

Irma...from Page 1A



Union County first responders in one of several special weather briefings last week in the Union County EOC at Fire Station No. 1. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Georgia, Irma was being compared to Hurricane Opal from 1995, which was responsible for downing thousands of trees around the state and leaving hundreds of thousands of people without power in Georgia and Alabama.

Here in the North Georgia mountains, which were under a Tropical Storm Watch as early as Sept. 10, meteorologists expressed the most concern

over the potential for downed trees and powerlines from wind gusts greater than 30 miles per hour starting Monday afternoon and lasting through Tuesday morning, though the storm had yet to move through Union County by press time Monday.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms said that the EMC would be ready to handle outages as they came up, and urged

residents to call (706) 379-3121 to report power outages.

Along with fierce winds, Irma brought rain to the area, which increased the chances for flash flooding in Union and surrounding counties, though the Union County Swift Water Team was ready at a moment's notice throughout the ordeal.

The potential for tornados was also greater than usual with Irma, but the National Weather Service out of Peachtree City said that the threat was less across North Georgia due to atmospheric stability in the region.

Union County EMA Director David Dyer used Facebook in the days leading up to the hurricane's arrival to keep people updated on Irma, and to urge people to stay home and shelter in place during the storm.

Dyer is a big proponent of preparedness, and believes that, when it comes to bad weather events, people should have enough food and water to last three or four days, plus a full tank of gas, all medications filled in advance, and perhaps a little cash in case of extensive power outages.

As EMA director, Dyer will be at the forefront of making sure the county benefits from any disaster funds made available in the aftermath of Irma based on local damages.

Many in Union County may have noticed a surge in local population over the weekend, as an untold number of Floridians and South Georgians traveled to Union County to evacuate from areas that were more impacted by the hurricane.

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce reported a high call volume of people looking to find places to rent or shelter in the county, and many people even brought their animals with them, including livestock.

Hurricane Irma arrived about a week after Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, which caused

at least 70 American deaths and tens of billions of dollars in damages.

Following closely behind Irma is Hurricane Jose, which meteorologists will be keeping a close eye on as it moves closer to the U.S.

A local effort to help victims of Hurricane Harvey has been hugely successful,

and residents should stay tuned for how to continue to help victims of Hurricane Harvey, as well as those affected by Hurricane Irma.

Check out the Sept. 20 edition of the North Georgia News for more coverage on the local impact of Hurricane Irma.

Equifax...from Page 1A

people, as well as the personal information of an unreported number of Canadians and Britons.

The data breach occurred earlier this year in mid-May and was discovered on July 29, though Equifax waited until Sept. 7 to make its findings public.

Equifax has set up a website that is asking Americans to put in more of their personal information – including last names and the last six digits of Social Security numbers instead of the usual four used for security purposes – as a way for people to determine if their personal information was part of the data breach by hackers.

Those interested in using the Equifax website, located at www.equifaxsecurity2017.com, are advised by the Federal Trade Commission to make sure that they access the site through a secure computer on an encrypted network connection.

Individuals affected by the data breach will receive the following message through the website:

"Based on the information provided, we believe that your personal information may have been impacted by this incident."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is looking into the Equifax hack, but what should vulnerable consumers do to protect themselves now that it's likely their personal information was stolen by hackers?

There's no quick fix, according to Equifax, which has shifted the burden largely back to individual consumers to monitor their own financial situations more closely and regularly after the hack.

"We recommend that consumers be vigilant in reviewing their account statements and credit reports, and that they immediately report any unauthorized activity to their financial institutions," according to Equifax.

"We also recommend that they monitor their personal information and visit the Federal Trade Commission's website, www.ftc.gov/idtheft, to obtain information about steps they can take to better protect against identity theft as well as information about fraud alerts and security freezes."

Equifax is offering all U.S. consumers a year of free credit file monitoring and identity theft protection, independent of whether an individual's personal information was stolen in the hack.

Those who opt for the free year of credit protection services through Equifax should keep in mind that the information stolen will be at the disposal of criminals for decades to come, after all, people keep the same names, Social Security numbers and dates of birth throughout their lifetimes.

From here on out, vulnerable Americans will need to maintain a closer watch on their financial affairs than ever before, at least until such a time that consumers have a better way of establishing their identities for credit purposes.

"This attack on you and me, carelessly allowed to happen by Equifax, is so severe and so extreme that it will require a lifetime of change on your and my part," said financial guru Clark Howard.

Howard and other consumer advocates have said that the only way to remain safe from the consequences of the hack is to institute a credit freeze with all three major credit reporting agencies so that criminals become unable to use people's identifying information against them.

Consumers interested in finding out more about establishing a credit freeze can visit <http://www.consumer.ga.gov/consumer-topics/credit-freeze>.

"Georgia's credit freeze law provides Georgia consumers with the ability to place a freeze on their credit file for only \$3, or a total of \$9 for each of the three major credit-reporting agencies: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion," according to the website.

"Each temporary lift – commonly called a "thaw" – to allow access to the consumer's credit file also costs \$3, and is available electronically within 15 minutes of request, keeping

on-the-spot credit an option for shoppers.

"If you are the victim of identity theft, there is no charge for a credit freeze.

Placing a credit freeze is also free to senior citizens 65 or older, but they can be charged \$3 for lifting or removing the freeze."

Garrett...from Page 1A

the Towns County Sheriff's Office called them up saying that they potentially had information concerning the Union County burglary from earlier that day, according to Lt. Osborn.

A search warrant turned up items connected to the Union County burglary in Garrett's vehicle in Hiawassee, according to Lt. Osborn.

Three vendor shops located inside Victoria's Antique Mall were hit in the burglary, and the stolen items, including old coins and jewelry – some of which had already been pawned prior to Garrett's Towns County arrest – have been recovered and returned to their respective owners, said Lt. Osborn.

Garrett's initial arrest came on Aug. 17 in Hiawassee, and he was charged in Towns County with burglary, criminal trespass, possession of tools for the commission of a crime, and obstructing law enforcement officers, according to Hiawassee PD at the time.

The circumstances of his arrest are as follows:

Around 6 p.m. on Aug. 17, a group of vendors having a meeting inside the Hiawassee Antique Mall heard what sounded like someone doing construction, according to Hiawassee PD.

When the hammering continued, one of the meeting attendees went outside to look behind the building to find a man pounding his way through the cinderblock exterior of the mall and into a back wall, according to police.

Upon being discovered, the man packed up his tools and took off, after which a 911 call was made from the scene, according to police.

The call came in at 6:04 p.m., and two Hiawassee PD officers responded to the area within a minute of the call, at which point witnesses told the officers the man had fled on foot into the wooded area behind Fred's Super Dollar, according to police.

Local first responders, including firefighters, officers and deputies, helped to establish a perimeter around the search area, and the Towns County Sheriff's Bloodhound K-9 Copper picked up the suspect's scent and led officers into the woods, according to police.

Not long after, authorities spotted the suspect, later identified as Garrett, fleeing across Bell Creek Road, where he ran behind the McDonald's restaurant, according to police.

Unfortunately for Garrett, more than a dozen Towns County Sheriff's deputies responded to the 911 call, as they had just let out of a previously scheduled pre-eclipse training session, according to police.

Finding himself with cops seemingly on every side, Garrett entered the water and began to swim out into Lake Chatuge, according to police.

"While he was swimming, we saw him go underwater a couple of times, and I think that's probably when he was taking his pants and shoes off," said Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith. "That's when we got really concerned, thinking he was going to drown."

Towns County Fire responded with a rescue boat from Station 1, just in case Garrett needed to be saved or pulled from the water, according to the chief.

Garrett attempted to make landfall via several docks, only to be met by authorities at each dock, according to police.

Exhausted from the pursuit, Garrett finally exited the lake near the Towns County Senior Center, where Chief Smith arrested him without further incident, according to police.

Garrett's vehicle was found at the crime scene, and is being held as part of the investigation, according to Hiawassee PD.