

Title: **UnexpectedSCschool closures wreak havoc onsome working parents**
 Author: BY JANET JONES KENDALL jjkendall@thestate.com
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Unexpected SC school closures wreak havoc on some working parents

BY JANET JONES KENDALL
jjkendall@thestate.com

Betsy Blake remembers the chaos of Hurricane Floyd all too well.

"It took people 21 hours to get from Charleston to Columbia during that evacuation because they just waited too late to evacuate and because they didn't redirect (Interstate) 26 soon enough," said Blake, a professor in the University of South Carolina's College of

FROM PAGE 1A

PARENTS

Lexington 1 - understand Gov. Nikki Haley's early call for evacuations and closing of many area schools for the rest of the week.

But that kind of understanding wasn't shared among many other working Midlands parents, who were struggling to find child care options for three days.

"It's just too extreme," said Carla Johnson, who was at Riverbanks Zoo Wednesday morning with her 8-year-old son, a Richland 1 elementary student. "There's no reason they can't be in school at least today, and probably the whole week."

Johnson, an employee at a Columbia-area restaurant, said she had to take Wednesday off work because she did not have adequate time to line up child care for her son.

"I'm an hourly employee," Johnson said. "Not being there means I don't get paid. ... I don't want to be insensitive to what others might go through because of the hurricane but this is more than just an inconvenience for those of us with kids."

Pharmacy.

Blake and her husband, Kevin, lived in Charleston and were part of the mass evacuation there in 1999. For that reason, the Blakes - who today have two children in

SEE PARENTS, 2A

Johnson wasn't the only parent Wednesday trying to manage child care - and keep the kids entertained.

By 11 a.m., zoo employees already were starting to see larger than usual crowds.

"I'm not sure how many people have come through the gate already today, but a lot of the questions and messages we were receiving through social media this morning were from people in the Charleston

area wanting to know as they were driving up with their families if we were open today," said Susan O'Cain, public relations manager for Riverbanks, adding that the zoo will be monitoring conditions over the next several days to determine whether remaining open is safe for visitors and zoo inhabitants.

O'Cain's own children - students in Lexington-Richland 5 - are staying with grandparents, as O'Cain helps monitor conditions at the zoo and her husband works extra hours this week as a marketing director for the state electric cooperative

in Cayce.

Other Columbia-area organizations offered options to help parents, too.

EdVenture Children's Museum, for example, has increased and extended its Club Edventure hours to encompass a whole day. And the State Museum and Columbia Museum of Art are offering price breaks through Friday.

"We do expect an influx of kids from out of town tomorrow and through the weekend," said Margaret Clarkson, EdVenture's marketing director. "We have had set events on the calendars and are not planning to cancel unless the governor tells us the roads are not safe. Today we have had a good steady group and have set activities for the rest of the week/weekend."

Museum spokespeople said they would be monitoring weather conditions through the weekend as well.

Among child care centers, several decided to stay open, with some even offering extended hours to help parents over the next

several days.

Some employees required to report to work during the governor's declared state of emergency were fortunate to have their employers provide on-site care. That was the case Wednesday at Palmetto Health campuses, for example, where a "Day Camp" offered to team members drew 100 children, according to spokeswoman Tammie Epps.

But parents without these kinds of options will have to get more creative.

"I immediately started making plans because five days shut in the house is not good," said Lexington resident and stay-at-home mom Dawn Frazier, who was at Riverbanks Wednesday morning with her three daughters. "We are at the zoo today, we're going to the movies tomorrow and they've got a sleepover planned at grandma's."

But Frazier isn't critical of the governor's decision to close schools. "At first I didn't understand closing the schools so early on, but then when I learned

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that they were going to use the schools for shelters it made sense," Frazier said.

Like most students, however, Frazier's daughters were on board from the moment of the an-

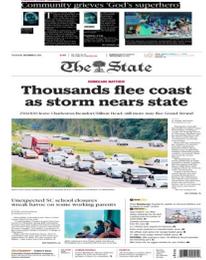
nouncement about school closures. "We get to go do fun things like come to the zoo," said 9-year-old fourth-grader Alyssa Frazier. "And it means we won't have to take tests this week."



JANET JONES KENDALL/jjkendall@thestate.com

Abby, Alyssa and Ava Frazier watch sea lions at Riverbanks Zoo, crowded with kids out of school.

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 Author: BY SALLEY MCINERNEY Contributing columnist
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Community grieves 'God's superhero'

BY SALLEY
 MCINERNEY

Contributing
 columnist

There is never a good day to say good-bye to a little boy, but on Tuesday, in the late afternoon, the small community of Townville, nestled amongst corn fields of western Upstate South Carolina, circled the wagons of grief and began its farewell.

Farewell to innocence. To the presumption that something like this could not possibly happen in such an off-the-bea-

FROM PAGE 1A

HEROES

Matthew. The governor has ordered coastal residents to evacuate.

But at Exit 11, the conversation changes.

On a big black highway sign - the kind set up by the side of the road to announce delays due to construction - flashes another kind of message in orange letters:

"PRAYERS TO THE JACOB HALL FAMILY AND TOWNVILLE."

It does not take long from the exit to reach Oakdale Baptist Church. At the Townville Café, just off the interstate, they'll tell you the church is just up the road, on the right. You'll say thank you and note the message posted to the café's front door. "The language you use in church is appropriate here."

Here. Townville. Home to some 3,000 folks. The backbone of America. The kind of place where people work hard, go to church, worry about the crops and

ten-path place. To a 6-year-old named Jacob Hall.

Jacob, a brown-haired boy who loved superheroes, died Saturday after being shot sever-

al days earlier on the Townville Elementary School playground, along with a teacher and fellow student who sur-

vived. A 14-year-old is charged.

On Tuesday, the last good-byes began.

TUESDAY, 4 P.M.

The traffic on I-85, west of Anderson, is light. There is talk on the car radio of Hurricane

SEE HEROES, 6A

the weather, fly the American flag and keep their front porches swept.

Indeed, the kind of place that keeps its head down, shoulder to the plow, waiting for the country fair, which is coming soon.

But now.

Now, the bucolic landscape has changed. Lives have been upended. Hearts have been broken. A little boy has been killed, randomly, it would seem.

On a school playground, for God's sake.

4:30 p.m.

The Baptist church is fairly new. "And by the grace of God," says a lady helping folks to get seated in the sanctuary for Tuesday night's visitation service, "it's paid for."

The grace of God. No one is talking about that right now. They are waiting for Jacob's family to arrive. They are chatting, cautioning children not to run in the aisles or stand

on the pews. They are grasping Kleenexes and grappling with the unthinkable.

At the front of the sanctuary, a small blue coffin is set on a rolling cart. Flowers and balloons surround it. A lifelike blow-up figure of Spider-Man is set on top of a piano.

Children, dressed in their own superhero outfits, admire it all. It is almost like Halloween, so many people - even the adults - dressed up in

costumes, so many people here to pay their respects to a little boy who is wearing a Batman outfit and has with him a pack of Skittles. Who is in a casket.

Rebecca Hunnicutt, Jacob's great-aunt, seems to be in charge of the Hall family. Many of its members, gathered around the casket, are wearing bright blue T-shirts that say, "TEAM JACOB."

"We are going to try

and get more security in our school systems," Hunnicutt says.

"A child should be safe at home, at school and at church. When a madman can get to our children on a school playground, something is wrong. When we have more security in our prisons - when prisoners are more safe and more protected than our kids are - we got a problem. We have got to be Jacob's voice."

Jacob.

"If Jacob thought a kid was littler than him, or weaker than him, then that's the kid he cared about," Hunnicutt says. "He was a superhero. God's superhero."

And 7-year-old Ethan Hyde's best friend. Ethan and Jacob have been in the same classroom since kindergarten. Ethan sits in a pew with his grandmother. He grasps a rubbery action figure that Jacob gave him.

"Jacob was my best

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friend," he whispers. "We used to play superheroes together. I'm real sad. Me and Jacob would go outside and run around and pretend we were fighting bad guys."

Who won?

Ethan looks up, his blue eyes brightening.

"We did."

5:30 p.m.

Jacob's mother, Renae Hall, arrives in the sanctuary. She looks exhausted. She reaches the casket and leans over. Her shoulders shake.

"This is the first time she has seen him," Hunnicutt says. "I'm just telling everybody to give her some space. She needs her space."

And she needs to be commended. For she asked everyone to wear superhero costumes to the visitation and funeral. She told a television station, "I don't want suits and ties and all that. There will be a lot of children there and I don't want it to be scary for them."

6 p.m.

Fresh hay bales sit in just-cut fields on either side of Highway 24, leading into the heart of Townville. A Dollar General is on one side of the road, surrounded by small, white clapboard homes. Brick bungalows. Nothing fancy. Middle America. Where something like this doesn't happen.

But it did. A flag flies at half-staff at the fire station. A sign near a field full of black and white cows says, "GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL. CONTINUE TO PRAY FOR OUR

TOWN."

And an old red tractor, strung in Christmas lights, is parked at the corner where a road leads to the elementary school.

But folks are not making the turn to see the tractor. No, they are coming to see a memorial of flowers and notes, balloons and stuffed teddy bears, which has sprung up at the school's entrance.

People stand quietly. They come from not just here, but other places, like Anderson. Like Jill Kinley.

"It really makes you think, you know? I saw that little picture of Jacob on the television and I had to come."

An older man stands nearby. He has a relative who works at the school. He recalls the day of the shooting. "The law was everywhere. Helicopters filled the sky. I ain't never seen anything like it."

6:15 p.m.

A yellow sign, listing safety rules, is posted on the gate to the playground behind the school.

One rule says "Play safely and be courteous of others."

A mockingbird lights on the top of a sliding board. Sixteen swings are still. The fence surrounding the playground is chain link. There is a new section, just near a door to the school, likely where the shooter ran his truck into it before getting out and opening fire on Jacob's first-grade class, which was going out for recess.

That shiny section of fence is the only visible evidence that anything out of the ordinary – anything

horrific – has happened here.

6:30 p.m.

The sun is setting in the west. Townville is in mourning.

Tomorrow will be another difficult day.

WEDNESDAY, 9 A.M.

The sky is clear. The winds are calm. Hurricane Matthew might as well be a million miles away.

At the church, inside the sanctuary, pews are filling fast. Extra chairs have been brought in. A little girl wearing a pink sweater is restless. Her mother stands and rocks her back and forth. Back and forth.

10:30 a.m.

Piano music begins. An announcement comes over the intercom, asking folks to move over, to make room for more people.

10:38 a.m.

The teachers and staff of Townville Elementary file in, wearing blue and red capes made out of felt.

10:45 a.m.

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley arrives. She approaches the casket and stands there for a moment or two. Then she returns to her seat. Her face is drawn. She has the coast to worry about. And she has yet another shooting to worry about.

Jacob's family files in shortly thereafter. It is the saddest of processions. Jacob's mother is absent. A man in a Batman suit stands at the podium, clears his throat. He says that Jacob "knew he was going to be famous someday."

But for this? Surely not this.

A preacher takes the podium, sparing any platitudes.

"I cannot understand what has happened in Townville, in our community. I can't make sense of it. I cannot understand. This isn't supposed to happen."

11:34 a.m.

Jacob's mother comes through a side door. She appears hardly able to stand. Her grief is palatable. She is given a stool so she can sit beside the casket.

Another preacher takes the podium. "Last week, evil and darkness came to Townville. But today, here, there's grace and faith and hope and love."

"Amens" roll through the congregation.

Noon.

The governor leaves through a side door. And then, the casket is rolled away. Jacob's mother reaches for it.

"Oh baby," she cries. "Oh baby."

12:08 p.m.

Jacob's casket is loaded into a long, black hearse at the side of the church. Family and friends gather around and watch as it pulls out of the parking lot, on its way to Anderson, where Jacob's body will be cremated.

It makes one think of ashes.

Perhaps Jacob's will be spread across a world in dire need of little boys who fight the bad guys and superheroes who can save us all.

Salley McAden McInerney may be reached by emailing salley.mac@gmail.com.

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Jacob Hall



KEN RUINARD Associated Press

Dale Hall, dressed as Superman, stands before the casket during a superhero-themed funeral service for his brother, Jacob.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEN RUINARD Associated Press

John Buckland of Huntington, W. Va., dressed as Batman, speaks during a superhero-themed funeral service for Jacob Hall in Townville.

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Renae Hall, mother of Jacob Hall, reacts after a superhero-themed funeral service for her son.

Title: **Thousands flee coast as storm nears state**
 Author: BY SAMMY FRETWELL sfretwell@thestate.com
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HURRICANE MATTHEW

Thousands flee coast as storm nears state

250,000 leave Charleston/Beaufort/Hilton Head; still more may flee Grand Strand

BY SAMMY FRETWELL
 sfretwell@thestate.com

Thousands of people fled South Carolina's coast Wednesday, seeking to escape the looming threat of Hurricane Matthew and the potentially heavy toll the storm could take on communities across the Lowcountry.

State officials estimated

FROM PAGE 1A STORM

extremely cautious," Gov. Nikki Haley said. "Our goal is to make sure that no lives are lost, that people get moved out safely and that they get moved back safely."

Matthew was expected to dump as much as a foot of rain on the Lowcountry, forecasters said. Wind speeds of up to 70 mph could be expected, even if the storm does not land in the Palmetto State, weather experts said. The Columbia area, in contrast, should get no more than 2 inches of rain with only moderately gusty winds.

Forecast tracks Wednesday indicated that the Myrtle Beach area could get heavy rain and high winds, but not as severe as on the lower part of the coast. Still, Haley said the storm continues to be unpredictable as it moves

the number of evacuees from the Charleston-Beaufort-Hilton Head Island areas at 250,000. Another 200,000 people could be evacuated Thursday from the Grand Strand.

The hurricane's eye wasn't projected to make

landfall in South Carolina, but forecasters said the storm could have wide-ranging effects far from its center by Saturday.

Tropical storm-force winds, heavy seas and coastal flooding were likely in the Charleston and Hilton Head Island

areas before the hurricane turns east and moves farther out to sea Saturday afternoon, forecasters said.

"We are trying to be

SEE STORM, 7A

up the coast.

"This is going to zigzag the entire time," Haley said of Matthew.

Many of those leaving the coast Wednesday were headed to hotels and shelters in Columbia and Greenville, both well inland and unlikely to see much impact from Hurricane Matthew. Many of the Columbia area's 11,000 hotel rooms were beginning to fill with those who left the coast. Other people were headed to cities in other states, including Augusta and Charlotte.

The memory of Hurricane Hugo in 1989, combined with an October 2015 flood that swamped much of the state, persuaded some folks to heed the governor's call to evacuate. Lanes on I-26 near

Charleston were reversed Wednesday afternoon to make evacuation easier.

"If it brings a lot of rain, more than the storm last year, why would I want to stay?" asked Folly Beach resident Gaby Trompeter as she loaded the car at her beachfront home in preparation for a trip to Augusta.

Despite evacuation orders, traffic Wednesday afternoon did not appear clogged on any of the major highways leading away from the Charleston and Hilton Head-Beaufort areas.

That could be because of the lane reversals, but also because not everyone planned to leave. Some coastal residents said they didn't think Matthew was enough of a storm to warrant evacuation.

"Not unless it makes a

dramatic change," Hilton Head's Dale Woolsey said of whether he would evacuate.

"Not unless it looks like we'd take a direct hit. Right now, it looks like it will bypass us."

Whether the storm has major impacts on the state or not, concern about its potential caused major disruptions to people's lives from the coast to the Columbia area.

Haley ordered most schools from the coast to the Midlands closed, as both a precaution and to help ease traffic during the evacuation. The University of South Carolina announced Wednesday its main campus in Columbia would be closed the rest of the week, and Benedict College planned to shut down Thursday until next

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week.

USC also was mulling options for its football game with the University of Georgia. On Wednesday night, the school issued a statement saying the game would be played in Columbia. A decision on other details of the game — scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Williams-Brice Stadium — will likely be announced Thursday, the school said.

Even though the weather is not expected to be severe in Columbia and no more than a few inches of rain are expected, issues arose about whether law enforcement would be available to staff the game.

Haley said she could not commit state resources to help with the crowd.

“I can’t take troopers off the road to go put them at a football game,” she said.

Meanwhile, Shaw Air Force Base in Sumter expected to move fighter jets out of what could be bad weather areas, officials said. Fort Jackson in Columbia was preparing to accept troops from several Lowcountry military installations, including the Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island.

Also, many state and local government offices

shut down Wednesday and will remain closed through the week.

In preparation for the hurricane, the city of Charleston handed out more than 15,000 sandbags for people to protect their property from flooding. City offices then closed at midday.

Haley and state officials said they will reassess the storm’s threat to the Palmetto State early Thursday and decide whether to move forward with evacuating the Grand Strand farther up the coast from Charleston.

To help with the evacuations Wednesday, the state reversed lanes on several major highways that linked to South Carolina’s interior.

Lane reversals on I-26 eastbound were going well as of 6 p.m. Wednesday, Haley said, urging Midlands residents to stay off the roads to allow coastal traffic to move smoothly. One Lowcountry resident told The State that before the lanes were reversed, it took her more than six hours to evacuate from the coast to Columbia.

In the Columbia area, the coastal evacuation was expected to bring more traffic through town. The

Columbia police and fire departments and the Richland and Lexington county

sheriff’s departments are staffing major roads with at least 70 employees at intersections and choke points near interstates.

Shelters also were opening in the Columbia and Greenville areas. Statewide, South Carolina has more than 100 shelters available, if necessary, that could accommodate 66,000 residents, officials said. By 5 p.m., 32 of those shelters had opened. Meanwhile, school districts in the Midlands and Upstate sent school buses to the coast to help evacuate those who could not leave by automobiles.

An evening update from the National Hurricane Center showed Matthew moving at 12 miles per hour north of Cuba. With winds of 120 mph, it was forecast to slide along the Florida and Georgia coasts before reaching an area offshore between Hilton Head Island and Charleston about 2 p.m. Saturday. The storm then would turn east, away from the South Carolina coast toward Bermuda, before curving south about 2 p.m. Sunday.

By Monday afternoon,

the storm would be well offshore roughly parallel with Jacksonville, Fla., according to the storm track. There was some concern the storm could do a loop and threaten the mainland of Florida again.

Even if Matthew continues to track seaward, the storm’s proximity to the South Carolina mainland could bring 5 to 8 feet of water rising along the coast and possible flash flooding, according to the National Weather Service. Heavy beach erosion is expected.

October hurricanes are not common in the Palmetto State. University of South Carolina geographer Cary Mock said he’s found evidence that only three have occurred in October since 1900. One of those was Hazel, the killer storm that leveled parts of the Myrtle Beach area in 1954. The biggest storms in the past quarter century, Hugo and Floyd, struck in September.

State staff writers Clif LeBlanc, Cynthia Roldan, Jamie Self, Jeff Wilkinson, Cassie Cope, Island Packet staff writer David Lauderdale, and the Associated Press contributed.

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Road crews closed eastbound lanes of Interstate 26 from Columbia to Charleston on Wednesday.

GERRY MELENDEZ gmelendez@thestate.com

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TRACY GLANTZ tglantz@thestate.com

Inmates at Wateree Correctional Institution in Rembert fill sandbags in preparation for flooding when Hurricane Matthew makes landfall. The sandbags will be shipped throughout the state to control flooding.

Title: **Let's keep perspective, welcome storm evacuees**
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Let's keep perspective, welcome storm evacuees

TAKE A DEEP BREATH. Take another one. Count to 10 if you have to.

Yes, you're stuck with the kids out of school for at least yet another day, even though you're more than 100 miles inland of where Hurricane Matthew will hit South Carolina, if it hits South Carolina, on Saturday, or later.

Yes, you're paying city and county and state officials to not come to work because the governor ordered not only the schools but also the city, county and state government offices 100 miles inland to close starting Wednesday, in preparation for the storm that might or might not hit our state, on Saturday, or later.

And on top of all that, we're swamped with evacuees, who are clogging our roads and our restaurants and most places we want to go — half of a state smashed together in one small place.

This is where we need to remember a few things. Those evacuees are not here because they want to be. They are here because they were ordered to leave their homes and businesses and head inland, knowing that might not have been necessary. They probably endured a traffic nightmare far worse than the delays we're experiencing as a result of their presence in the Midlands.

We can perhaps understand Gov. Nikki Haley's caution in ordering evacuations so early: If she waited until it was clear that the storm would hit South Carolina — if that does become clear — it would have been too late to safely clear out the entire coast. And it's not lost on us that she made her decision one year to the day after our community and large parts of our state were devastated by floods that we

never could have imagined or believed would occur; we're sure it's difficult for her not to have that in the back of her mind when deciding whether to do too little or too much. The school and government cancellations 100 miles inland are a different story, but there will be time to talk about that later.

For now, we need to do one more thing: We need to remember who we are. We are the community that cares. The community that helps our neighbors when they are in need. Not just the neighbors we know, but the neighbors we have never met. Not just the neighbors next door, or across town, but surely across the state.

We demonstrated our grace and graciousness and charity after the floods, when we came together to help friends and strangers alike. There is no reason at this point to expect that Matthew will wreak damage even remotely as great as the floods did, no reason to think the upheaval even for our friends along the coast will be as devastating or as long-lasting.

But for today, and at least the remainder of this week, they are refugees — forced from their homes with only what they can carry with them, forced to leave behind their jobs, missing important deadlines, their personal plans interrupted, their lives disrupted. And many of them are here with us in the Columbia area.

We need to welcome them, to do what we can to make their stay with us less unpleasant. At the very least we need to resist the temptation to focus on ourselves and our inconvenience. And when the storm passes, we need to lend our help as needed to get them back to their normal lives.

Title: **Midlands stores busy as folks prepare for storm**
 Author: BY JEFF WILKINSON jwilkinson@thestate.com
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HURRICANE MATTHEW

Midlands stores busy as folks prepare for storm

BY JEFF WILKINSON
jwilkinson@thestate.com

For Carolyn Jones, stocking up for Hurricane Matthew was prudent on Wednesday morning, as her children and grandchildren were coming up from the coast to stay with her.

But unlike some customers at the Piggly Wiggly grocery store on Devine Street, her cart had a only a few staples such as cereal and milk, not a large stockpile of bread and water that is typical before a major storm.

"I wanted to get a little extra, but not go crazy," the former University of South Carolina administrator said. "I remember last year's flood, and I want to be respectful of other people's needs too."

Gas stations, convenience stores and hotels all were doing a bustling business on Wednesday as Columbia residents piled in supplies in preparation for shortages, power outages or guests. Meanwhile, evacuees from the coast snapped up every available hotel room.

The run on grocery stores began at noon yesterday, store owner Ha-

rold Miller said. And when Gov. Nikki Haley ordered evacuations beginning Wednesday, the deluge began.

"By midafternoon, people were buying strong," he said.

Miller said the store plans to get delivery trucks in Wednesday, Thursday and Friday in preparation for the the rocky weather and the influx of evacuees from the coast.

"We've got our supply lines open," he said, standing in front of the decimated bread aisle. "We should be fine tomorrow."

Irmo Town Councilwoman Kathy Condom spent an hour waiting to park at a local supermarket in order to stock up on food that doesn't need to be heated should power go out in the storm.

But inside the store she found "a very congenial attitude" as shoppers shared cartons of eggs and other items in short supply.

"It was terrible, but wonderful, at the same time," she said.

Denise Cooper, manag-

er of the Family Dollar store on Rosewood Drive, said customers began coming in about 2 p.m. Tuesday, wiping out her inventory of water, flashlights and batteries.

"We're hoping to get more on Friday," she said. "If the truck can get here."

Local hotels were already filled for a big football weekend as the Gamecocks are scheduled to play the Georgia Bulldogs on Saturday night at Williams-Brice Stadium. No decision had been made Wednesday evening about whether the game would be postponed or moved because of Hurricane Matthew.

David Erbacher, director of sales for the Hyatt Place Columbia Downtown on Gervais Street in the Vista, said football cancellations are rolling in and bookings from people evacuating the coast are beginning to snap up the rooms.

Rates are typically high on football weekends. Currently, the rates are \$229 Wednesday and

Thursday and \$399 Friday and Saturday.

But Erbacher said the hotel is lowering the weekend rate for everyone to \$229.

"We won't know who is coming in for the football game and who is evacuating," he said. "So we're lowering it for everyone just to be accommodating and do our part."

He added the hotel will also be refunding all cancellations, despite requiring pre-payment on football weekends.

At the Inn at USC – a hotel located on campus – general manager Andrew Lucas said cancellations have yet to come in.

"We're sold out and people are waiting to see what happens with the game," he said. "But our phone is ringing off the hook."

Lucas advised those wanting to book a room to go to the property's or company's website rather than a booking clearinghouse site because rates will likely be volatile.

Staff writer Tim Flach contributed to this report.

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JEFF WILKINSON jwilkinson@thestate.com

A shopper buys some of the few remaining bottles of water at the Piggly Wiggly store on Devine Street on Wednesday.

Title: **Nearly 2M along coast urged to evacuate**
 Author: BY MIKE SCHNEIDER AND KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press
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HURRICANE MATTHEW

Nearly 2M along coast urged to evacuate

BY MIKE SCHNEIDER
AND KELLI KENNEDY

Associated Press
MELBOURNE BEACH, FLA.

Hurricane Matthew marched toward Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas and nearly 2 million people along the coast were urged to evacuate their homes Wednesday, a mass exodus ahead of a major storm packing power the U.S. hasn't seen in more than a decade.

Matthew was a dangerous and life-threatening Category 3 storm with sustained winds of 120 mph as it passed through the Bahamas, and it was expected to be very near Florida's Atlantic coast by Thursday evening. At least 16 deaths in the Caribbean have been blamed on the storm, with heavy damage reported in Haiti.

After moving past Haiti, Matthew rolled across a corner of Cuba and then began pounding the southern Bahamas with winds of 120 mph and heavy rain on a course expected to take it near the capital city of Nassau.

The storm was forecast to scrape much of the Florida coast and any slight deviation could mean landfall or it heading

farther out to sea. Either way, it was going to be close enough to wreak havoc along the lower part of the East Coast, and many people weren't taking any chances.

In Melbourne Beach, near the Kennedy Space Center, Carlos and April Medina moved their paddle board and kayak inside the garage and took pictures off the walls of their home about

500 feet from the coast. They moved the pool furniture inside, turned off the water, disconnected all electrical appliances and emptied their refrigerator.

They then hopped in a truck filled with legal documents, jewelry and a decorative carved shell that had once belonged to April Medina's great-grandfather and headed west to Orlando, where they planned to ride out the storm with their daughter's family.

"The way we see it, if it maintains its current path, we get tropical storm-strength winds. If it makes a little shift to the left, it could be a Category 2 or 3 and I don't want to be anywhere near it," Carlos Medina said. "We are just being a little safe, a little bit more cautious."

About 20 miles away in the town of Cape Canaveral, John Long said Hurricane Matthew is just hype as his neighbors in his RV park packed up and evacuated inland. Even though his 32-foot RV is just feet from the Banana River and a half mile from the beach, he had no plans to leave.

Long, who owns a bike shop and has lived along the Space Coast for 30 years, said he has a generator and enough food and water for himself and his cats to last a week.

"There's always tremendous buildup, and then it's no stronger than an afternoon thunderstorm," he said. "I'm not anticipating that much damage."

The last Category 3 storm or higher to hit the United States was Wilma in October 2005. It made landfall with 120 mph winds in southwest Florida, killing five people as it pushed through the Everglades and into the Fort Lauderdale and Palm Beach area. It caused an estimated \$21 billion in damage and left thousands of residents without power for more than a week. It concluded a two-year span when a record eight hurricanes hit the state.

As of 5 p.m. Wednesday, Matthew was centered about 400 miles southeast of West Palm Beach and moving northwest, according to the National Hurricane Center. Hurricane-force winds extended 45 miles from the center.

"When a hurricane is forecast to take a track roughly parallel to a coastline, as Matthew is forecast to do from Florida through South Carolina, it becomes very difficult to specify impacts at any one location," said National Hurricane Center forecaster Lixion Avila.

Florida can expect as much as 10 inches of rain in some areas.

In South Carolina, Gov. Nikki Haley reversed the lanes of Interstate 26 so that all lanes of traffic were headed west and out of Charleston. It was the first time the lanes had been reversed. Plans to reverse the lanes were put in place after hours-long traffic jams during Hurricane Floyd in 1999.

The governor planned to call



Title: **Nearly 2M along coast urged to evacuate**
 Author: BY MIKE SCHNEIDER AND KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press
 Size: 131.90 column inches
 Hilton Head Island, SC Circulation: 20015

for more evacuations on Thursday, which would bring the total to about 500,000 people in the state. Florida urged or ordered about 1.5 million to leave the coast, said Jackie Schutz, spokeswoman for Gov. Rick Scott. Georgia had around 50,000 people told to go.

At Folly Beach, S.C., southwest of Charleston, Gaby

Trompeter loaded her car to evacuate to Augusta, Ga. A year ago when a flood inundated the state there was so much water on the road near her house she couldn't get out for three days.

"If it brings a lot of rain, more than the storm last year, why would I want to stay?" she said.

President Barack Obama visited the Federal Emergency

Management Agency's headquarters Wednesday to be briefed on preparations. FEMA has deployed personnel to emergency operation centers in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. It's also positioning commodities and other supplies at Fort Bragg in North Carolina and in Albany, Ga.



CRAIG LENIHAN AP

Landscapers ride along a stretch of road that's partially flooded from rain triggered by the arrival of Hurricane Matthew in Nassau, Bahamas, on Wednesday.

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BRUCE LIPSKY AP

Rob Emahiser, top, and Kenneth Bonn of Jacksonville Beach Ocean Rescue shutter the lifeguard station on Wednesday.

Title: **Meet Gov. Haley's interpreter for the deaf**
 Author: BY JAMIE SELF jself@thestate.com
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'GREATEST SIGN LANGUAGE GUY EVER'

Meet Gov. Haley's interpreter for the deaf

BY JAMIE SELF

jself@thestate.com

COLUMBIA

You may have seen him on television or the internet – standing next to Gov. Nikki Haley and other S.C. officials this week as they discuss Hurricane Matthew – his hands and arms moving in rapid, calculated motions.

Jason Hurdich, a nationally certified deaf interpreter, has been sharing with deaf S.C. residents what they need to know about the approaching storm and the state's plans.

The Charleston-based counselor for the State Agency of Vocational Rehabilitation – who once interpreted for President Barack Obama – has created some buzz on Twitter from people watching Haley's news conference.

"Nikki Haley has the

GREATEST SIGN LANGUAGE GUY EVER!" one tweeter wrote.

Another tweet said Hurdich upstaged Haley: "The sign language interpreter is the best part of Nikki Haley's press conference," and adding his facial expressions were hot – expressed by three flame emojis.

Hurdich is a newcomer to the Palmetto State.

The New York City native moved to Charleston only two months ago.

"I'm a newbie to the state. I love it. It's a beautiful state. People are so friendly," Hurdich, who was born deaf, told The State through interpreter Shonna Magee, with whom he works at Vocational Rehabilitation.

Hurdich said he did not

expect to become part of the story this week, adding he is a humble guy who is happy just to help get information to the people who need it.

"My job is not about me," he said. "It's about the state and what they need and the governor

needs. I'm just giving that information and interpreting it to the deaf citizens of South Carolina."

In his everyday low-profile state gig, Hurdich counsels the deaf and hard of hearing.

Having worked with the deaf for more than 20 years, Hurdich said he finds the counseling rewarding. He appreciates "really seeing deaf people succeed and know that they can do anything except hear," he said.

Because Hurdich cannot hear what Haley and other state officials are saying about the state's hurricane plans, Magee sits in front

of him, listening to Haley and others speak, and then signing that information to Hurdich. He then reinterprets the information for a deaf audience.

"Interpreting work is not easy," he said. "It's hard work."

But sometimes it also is exciting, like when he interpreted for Obama, who was campaigning in Florida, he said. "When you get to interpret for the president, it's an honor. It's an honor because you're also serving your country."

Jamie Self: 803-771-8658, @jamiemself

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JEFFREY COLLINS AP

Jason Hurdich, a nationally certified deaf interpreter, conveys the information as Gov. Nikki Haley announces evacuation plans Tuesday ahead of Hurricane Matthew.

Title: **Columbiaplays hostto evacueesfrom coast**
 Author: BY JEFF WILKINSON jwilkinson@thestate.com
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HURRICANE MATTHEW

Columbia plays host to evacuees from coast

■ **The Capital City is a main destination for thousands of evacuees from South Carolina's coast. Restaurants, bars and attractions expect to see a big spike in business as the S.C. Lowcountry moves to the Midlands.**

BY JEFF WILKINSON
 jwilkinson@thestate.com

COLUMBIA SC

Alex and Stefany Marks and their three children left Beaufort at 9 a.m. Wednesday and arrived at the Chapin home of Stefany's parents at about 1 p.m., taking back roads all the way.

The Marks expect to be in the area until at least Saturday, when Alex, a pastor at First Scots Presbyterian Church, has to decide whether to have Sunday services. While they are here they plan to attend the Orangeburg County Fair, if possible, go to a movie and visit Riverbanks Zoo.

They are not alone. About a half-million people across the entire coast are expected to evacuate the South Carolina coast in advance of Hurricane Matthew. And many will be guests of friends, family, hotels and shelters in the Capital City.

"All your crazy cousins are coming to town," Marks said. "If you have to be stuck somewhere, Columbia isn't a bad place to be."

Gov. Nikki Haley on Wednesday ordered the evacuation first of Beaufort and Charleston counties. That started in earnest mid-afternoon. And Horry County will evac-

uate Thursday. Haley called for everyone to move 100 miles inland.

That's Columbia. And the Capital City, now expected to be minimally impacted by the storm, is preparing to host a hurricane party.

"Basically we have the reverse of the entire summer packed into three days," said attorney Kyle Michel, a board member of First Thursdays, a monthly open house and festival held up and down Main Street. "Instead of the whole state going to the beach sometime in June, July or August, we have the whole coast coming (here) for the weekend."

Michel said the Main Street merchants contemplated canceling the event but decided to go ahead anyway, as rough weather is not supposed to arrive before Friday.

"We haven't projected whether we will have a crush of people down here, but we might," he said.

Restaurants and bars are expecting big business this weekend, especially if University of South Carolina officials decide to go forward with the USC-Georgia football game, which now looks likely.

"A lot of people will be

coming to town and staying with friends and relatives," said Ryan Dukes, who owns the Columbia landmark restaurant Blue Marlin with his father, Bill.

Gail Hawkins, Woody Jones and his service dog Chinadoll arrived in Columbia from Charleston around 1 a.m., Wednesday, after spending about six hours in stop-and-go traffic on Interstate 26.

Hawkins, a nurse, said her employer Vibra Hospital of Charleston, sent her to accompany patients that have been transferred to Continued Care at Palmetto Health Baptist Hospital in Columbia.

Hawkins said she struggled to find a hotel through the weekend because too many rooms are already booked for the USC-Georgia football game.

Joe and Kayla Penta met their friends Derek King and Callie Campbell when they adopted puppies from the same litter. On Wednesday, the Pentas are hosting the couple, who are leaving their North Charleston home in anticipation of Hurricane Matthew.

They plan to stay in for a quiet dinner before Derek and Callie drive on to Asheville. But Joe Penta, area manager for Marco's

Pizza, said he expects a lot of business for Columbia's bars and restaurants.

"We're already busier than we would be," he said at about 2 p.m. Wednesday at the chain's Rosewood Drive store. "There are going to be a lot of people out doing things, trying to put their worries aside."

Columbia's movie houses are almost a natural draw for locals and their out-of-town guests.

The Nickelodeon Theatre, weather permitting, will open two popular films on Friday, according to Kristin Morris, marketing manager: "The Birth of a Nation," depicting the efforts of a literate slave, Nat Turner, to lead a revolt, and the documentary, "Cameraperson," the film memoir of world photographer Kirsten Johnson.

"If there is bad weather, people do want to go to the movies," Morris said. "As long as we are open and we've got power, I would anticipate that we would probably see some crowds."

Some people see the stall from the weather as a prime opportunity to visit the local zoo. By 2:30 Wednesday afternoon, 3,000 guests had gone through the turnstiles at

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Riverbanks Zoo, according to Susan O’Cain, the zoo’s public relations manager.

The normal expected draw for a day in the middle of the week in October is about 1,000 visitors, O’Cain said.

Riverbanks Zoo, widely acclaimed as the most popular tourist attraction in South Carolina, fielded numerous inquiries early Wednesday via Facebook asking if the park would be open, O’Cain said.

Riverbanks Zoo normal operating hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a

week. The park will remain open as long as weather permits, O’Cain said.

Pets also occupy a high place on the list when it comes to new arrivals in town.

At Shandon-Wood Animal Clinic near Melrose Heights, calls were coming in from the coast on Wednesday in search of boarding space. “We’re fully booked for large breed dogs,” said Mary Tresca Hoefler, which is an abnormality for a non-holiday week, she said.

The same held true at Elam Animal Hospital on

Forest Drive. “Our boarding is very filled up,” said Chelsea Williams. “We’re a full house this weekend.”

State staffers Roddie Burris, Cynthia Roldan and Avery Wilks contributed.

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IF YOU HAVE TO BE STUCK SOMEWHERE, COLUMBIA ISN’T A BAD PLACE TO BE.

Alex and Stefany Marks and their three children of Beaufort, staying with relatives in Columbia

Title: **Lane reversals, evacuation routes: Here's what you need to know**
 Author: BY ERIN HEFFERNAN eheffernan@islandpacket.com
 Size: 93.62 column inches
 Hilton Head Island, SC Circulation: 20015



TRANSPORTATION

Lane reversals, evacuation routes: Here's what you need to know

■ As Hurricane Matthew approaches the Lowcountry, the South Carolina Department of Transportation will reverse some lanes on some highways in an effort to make the evacuation smoother.

BY ERIN HEFFERNAN

eheffernan@islandpacket.com

Here's what you need to know about evacuation routes and lane reversals in the Lowcountry for Hurricane Matthew.

Emergency crews reversed lanes on two major Beaufort County highways Wednesday to allow residents to comply with Gov. Nikki Haley's call for all coastal residents to evacuate in preparation for Hurricane Matthew.

Haley called for all the state's coastal residents to evacuate and move 100 miles from the coast, beginning with greater Charleston and Beaufort coun-

ties Wednesday afternoon. Georgetown and Horry county will be called to evacuate Thursday morning, Haley said.

The lane reversals will remain in effect until tropical storm conditions hit the area, said Capt. Bob Bromage of the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office.

● **Hilton Head/ Bluffton** — One lane is reversed to create three lanes traveling west on U.S. 278. The reversal begins at the intersection of Spanish Wells Drive and ends at Moss Creek

Village Drive when the highway expands to three lanes after the bridges to Hilton Head, according to Wendell Mulligan, with the S.C. Department of Transportation Beaufort office.

Emergency officials plan to keep one lane open heading east, which drivers will be able to use to drive back to the island during the evacuation, pending conditions of the storm, Mulligan said Wednesday.

The reversal lane is approximately two miles in length and does not

continue further into Bluffton. Bluffton Parkway will not be reversed.

After drivers continue on U.S. 278 through Bluffton, the right lane will exit at S.C. 170, where the highway narrows to two lanes, and drivers in that lane will proceed to S.C. 462 and eventually be directed to I-95 North at Exit 28. The center and left lanes will continue on U.S. 278.

The center lane will then become the right lane and will be directed to I-95 North at Exit 8.

SEE ROUTES, 4A

FROM PAGE 3A

ROUTES

The left lane will continue on to U.S. 278 to Hampton County and eventually North Augusta.

Some lane changing may be possible on the evacuation route but could become difficult and drivers may have to be diverted away from their intended destination, Mulligan said.

● **Beaufort** — U.S. 21 is reversed to create three lanes at U.S. 21 Business near the intersection with Parris Island Gateway until U.S. 17. U.S. 21 is the County: Beaufort

only road with lane reversals in northern Beaufort County, according to S.C. DOT.

The remaining right lane will be directed to U.S. 17 North to S.C. 303 to Walterboro. The left lane will be directed to U.S. 17 South, then to U.S. 17 Alt/U.S. 21 to Yemassee and ultimately to North Augusta.

● **Charleston to Columbia** — A full, four-lane reversal on I-26 in Charleston begins at the interchange of I-26 and

I-526. The full reversal continues west until the I-26 crossover to I-77 just outside Columbia in Lexington County.

● **Horry County** — Horry County has two four-lane reversals: S.C. 544 to U.S. 378 and S.C. 22 (Conway Bypass) to S.C. 576 near Marion County.

All other roads not listed above should have normal lane directions, according to S.C. DOT officials Wednesday.

Lowcountry residents

were discouraged by the governor and first responders from staying in the area after Wednesday afternoon. Those who do stay, however, should be able to travel freely in the area during the evacuation. If weather conditions deteriorate, that is subject to change in the coming days, said Bromage of the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office.

Comfort stations are set up along the evacuation routes including water and bathrooms for evacuees,

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Author: BY ERIN HEFFERNAN eheffernan@islandpacket.com
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Haley said in a Wednesday morning press conference.

Most hotel rooms in the Midlands were booked by Wednesday morning, but there were still openings in the Upstate, Haley said.

In Georgia, Gov. Nathan Deal issued a state of emergency for 13 coastal counties, and residents of the state's coastal islands were urged to evacuate.

Secretary of Transportation Christy Hall

urges drivers to use extreme caution during hurricane conditions, particularly those using reversed lanes to evacuate the coastal areas.

"The usual rules of the road are changed in reversed lanes. The reversals are designed to keep traffic flowing; however, traveling speeds will be slower than normal. Drivers need to pay extra attention while in reversed traffic," said Hall.

Erin Heffernan:
843-706-8142,
@IPBG_Erinh

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THE REVERSALS ARE DESIGNED TO KEEP TRAFFIC FLOWING; HOWEVER, TRAVELING SPEEDS WILL BE SLOWER THAN NORMAL.

Christy Hall, S.C. Secretary of Transportation



REBECCA LURYE rlurye@islandpacket.com

Traffic was light Wednesday evening as lanes along U.S. 278 were readied for the evacuation ahead of Hurricane Matthew in Beaufort County.

Title: Evacuation begins, but where is the traffic?
Author: BY LUCAS HIGH AND TERESA MOSS
Size: 116.40 column inches
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Evacuation begins, but where is the traffic?

Thousands of Beaufort County residents were expected to begin evacuating Wednesday in advance of Hurricane Matthew, but many people appeared to be waiting. Meteorologists say the storm is likely to reach coastal South Carolina late Friday or early Saturday, bringing with it the potential for torrential rains, flooding and high winds.

BY LUCAS HIGH AND TERESA MOSS
lhigh@islandpacket.com
tmoss@islandpacket.com

U.S. 278 on Hilton Head Island and through Bluffton was largely vacant on Wednesday evening, even though the highway's traffic was set to be reversed for evacuations related to Hurricane Matthew.

Gov. Nikki Haley earlier this week ordered a 3 p.m. evacuation of the county — and as that deadline approached, military and law enforcement personnel were positioned at most major intersections along U.S. 278 and S.C. 170.

Joy Riley, Lowcountry program manager for South Carolina Department of Transportation, said she witnessed first-hand the difference between the Charleston and Beaufort County evacuations while driving from Columbia earlier in the day.

"It was apparent people were leaving Charleston and heading

toward Columbia," Riley said. "... I don't know what is happening here in Beaufort. I don't know if they left already or if they are still working on their houses."

Capt. Bob Bromage, spokesman for the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office, said thousands of people left prior to the official start of the evacuation. He said it is possible many people are watching the track of the storm

SEE HURRICANE, 8A

Here's what you need to know

- Stores and businesses across Beaufort County were closed on Wednesday as traffic flow reversals were put into place to handle thousands of evacuees ahead of Hurricane Matthew.
• Meteorologists say the Lowcountry can expect to see the worst wind and storm surge impacts on Saturday and through Saturday night.
• Beaufort County could see anywhere from 4 to

15 inches of rain starting Thursday evening and going through Saturday.

- The storm battered Haiti and Cuba, killing at least 11 people and washing out roads and bridges. The death toll was expected to rise.

MORE INSIDE

- What you need to know about lane reversals, 3A
• Will the water and power be shut off? 5A
• Meet the governor's sign language interpreter, 6A

ONLINE

Visit islandpacket.com and beaufortgazette.com for videos, photos and the latest Beaufort County storm news.

FROM PAGE 1A

HURRICANE

and seeing that it won't hit until the weekend. The worry is that everyone could leave at once right before the storm hits, he said. While drivers may have put a bit of wear and tear on their brakes during stop-and-go traffic near the Interstate 95 interchanges, the county's evacuation was going smoothly as of late Wednesday afternoon,

Bob Kudelka of the S.C. Department of Transportation said. "I haven't heard of any major (transportation) problems," he said. Leading up to the evacuation, area gas stations sold out of fuel and bottled water flew off grocery store shelves as locals either prepared to hightail it out of town or hunker down at home. Many stores and businesses shut down

Title: **Evacuation begins, but where is the traffic?**
Author: BY LUCASHIGH AND TERESA MOSS lhigh@islandpacket.com tmoss@islandpacket.com
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Wednesday afternoon, but some owners vowed to keep their establishments open as long as possible.

David Martin, owner of the Piggly Wiggly store in Coligny Plaza on Hilton Head Island, said he "will stay open as long (he) has the staff to do it."

"It's really not about making more sales," he said. "We are trying to

provide a service."

While the forecast remains uncertain, Beaufort County could see four to 10 inches of rain starting Thursday evening and through Saturday, National Weather Service meteorologist James Carpenter said Wednesday.

Meteorologists at the Weather Channel are

predicting 10 to 15 inches of rain in coastal parts of the county.

Carpenter said the area could see 100 mph winds, life-threatening rip currents, isolated tornadoes, torrential rains and flash flooding between Friday and Saturday.

Lucas High: 843-706-8128,
@IPBG_Lucas
Teresa Moss: 843-706-8152



DREW MARTIN Staff photo

S.C. DOT workers place pylons in an eastbound lane of U.S. 278 as the recently completed Bluffton Flyover looms over the barren highway. The pylons were placed as part of the state's plan to reverse an eastbound lane to ease congestion for those evacuating Hilton Head Island. Crews started an hour later than planned, but the traffic never materialized.