



LOCAL NEWS

Historic town flooded by hurricanes invites guests to weekend event

Posted August 4, 2022 7:23 p.m. EDT

Updated August 5, 2022 4:05 a.m. EDT

By Rick Armstrong, WRAL Enterprise multimedia journalist

An embattled Edgecombe County town hopes a new homecoming event this weekend will generate more progress – and encourage people to

visit and learn about its history.

The town of Princeville is the oldest in the country founded by enslaved men and women. Today, it is among the poorest in the state – in part due to hurricane damage and high water.

Sitting near the banks of the Tar River - the town has always been vulnerable during hurricane season.

"If you talk to anyone, they are always going to go back to 1999. Hurricane Floyd, that very much devastated the town," said Britney Watson, who works with a new non-profit called Freedom.org, who has a mission of helping disinvested towns.

The devastation of Hurricane Matthew in 2016 came just 17 years after Floyd.

Many residents moved on to higher ground - but many remain - partly because of the town's unique history.

"It's the first black town in the United States, which is very very awesome," said Watson. "It was founded in 1885 and originally it's name was Freedom Hill."

Their strategy is to promote agriculture, community engagement, education and historical preservation – starting in Princeville.

"But the vision is down the line - that we can branch out and help other communities in similar situations," said Watson. "And prove to people that hey, there's something going on in this community - and it has a rich history."

Watson says Freedom.org's goals are to start a community land trust, provide more affordable housing and create a new spirit of pride in Princeville.

"The goal is to bring people back, and let this town grow," she said.

Princeville's special Homecoming events will run Friday through Sunday. They also plan to show a Freedom Hill Documentary film, produced with the help of East Carolina University.

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