuild their lives. She was able to return to UNC in August.

Dean of Students Melissa Exum said University officials made every effort to allow those students affected by the hurricane to continue at UNC, regardless of their financial situation at home.

"We made sure that whatever students (decided to do) they weren't penalized academically or financially."

She said it was the University's obligation to spearhead relief efforts from the area.

"We are a compassionate University and a compassionate community," Exum said. "We have an obligation to the state and all its people. I really think the University rose to the commitment."

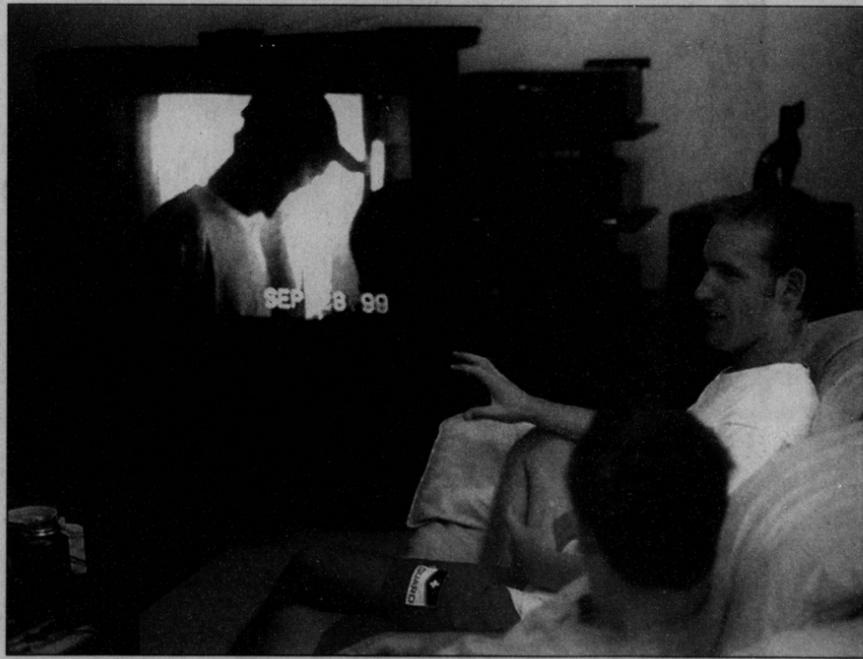
She said students in need of aid could sense the sincerity that permeated UNC's efforts. "It made me proud to work at Carolina."

But UNC's outreach included more than financial support and labor. UNC Counseling and Psychological Services offered students an outlet for their emotions while dealing with Floyd's aftermath.

Although CPS Director John Edgerly said only a few students sought help from University psychologists, he said Floyd had taken its toll on those he saw.

"Those students were usually very upset," Edgerly said. "It was primarily an issue of anxiety and worrying because they couldn't get back to (their families)."

He said students showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, exhibiting denial or depression and sometimes complaining of insomnia.



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Bradley Cash and Jacob Parrish, seniors at ECU, relive the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd on home video. Displaced from their apartment, they were required to wear face masks when checking out the damage.

"Students were seeing their homes devastated," he said. "They came back and were trying to maintain an academic focus."

Edgerly said CPS provided counseling to all students who requested it and also provided mild medication to counter some of the symptoms.

But some students, like Coburn, dealt with the trauma themselves — by waiting, by praying, by staying hopeful.

"My roommate and I were really close, and we prayed — prayed that the rivers wouldn't crest

so high and things would get better."

Coburn said everything in her life took a back seat to her family concerns.

"You see it on TV, and you don't believe it's your home," she said. "No one ever thinks it's going to happen. It's heartbreaking."

"Unless you see it, no one will ever know how bad it was."

The University Editor can be reached at udesk@unc.edu.