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Work underway as SC recovers from floods

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Life has started to return to normal in areas of South Carolina inundated by massive floods from days of rain earlier this month. But challenges still remain, including getting Columbia's water system back in shape and repairing bridges that are forcing Interstate 95 drivers on the East Coast into a more than two-hour detour.

What needs fixing

The capital of Columbia continues to slowly fix its water system. Workers are trying to shore up the canal that the city uses to bring in drinking water after a breach nearly drained the waterway. They also are trying to finish fixing dozens of water line breaks caused by the massive floods earlier this month.

The city has been able to tell about 10 percent of its 375,000 customers they no longer have to boil water from their taps before

drinking it.

Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin said he's hopeful the city can lift the advisory for all customers in the next week or so.

"It's going to be very methodical, and it's going to be very conservative," he said in a phone interview, describing the process of lifting the advisory.

Repairs continue to the Columbia Canal, which the city uses to draw water into most of its system. The canal nearly ran dry after a breach during the floods. While the hole in the canal wall is repaired, city workers are also pumping wa-

ter into the canal from the nearby Broad River.

The mayor said repairs are going well along the canal: "I believe we might be a little bit ahead of schedule right now."

The boil-water advisory for most of Columbia's water customers will continue until the supply of water is stabilized and repairs are made.

Work also continues to repair 13 small bridges on Interstate 95 in Clarendon County. A 16-mile stretch remains closed where the major East Coast highway goes through lowlands and swamps and over the Black and Pocotaligo rivers.

The South Carolina Department of Transportation said it hopes to have I-95 reopened in a few days. Drivers on I-95 currently

have to take a 168-mile detour through Columbia instead of the normal 74-mile drive from Interstate 26 to Interstate 20.

Returning to normal

Perhaps the biggest sign that the flooding and problems were winding down came when South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley did not talk to reporters for the first time in more than a week.

Schools are also starting again. The University of South Carolina will welcome students back Monday after an unscheduled week break.

A number of local school districts are also returning, although some are delaying the start of school by two hours so buses can travel their new routes in daylight. Hundreds of bridges and roads across the state remain closed from flood

damage.

Also, the South Carolina Department of Transportation will start sending contractors out to clean up debris left at the side of the road Monday. Local governments are doing the same.

Death toll

Nineteen people have died from flooding or weather-related traffic wrecks since the heavy rains started Oct. 2. Two more people died in North Carolina.

The latest deaths happened Thursday night in Horry County, where 27-year-old Shykimia Holman and 21-year-old Brianna Johnson died after the 2011 Honda they were in flipped into a water-filled ditch on state Highway 22 in Horry County. Both Orangeburg women drowned, authorities said.

All of the deaths in the storm happened in or near vehicles, officials said.

Big events

Organizers of the South Carolina State Fair said it should begin as normal Wednesday.

The fair brings thousands of people every day to Columbia, and authorities said law enforcement and infrastructure should be ready.

The University of South Carolina had to move Saturday's football game against LSU to Louisiana because law enforcement said the officers needed for security and traffic control were too busy helping with the floods.

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State lawmakers weigh special session on flood aid

BY ANDREW SHAIN
The State
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State Reps. Rick Quinn, R-Lexington, and James Smith, D-Richland, say they have started putting together a plan to issue bonds to fix roads and use new tax revenue to help cover costs for people who don't have enough money to rebuild their homes.

"We're a long way from being out of the woods,"

COLUMBIA – No one is willing yet to put a price tag on damages from last week's historic rainstorm in South Carolina. But some state lawmakers are talking about asking to reconvene the General Assembly to discuss paying for flood recovery.

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Costs

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Quinn said.

The General Assembly could meet in an emergency session before January to consider the plan once it is finalized, said Quinn and Smith, whose districts were hit hard by the storm.

Discussions are in the early stages, but the lawmakers said they hope to use \$500 million to \$700 million in additional anticipated state tax revenue. Some of that money could be used for a Superstorm Sandy-style fund to provide money to homeowners when federal disaster-relief and insurance payments don't cover the costs of their damages.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration pays a maximum of \$33,000 for disaster claims. In many cases, that won't be nearly enough to rebuild. A majority of people who lost homes in the storm did not have flood insurance, Smith said.

"Because of the nature of the disaster, we have found us in a place where we're going to need a plan to do more," he said. "It's the sensible, responsible thing to do. It's going to be a greater cost to us if we don't help."

The state already has at least \$131.4 million in extra revenue for next year's budget, according to the

S.C. Board of Economic Advisors.

But the state's tax revenues will take a hit due to the rainstorm and flooding that temporarily shut down Columbia and other parts of the state for days and disrupted Charleston.

The other part of the Smith-Quinn plan — borrowing money to fix and replace more than 500 damaged roads and bridges — also could meet some resistance.

Lawmakers have not been eager to borrow money recently.

Plans to issue up to \$500 million in bonds for college buildings, job-training centers, economic-development projects and state armories failed during the last session.

But that was before the once-in-a-1,000-years storm that dumped up to 2 feet of rain on parts of the state.

"If we can hand out money to Boeing (for economic incentives), we can lay out for people who are really hurting now," Quinn said.

Quinn and Smith don't have a dollar figure yet.

To help determine that, Quinn said lawmakers could reconvene to provide money to Gov. Nikki Haley's office to complete damage assessments. Haley and the Legislature could use those assessments to draw up funding plans.

In an emergency session, lawmakers also could dis-

cuss budgeting more money to help with dam safety, Quinn said. In the storm, at least 20 neighborhood dams failed statewide, including more than a dozen in Richland County. Some of the dam breaks caused massive damage.

The state spent less than \$200,000 on dam safety in 2013. South Carolina has more than 2,400 regulated dams.

Authority to restart the legislative session lies with Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, and House Speaker Jay Lucas, R-Darlington.

More financial help for thousands of S.C. flood victims also could come from Congress, which approved \$60 billion in aid after Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-Columbia, said Friday he plans to seek additional federal money. More than 31,000 South Carolinians already have registered for financial help from FEMA.

During a stop Friday in Charleston, U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, R-North Charleston, said he also expects a relief plan to come out of Congress. Scott and six other Republicans in the state's congressional delegation voted against aid after Sandy.

For now, state and federal authorities are continuing to try to figure out how much repairing the state will cost.

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FLOODING AFTERMATH

RECOVERY CONTINUES

Crews working to reopen roadways in the Pee Dee

BY JOSHUA LLOYD
Morning News
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FLORENCE — Last weekend's historic rainfall left dozens of Pee Dee roads and bridges in shambles, and in a state with a notoriously weak roadway repair system, a quick fix isn't in the cards.

Nearly 400 passages across

South Carolina remain closed because of flooding or roadway washouts — over 40 in Florence County alone.

Gov. Nikki Haley said during a Friday news conference that the South Carolina Department of Transportation has 35 assessment teams in 22 counties throughout the state, including Florence and Darlington.

Lorena Pate, assistant maintenance engineer for District 5 of the Transportation Department, said some damaged roads in the district can be fixed by local crews with existing equipment and materials. Others are too badly damaged and will need

contracted work.

"We can fix shoulder washouts; if there's asphalt that's come up, we can patch it and even some locations where the road did blow out, but it's an easy fix," she said. "We are doing some of that here. It's just the big things where we won't have the equipment or manpower to do that."

Pate said all closed roads are thoroughly inspected before reopening, even if there isn't apparent damage.

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Roads

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What inspection teams look for are segments of roads, bridges and adjacent shoulders that may be compromised.

For bridges, inspectors will look at the underside of the structure for damage, as well as roads and headwalls near the bridges to make sure the pavement is solid enough to drive on.

"They'll ride the roads slowly, look at the shoulders for wear and look for place where it looks like a pothole may be forming to check for a cross-line pipe," Pate said. "Sometimes when pothole forms on top, the dirt is being sucked in through the pipe as water flows through."

Haley said the Transportation Department is prioritizing road repairs in three categories: immediate need, requires repair in two to four weeks, and long-term.

Officials have yet to place a projected price tag on infrastructure repairs, and it isn't clear how much federal assistance the state will receive for public road work.

Major inconvenience

Road closings across Florence and Darlington counties, as well as a stretch of I-95 between Florence and Orangeburg, have forced some travelers to find alternate routes and take often lengthy detours.

Martin Peterson uses secondary roads in Florence County as a private contractor, hauling cut logs to

and from parts of the Lowcountry. He said parts of the roads he typically uses — like Old River Road and Friendfield Road — are closed, forcing him to find other routes.

"It's a real problem when you're carrying 30,000, 35,000 pounds' worth of stuff and you have to stop and try to find a safe way to turn around," Peterson said. "Sometimes you can't just turn around. You got to back down the road and hope nobody comes flying up behind you."

Motorists aren't the only ones concerned about closed roadways.

Terri Gaskins, a resident of the Evergreen area in Florence County, is concerned about drivers using her neighborhood and close-by streets as a shortcut rather than the designated detour. The speed limit is 35 mph, but Gaskins often sees cars passing at 50 to 60 mph.

"I'm absolutely terrified to check my mail now. I'm scared to cut my grass, and I'm traumatized from watching a speeding car hit my neighbor's dog," Gaskins said. "On top of that personal concern, we are left with the concern for our road. What happens to us when Pamplico Highway is fixed and our road is destroyed? ... We simply are a shortcut, and we will be forgotten once again."

Interstate 95 remained closed Saturday to all traffic between Exits 119 and 135, though it remained open to local traffic north and south of those exits.

Through traffic on I-95 is being routed onto Interstate 20. At one point Saturday, Interstate 95 traffic

being routed onto Interstate 20 had backed up as far as the U.S. 52 exit.

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Statewide, the number of road closings continues to fall.

"Total closures are down 35 from 370 (we opened 24 roads and 11 bridges) from this reporting period yesterday," said Robert Kudelka, a spokesman for the S.C. Department of Transportation, in a media advisory.

Elsewhere in Florence County, several heavily traveled roads remained impassable because of washouts associated with heavy rains and high water.

Florence County roads closed because of washouts included:

» McLaughlin Road between Hill-Harrell Road and Stagecoach Road.

» Friendfield Road between Lebanon Road and East Effingham Highway and again between Francis Mar-

ion Road and Ward Road.

» Pamplico Highway between Lebanon Road and Francis Marion Road.

» North Old Georgetown Road between Anderson Bridge Road and East Myrtle Beach Highway.

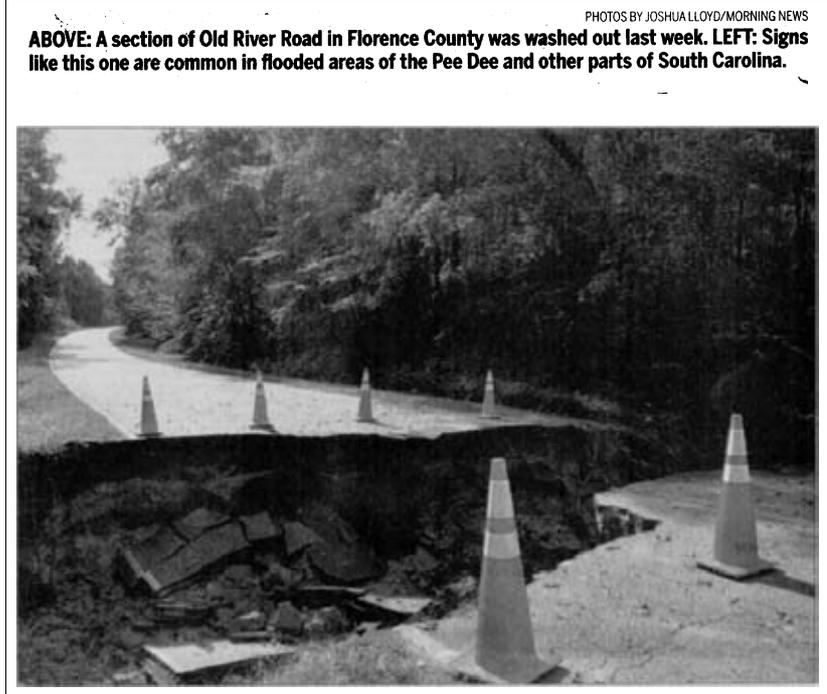
» North Country Club Road between H.L. King Drive and West Main Street.

» Old River Road between Papermill Road and Keefe Road.

» Diamond Branch Road between White Oak Drive and Lake City Highway.

» Whispering Pines Road between St. James Road and the Williamsburg County line.

Morning News content coordinator Matthew Robertson contributed to this story.



Flood slams South Carolina's already shoddy infrastructure

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — Long before the historic floods of the past week, crumbling roads, bridges and dams and aging drinking water systems plagued South Carolina — a poor state that didn't spend much on them in the first place and has been loath to raise taxes for upkeep.

Now the state faces hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars' worth of additional bills to fix or replace key pieces of its devastated infrastructure.

As the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy and other disasters shows, the federal government will cover much of the costs, but isn't going to pay for all of it.

"You're not going to have people down there tomorrow giving out money," said Gerry Galloway, a civil engineering professor at the University of Maryland.

It will take weeks or months to document the full extent of the damage, and to find out how much federal aid is coming South Carolina's way. That aid likely will come with requirements that bridges and dams be built to stronger, more expensive standards.

So the Republican-controlled state's leaders — who recently shot down a business-backed effort to

get an extra \$400 million a year for roads by raising some taxes and lowering others — likely will have to grit their teeth and come up with matching funds.

In the meantime, barricades will be blocking commutes for a long while.

A former trucker, Jerod Anderson currently drives a car to take pictures used in street mapping software, so he knows his way around. But just getting to and from his house in the swampy area of Richland

County, he's found road after road barricaded and driven miles on alternate routes only to find the next bridge closed.

He nearly reached the breaking point Tuesday when he drove into Columbia on a route several miles longer than usual, then found out it was closed

when he tried to go back that way several hours later.

"I've accepted that it is just going to be difficult," Anderson said. "But I'm not happy about it."

Workers have fanned out across the state looking at bridges, but right now it is mostly just informal inspections to see if it is obvious that a bridge or road should be shut down.

South Carolina Department of Transportation worker Radames Zambrana was at a bridge Wednesday where flood waters washed out the support underneath. He was getting ready to request big barricades be put up instead of the small traffic cones to make sure no one drove on the intact pavement, supported by almost nothing.

"I'm seeing this every where," Zambrana said pointing at the gaping hole under the bridge where soil was washed away.

About 260 roads and 150 bridges remained closed Wednesday, many of them washed out, according to the Transportation Department.

South Carolina depends almost entirely on its gas tax to fund highway maintenance, and it hasn't raised its gas tax since 1987. Even before the floods, 20 percent of the state's 8,300 bridges were rated structurally deficient or struc-

turally obsolete, and a road advocacy group made up of business leaders estimated

it would take \$500 million extra a year just to patch the pothole-dotted roads that shake vehicles as they drive over them.

The state periodically closed deteriorated bridges until they could be repaired, and even heading down interstates and major highways could rattle cars so violently they need frequent alignments. Over the past several years, the state has paid tens of millions of dollars to settle claims over vehicles damaged by potholes or poorly maintained roads.

South Carolina's poor spending may have made the problems from the flood even worse, the

rushing water a final blow against crumbling structures, said Galloway, the Maryland professor.

State officials reported at least 11 small dams have failed in a state where some 200 dams are considered high-hazard, meaning they could significantly threaten life and property if breached. The state spends less than \$200,000 a year on dam safety.

Drinking water supplies, too, have gone wanting. Some customers have sued the state's capital and largest city, Columbia, for diverting water system profits to pay for economic development projects even though the Environmental Protection Agency had ordered \$700 million in fixes to the aging system.

Now the city is using giant sandbags dropped by National Guard helicopters to try to plug a canal breach that threatens its entire water supply. It's also scrambling to repair a slew of water main breaks that left tens of thousands of customers with empty taps.

Gov. Nikki Haley made South Carolina a promise Tuesday: "We're not going

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to stop until we get everything back up and fixed again," she said.
 But she wouldn't get into where the money will come from.

If Congress decides to consider a special relief bill, South Carolina could face a different kind of payback. Five of the state's six U.S. House members and both U.S. senators voted against an aid package for northeastern states after Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

Another storm that waylaid the Northeast the year before might give a hint to South Carolina's future. Widespread flooding from Tropical Storm Irene in August 2011 severely damaged infrastructure in 225 of Vermont's 251 towns, wrecking more than 300 bridges, 500 miles of state highways and 2,200 segments of town roads.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has directed more than \$210 million to Vermont for public assistance that includes infrastructure repairs. The Federal Highway Administration has provided about \$150 million in additional aid, according to Vermont officials.

To get federal dollars, states often must chip in some of their own money. Vermont, which had been building up a funding shortfall even before Irene, raised its gas tax by about 6 cents a gallon in 2013 as it was in danger failing to meet its required match for federal highway funding.

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Residents of a lakeside neighborhood walk across Overcreek Bridge by the remains of a failed dam in Columbia.

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South Carolina still on edge from floods; 2 die in truck

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — It could take until the weekend for the threat of flooding to ease in storm-tattered South Carolina, where a senator warned of a potential billion-dollar cleanup bill, two more people died in the floodwaters and the flagship university sent a home football game 700 miles away.

Rivers rose and dams bulged as storm water from days of heavy rains made its way to the Atlantic Ocean, causing a second round of flooding downstream.

Gov. Nikki Haley paid a visit to the coast, which she said would still be in danger for another 24-48 hours.

"We're holding our breath and saying a prayer," she said.

U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham warned the disaster could "break the bank" of federal emergency funds, possibly topping more than \$1 billion.

In another image of the storm's otherworldly toll, state officials said caskets have popped out of the

ground in 11 instances in six counties.

At least 19 people in South Carolina and North Carolina have died in the storm, while many survivors returned home to discover they'd lost everything.

Wendy Dixon burst into sobs after realizing her wedding album and dozens of photos of her two sons and three grandchildren were destroyed.

Overcome with emotion

and barely able to walk across her waterlogged carpet, Dixon grasped the arm of a niece inside the Columbia apartment.

"Everything is gone!" she wailed. "My clothes and all can be replaced. But my little things, my pictures, are all gone."

It was another anxious day of waiting for floodwaters to recede around the capital city.

About 1,000 residents near the compromised Beaver Dam were told to evacuate Wednesday morning, though the order was lifted several hours later when crews shored up the dam.

Haley said 62 dams across the state were being monitored, and 13 had already failed. However, she said South Carolina was fortunate that those represented only a small frac-

tion of 2,000 or so dams regulated by the state.

At a news conference, Haley and other officials were asked repeatedly about whether the state had spent enough in previous years to maintain dams and other infrastructure.

"I think the analysis of this can be done after" the danger from the floods passes, she said in one testy response.

But Graham said the federal lifeline must be treated with care to avoid a "pork-laden monstrosity" like the federal government's aid

package to the Northeast after Hurricane Sandy in 2012. He warned state and county officials not to use the disaster as an opportu-

nity to ask for money unrelated to flood damage.

He also said it would take weeks to get a reliable damage assessment.

"We're talking hundreds of millions (of dollars), maybe over a billion," he said while visiting a shelter in Columbia.

As they waited for floodwaters to drop, officials also struggled to preserve Columbia's water supply.

That supply was threatened earlier this week when a portion of the Columbia canal collapsed. Workers have been trying to build a dam and have dumped giant sandbags into the water to plug the breach. But when a second portion of the canal collapsed Wednesday afternoon, they were forced to look at other options, Mayor Steve Benjamin said.

Benjamin said contingency plans include pumping water from the canal to the reservoir that feeds the water plant and working with the National

Guard to pump water directly from the Broad River. In the meantime, he asked the city's 375,000 water customers to conserve water.

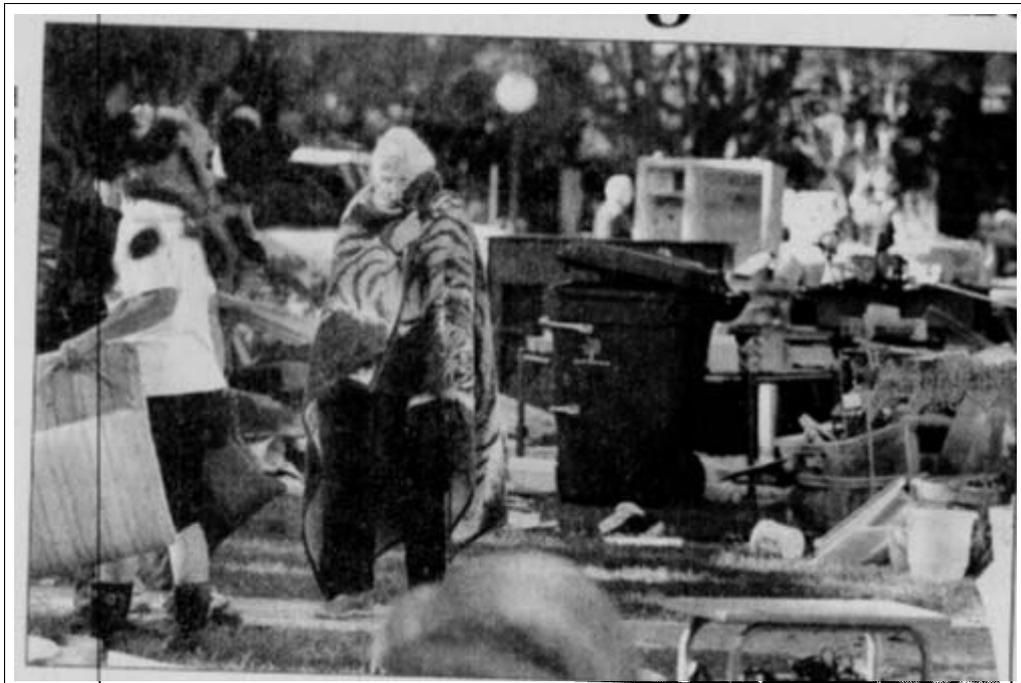
In the most recent storm-related deaths, a group of five railroad workers were in a pickup truck when it drove past a barricade and plunged into the water where pavement was washed out. Three men in the pickup managed to get to safety around 3 a.m. Wednesday and divers later found the bodies of two men, authorities said.

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Rankin Craig watches as friends and family remove belongings Wednesday from her flooded home in Forest Acres in Columbia.
ground in 11 instances in Columbia, S.C.

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148 South Carolina cleans up, but worries remain amid floods

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA—The family of Miss South Carolina 1954 found her flood-soaked pageant scrapbook on a dining room floor littered with dead fish on Tuesday, as the first sunny day in nearly two weeks provided a chance to clean up from historic floods.

"I would hate for her to see it like this. She would be crushed," said Polly Sim, who moved her 80-year-old mother into a nursing home just before the rainstorm turned much of the state into a disaster area.

Owners of inundated homes were keeping close watch on swollen waterways as they pried open swollen doors and tore out soaked carpets. So far, at least 17 people have died in the floods in the Carolinas, some of them drowning after trying to drive through high water.

Sim's mother, known as Polly Rankin Suber when she competed in the Miss America contest, had lived since 1972 in the unit, where more than 3 feet of muddy water toppled her washing machine and turned the wallboard to mush.

"There's no way it will be what it was," said Sim. "My mom was so eccentric, had her own funky style of decorating, there's no way anyone could duplicate that. Never."

Tuesday was the first dry day since Sept. 24 in South Carolina's state capital, where a midnight-to-6 a.m. curfew was in effect. But officials warned that new evacuations could come as the huge mass of water flows toward the sea, threatening dams and displacing residents along the way.

Of particular concern was the Lowcountry, where the Santee, Edisto and other rivers make their way to the sea. Gov. Nikki Haley

warned that several rivers were rising and had yet to reach their peaks.

"God smiled on South Carolina because the sun is out. That is a good sign, but ... we still have to be cautious," Haley said Tuesday after taking an aerial tour. "What I saw was disturbing."

"We are going to be extremely careful. We are watching this minute by minute," she said.

Georgetown, one of America's oldest cities, sits on the coast at the confluence of four rivers. The historic downtown flooded over the weekend, and its ordeal wasn't over yet.

"It was coming in through the kitchen wall, through the bathroom walls, through the bedroom walls, through the living room walls. It was up over the sandbags that we put over the door. And, it just kept rising," Tom Doran said, bracing himself for the next wave. "If I see a hoard of locusts then I'm taking off."

In Effingham, east of Columbia, the Lynches River was at nearly 20 feet on Tuesday — 5 feet above flood stage. Kip Jones paddled a kayak to check on a home he rents out there, and discovered that the family lost pretty much everything they had, with almost 8 feet of standing water in the bedrooms.

"Their stuff is floating all in the house," Jones said. "Once the water comes in the house you get bacteria and you get mold."

In downtown Columbia, about 200 workers rushed to fix a breach in a canal that is threatening the city's water supply to its 375,000 customers. The city's main intake valve is in the canal, and the water level was steadily dropping, Columbia Utilities Director Joey Jaco said.

Crews planned to work into Wednesday morning,

sinking a barge and piling bags of rocks and sand on top to try and block the hole in the canal, Jaco said.

If the water gets below the intake valve, there is less than a day's supply in a reservoir.

Haley said it was too soon to estimate the damage, which could be "any amount of dollars." The Republican governor quickly got a federal disaster declaration from President Barack Obama, freeing up money and resources. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Republican presidential candidate, promised not "to ask for a penny more than we need" and criticized other lawmakers for seeking financing for unrelated projects in disaster bills.

Water distribution was a challenge. In the region around Columbia, as many as 40,000 homes lacked drinking water, and Mayor Steve Benjamin said 375,000 water customers will likely have to boil their water before drinking or cooking for "quite some time."

The power grid was returning to normal after nearly 30,000 customers lost electricity. Roads and bridges were taking longer to restore: Some 200 engineers were inspecting about 470 spots that remained closed Tuesday, including a 75-mile stretch of Interstate 95.

Some drivers had a hard time accepting the long detours around standing water. In Turbeville, police Lt. Philip Wilkes stood at a traffic stop, telling motorists where they could go to avoid flooded roads and dangerous bridges.

South Carolina was soaked by what experts at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration called a "fire hose" of tropical moisture spun off by Hurricane Joaquin, which mostly missed the

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East Coast.

Authorities have made hundreds of water rescues since then, lifting people and animals to safety. About 800 people were in two-dozen shelters, but the governor expects that number to rise.

The Black River reached

10 feet above flood stage in Kingstree, breaking a 1973 record by more than 3 feet, according to Town Manager Dan Wells, who found himself involved in a porcine rescue mission Tuesday.

After a wild hog fell into the rushing river and

slammed into the town bridge, Wells and a colleague used a stun gun and captured the exhausted hog, trussed its legs with duct tape and pulled it into a pickup truck to be released in a nearby forest.

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS

A truck rests off a washed out road Monday outside of Columbia.



South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley (right) and Major Gen. Bob Livingston (left) view flood damage Tuesday from a helicopter in Columbia.



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Volvo breaks ground on \$500 million plant

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The Associated Press

RIDGEVILLE — Volvo broke ground on its first auto manufacturing plant in North America on Friday and announced that workers at the \$500 million plant will build a car still being designed in Sweden.

Volvo North America CEO Lex Kerssemakers said the plant will build the company's new S-60 sedan as well as another model to be announced later.

"This is the one and only factory where we are going to produce the S-60. Global customers all over the world will drive a car made in this factory," he said.

The plant is being built off Interstate 26 about 30 miles northwest of Charleston will eventually be capable of making 100,000 cars a year.

Kerssemakers was joined at the site by Gov. Nikki Haley, U.S. Sens. Lindsey Graham and Tim Scott, Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt and other state and local officials. Haley joined Kerssemakers in wielding a silver shovel to turn dirt at one corner of a large tract that has already been cleared of trees

Company officials said foundation work will begin early next year and the first vehicles are expected to roll off the plant's production line in 2018.

Kerssemakers said customers will be able to order vehicles and come by the plant to pick them up. That, he said, will benefit the tourism, an \$18 billion industry in South Carolina.

"It means South Carolina is going to receive a number of people who are going to enjoy the beautiful landscapes of South Carolina," he added.

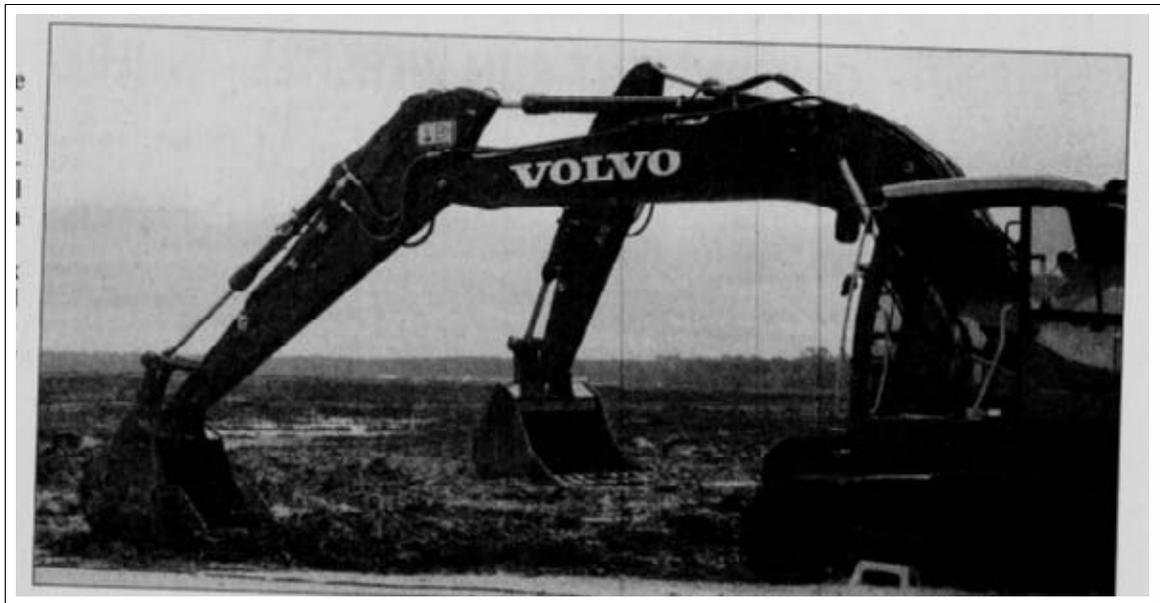
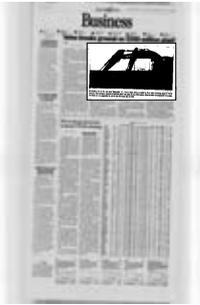
He added the plant, which is expected to employ about 2,000 workers during the next decade, will also have a visitors' center so people can see how Volvos are designed, built and marketed. He said a small museum showing Volvo's history and its vision for the future is also planned.

"We have all the plans but first, it's a small detail, we have to build a factory," Kerssemakers said.





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Excavators are on the site near Ridgeville, S.C., where Volvo plans to build its first auto assembly plant in North America. The company announced that the plant will make its new S60 sedan, which is under development in Sweden. The first cars are expected to roll off the assembly line in 2018.

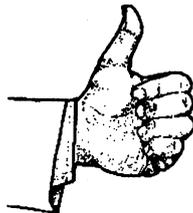
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148 Fireball Run means fun, good exposure for Florence

Thumbs up to the "Fireball Run" for routing its "Space Race" through Florence. The big event has been hyped for five months, and now the big day is only four days away. On Wednesday afternoon, 50 teams will cross the finish line at the intersection of South Dargan and Cheves streets in downtown Florence. A celebratory downtown block party will begin at 4 p.m. We hope a large crowd comes to make a fun atmosphere and present Florence in a most positive light. The Fireball Run, now in its ninth season, is a 13-episode travel series that is televised internationally and streamed in the United States.



The exposure can help local economic development. This year's season is called "Space Race," because four astronauts are among the competitors. Florence is one of eight stops during the 2,000-mile race from Hartford, Connecticut, to Sanford, Florida. Competitors play a life-size trivia game at each stop. Each participant is assigned a missing child from his or her hometown and given 1,000 posters to distribute in each town. The Fireball Run has contributed to the recovery of 45 missing children. Corey Wallace, general manager of the Hampton Inn and Suites-Florence North and Roger Allen, general manager of the Hampton Inn and Suites-Civic Center make up Florence's Team Raldex. They will pass out fliers for missing child Amir Jennings of Columbia.

Thumbs up to the South Carolina Supreme Court for giving Gov. Nikki Haley and the General Assembly a Feb.



1 deadline to offer a plan to improve rural schools. The plan must include legislation to address problems cited in a 22-year-old school equity lawsuit. In mid-October, the S.C. schools superintendent and two other experts will start reviewing the needs of poor rural schools. On March 1, school districts will respond to the state's plan. In mid-March, a panel of experts will evaluate the state's plan in a written report. Later, after reviewing the state's plan and the experts' evaluation, the Supreme Court will rule whether the plan can improve rural schools. It's good to see a strict timetable set. We're counting on follow through.

Thumbs up to the Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce for playing host to its Legislative Breakfast on

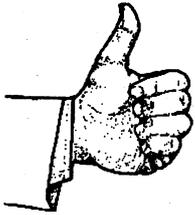


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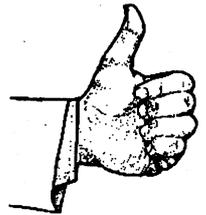
Wednesday at the Florence Civic Center. A good crowd of business leaders heard from three local legislators: Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh K. Leatherman Sr. and Reps. Phillip Lowe and Jay Jordan. Their updates were informative. They answered questions from the crowd during the program and stayed to mingle afterward. Lowe went to the extraordinary extreme when he gave the entire crowd his cell phone number. Kudos for that.

Thumbs up to Pope Francis, the outspoken and charismatic leader of the Catholic Church who is making quite a splash during his first visit to the United States. Becoming the first pope to speak to a joint session of Congress, he delivered a message of mercy, compassion and unity to lawmakers who toil in turmoil. He's concerned about humans' detrimental effect on the environment. He's soft on immigration and strongly pro-family. The pontiff preaches pragmatism over polarization and politics. Amen.



Thumbs down to drivers who don't stop for school buses that are stopped to pick up children. These buses have lights flashing and stop signs extended. Running a stop sign is against the law. Children are vulnerable in these settings as they come and go from buses. Please, please, please. Let's avoid a tragedy. Follow the law.

Thumbs up to John and Colleen Bambery of 707 Pearl Street in Darlington. On Thursday morning, they were presented the Residential Pride of Darlington Award. The Bamberys moved to Darlington after many enjoyable visits with family in town. The house they occupy was once a home provided to a supervisor at the cotton mill. The award, presented three times each year, recognizes someone for having pride in Darlington and the neighborhood to keep property and yard looking good. Nominations are accepted from the community. To nominate a home or business, call Lisa Rock at 843-398-4000 ext. 103 or email darlingtonplanner@gmail.com.



Thumbs up, thumbs down is a regular feature of the Morning News and appears each Saturday on our Opinion page. We seek nominations for both good and bad deeds from our readers. Send nominations to us by email at letters@florencenews.com. Be sure use the word "thumb" in the subject and include a contact number. Thumbs can also be mailed to us c/o The Morning News, 310 S. Dargan St., Florence, S.C., 29506.

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Emily DeRoberts (second from right) of Duke Energy presented a \$5,000 donation on behalf of the company to the Abbeville County strategic planning process on Sept. 29. Accepting were Due West Mayor Lee Logan (far left), Abbeville County Council chairman Bryan McClain (second from left) and Abbeville County development services director Stephen Taylor. (Staff photo by Henry E. Green)