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HOSE vs. HELENE

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Presbyterian College News Service

HOSE VS. HELENE: PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE RESPONDS TO DEVASTATING STORM THAT RIPPED THROUGH THE REGION

October 16, 2024

Presbyterian College was not spared from Hurricane Helene's destructive rampage through the southeast on Sept. 27. Buildings were damaged. Trees and lives were uprooted. All of the advantages of modern technology were stripped away.

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Thank you to all of our primary care providers who go above and beyond for our patients every single day!



What could not be taken, however, was the inimitable PC Spirit – the overwhelming and compelling urge to respond to the needs of others and to meet a challenge head-on.

On Oct. 9, following an extended fall break, PC president Dr. Anita Gustafson welcomed students back to a changed campus. Dozens of the college's stately oaks were gone. Several offices were temporarily relocated due to damage or safety concerns. Debris was still being cleared. But the Blue Hose were back – and the rhythm of classes and college events quickly resumed.

A lot happened, though, between the morning the storm hit and classes began again, Gustafson noted in an email to students, faculty, and staff.

“Over the past 13 days, I have witnessed what it means to be ‘True Blue’ from the dedication of so many on our campus who worked countless hours to get campus ready for us to begin classes today,” she wrote on Oct. 9. “It certainly takes a village to handle a challenge such as the damage that Helene caused to our campus.

“The day the storm hit, we quickly formed an operations team to address the safety of our students and the immediate needs of the campus. This was all the more challenging because communications were down, so we had to physically locate each other on campus and set specific times to meet in-person. We decided that our slogan needed to become ‘PC Pivot,’ since we needed to change plans more than once.”

The most immediate concern, of course, was the safety and welfare of students who resided on campus during the storm and during the break, including a number of student-athletes. Dean of student affairs Drew Peterson moved into Clinton Hall to be closer to students and he and his staff – along with campus police led by Chief Tony Eigner – provided constant protection and support throughout the crisis. Student affairs staff also led efforts to clean out refrigerators in residence halls since power was out for several days. Staff opened Springs Campus Center to students, as well, giving them a sense of community during the ordeal.

Students never missed a warm meal following the storm. Director of auxiliary services Jason Koenig worked closely with AVI general manager Kirtley Baez and her staff to ensure students were fed. Koenig and his staff also got the college's mailroom back in order so that deliveries could be made on time.

Undoubtedly, one of PC's greatest challenges following the storm was restoring campus facilities to working order. Director of facility services Trent Roark and his crews worked tirelessly around the clock to address fallen trees, power lines, outages, and water damage, including damage to the Provost's Office in Smith Administration Building. Budd Group employees also worked hard to restore the grounds, clean up debris, and make the campus safe again.

Information technology, led by director Kevin Crider, were able to get the college's network up and running again once power was restored.

There were many other individuals and employees across campus who pitched in to bring campus back to a semblance of normalcy for students' return on Oct. 9. But one of the most remarkable responses to Hurricane Helene was initiated by students themselves demonstrating their remarkable hearts of service.

Putting the college's motto, "While We Live, We Serve," into action, students were inspired to help others in the community and surrounding area. Many of PC's athletic teams – volleyball, football, men's and women's soccer, men's and women's basketball, men's and women's tennis, baseball, and men's and women's wrestling – rolled up their sleeves to help people impacted by the storm.

Coordinating with the Chaplain's Office, more than 200 students volunteered in the aftermath of Helene's destruction. Students went to residences in Lydia Mills and to the campus of Thornwell to clean up. They cleaned up Pine Haven and Pine Street parks in the community. They helped move the Provost's Office, and the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion offices due to the damage in Smith. Individual students also gathered supplies and offered their help to areas outside Laurens County impacted by the vicious storm.

In all, the college's response to Hurricane Helene was, as Gustafson put it, a "True Blue" moment for PC.