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Leading into Wednesday of last week, Hurricane Florence reached a Category 5 before dwindling down to a Category 2 and suddenly turning into a tropical storm over the weekend.

Classes were called off due to the severe weather ahead, beginning from noon on Thursday, Sep. 13 and remained closed till Sunday, Sep. 16. A few professors made the decision to dismiss class even before noon so that students could make it home early to prepare for the storm.

Abbie Solinger, a freshman at Radford, was one of the few to leave for home as early as Tuesday night. "I was nervous the storm would touch landfall in Radford and completely flood the place. I also hate driving through the rain." Home for her is Charleston, but things weren't looking good there either. "So we went to Tennessee where my sister and her husband live."

However, Thursday saw no rain. Friday came and the night brought with it some rain and possibly, there's more on the way this week.

City Mayor David Horton has been working closely with city officials to monitor the New River and its impact on the surrounding areas. "Keep in mind, this could be higher or lower depending on the storm track. Sunday night, all Monday, all Tuesday, and potentially part of Wednesday could see flooding."

In fact, even the National Weather Service has put Virginia on a Flash Flood Watch up until Wednesday, Sep. 19.

For two community members, Kris VonFricken and Tyra Anderson, this wasn't reason enough to keep them off the New River. With a couple of cars and tubes, they used the day off to go floating from three to eight in the evening, right before Radford began to catch the scattered bands of Hurricane Florence.

Floating over the rapids is normally a rocky experience, but it wasn't so much this time. "The water was higher than usual," noticed VonFricken. "The best way to prep for a hurricane is to become one with the water."

Anderson, on the other hand, saw it as the calm before the storm.

"I expected there to be high wind and rain, not the cloudy and mild weather we got," commented junior, Allison Scherner. "I got dinner with my Big, Shannon, and did homework because online classes are sadly still a thing when we still have power."



Allison Scherner taking her online class

Carly Sumpter, also a junior, had similar expectations. She was "disappointed" and spent her Thursday as a "lazy day" cooking for herself and her boyfriend. "Friday, I worked on homework all day and then was able to drive to Franklin County to help volunteer at the petting zoo."

Local businesses were not so pleased since the news of the Hurricane.

Scott Blaylock, assistant store manager for Rural King said, "It has been tremendously busy." They're used to one truck delivering water a week, but "had about five trucks of water delivered" to the store.

Water, generators, flashlights, gas cans, batteries, anything related to hurricane preparation was selling quickly in large quantities.

Walmart, too, was affected. You can find Karolin Howard often working there as the self-checkout host.

Howard said, “First of all, we are out of vegetables entirely because we couldn’t get shipments in and now we’re taking donations when you check out at the register for hurricane relief.” This feature was added to all the self-checkout stations and registers.



According to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service, the New River was projected to reach 8 ½ feet above flood stage on Sep. 16.

The latest observation was made at quarter after two in the morning on Sep. 17 with about four feet raised, still below flood line.

Sure, the surrounding mountains may act as a wall and smooth over the potential damage, but, scientifically, their presence in the path of a wind could also force the air to move upwards and be carried away like rain.

Areas close to the river have been closed off, and officials are urging residents of Radford to “Turn Around, Don’t Drown.” There’s also an app the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recently launched as a rumor control service and up-to-date, accurate info hub.

Photo Credit: (Shiza Manzoor | The Tartan; weather.gov)