

THE SAMPSON INDEPENDENT

Assistance through the storm

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Legal Aid assistance offered at senior centers

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Legal Aid of North Carolina officials help residents in Sampson County.



Several years ago hurricanes Matthew and Florence slammed Sampson County leaving destruction as they turned up the coast.

With many still recovering, Legal Aid of North Carolina wants to help and local senior centers are opening their doors and parking lots for the space. Upcoming drive-thru events will be held throughout Sampson County Officials recently visited Garland, Harrells and will be in Turkey from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 18, at 30 Market St. The visits are part of funding provided by a grant from Legal Services Corporation for \$4.8 million to serve hurricane survivors in rural counties declared disaster areas by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

For Dale Deese, a managing attorney of the Pembroke office, it's a very fulfilling role.

"It allows us to get out into the communities," Deese said. "They learn more about us and we learn more about them. When we're able to get out into the community and see the various needs of storm damage and other things, it helps us in being able to prepare ourselves to help people."

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The disaster recovery team started the project after Florence came through the state. During the visits, staff members will visit with community members who still have home damage from storms.

"The people here were very friendly, very open in wanting to assist us," Deese said about a previous visit to Garland. "We're only successful if the folks in the various areas that we serve are accepting and wanting us to come in and help. We view it as a partnership and it's been very successful throughout all of the communities so far."

Legal Aid NC is a statewide, nonprofit law firm that provides free legal services in civil matters to low-income people. Through its Disaster Relief Project, people impacted by Hurricane Matthew and Hurricane Florence, staff members may be able to help residents applying for ReBuild NC or another recovery source. Some of the services may include filling out and submitting applications; online filing for residents without Internet service or email; reviewing applications before submitting; collecting required applications; and questions regarding deed or title concerns.

Marie Faircloth, director of the Garland Senior Center, was glad to be able to partnership with the organization. Faircloth also applauded their work of helping people in rural areas such as Garland.

"It's been awhile since Hurricane Matthew and Hurricane Florence, but if you found out today that you can reimbursed for something that happened several years ago, it's a real good thing," Faircloth said.

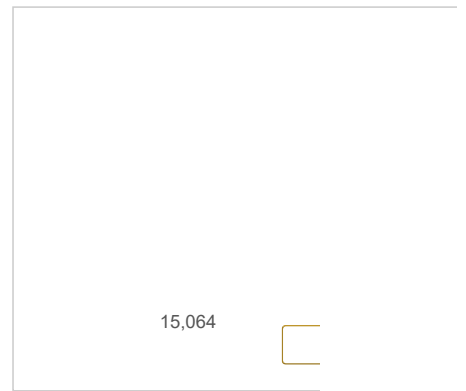
In addition to assistance with damages, Legal Aid NC is also providing free advice for matters dealing with public benefits such as foods stamps, Medicaid and Medicare; unemployment insurance; consumer issues such as bankruptcy, debt collection, foreclosure; domestic violence, sexual assault; and many more civil-related needs.

"Along with this program, they assist people with doing wills," Faircloth said while providing an example. "It's free and all of those services are great for our seniors and other people. There's no age limit of getting help through this program."

During the event in Garland, Hope4NC and Eastpointe, a managed care organization, provided assistance to visitors after they received legal advice. One of the goals of the organization is to provide mental health services.

"We want to make sure everybody's mental health is at a good level and that they're able to talk and get whatever they need," said Chuki Wooten, a qualified mental health professional and a certified dementia practitioner for Eastpointe.

Along with other directors around Sampson County, Faircloth hopes everyone takes advantage of such services during upcoming events, scheduled for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day.



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The next visit is scheduled for Friday, Feb. 19, at the Roseboro Senior Center, West Railroad St., Roseboro. COVID-19 testing and free food bags will be distributed to visitors at this event. Drive-thru services will continue Monday, Feb. 22, at the Westbook Community Building, 4431 Newton Grove Hwy., Newton Grove.

Additional information about the drive-thru or Legal Aid NC is available by calling 866-219-5262.

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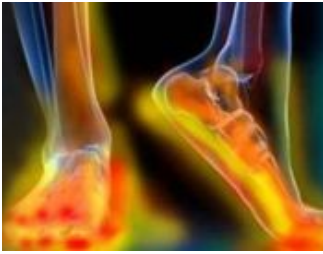
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