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Local News for Everyone

FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2024



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Creating meaningful change in Sumter with *The Impact*

Welcome to the very first edition of *The Sumter Item Impact* - Local News for Everyone.

You're one of 28,000 households and businesses in Sumter receiving this new monthly publication at no cost to you, and it will be delivered the third Friday of each month. It will also be available complementarily at *The Item* office and digitally at *TheItem.com*.

This newspaper has big goals. By delivering some of *The Item's* best local journalism to our entire community, reaching more households than any time in *The Item's* 130-year history, *The Impact* will create meaningful change for Sumter.

The presence of local news means more people attend local gatherings, more people participate in local government and more people are informed about what's happening around them. We want Sumter

to be an informed community, and we hope it makes your quality of life just a little bit better.

We hope you use *The Impact* not only to connect to our community, but we also hope it sparks a desire to engage even more.



Vince Johnson

Follow and visit the great local businesses throughout this publication.

If you haven't done so already, you can also subscribe to all of the local news *The Item* produces at *TheItem.com/Subscribe*.

We keep our community informed daily on many platforms — through *TheItem.com*, email newsletters, social media, online videos and magazines — and we deliver a newspaper each Wednesday and Saturday to every subscriber's mailbox.

I hope you enjoy this first edition. Let's make an impact.

Vince Johnson is publisher of The Sumter Item.

CURRENT SUMTER COUNTY STATISTICS

Considered a leading community among rural counties in the state, Sumter has a diverse population with a relatively equal number of Black and white residents. Anchored by Shaw Air Force Base, Sumter has a much higher concentration of veterans than average in the state of South Carolina and the U.S. The county's population in the 2020 Census was 105,556, which was fairly flat compared to 2010.

People often confuse the Sumter County population with the City of Sumter, likely because they share the same name. The city is part of the county, and its population in 2020 was 43,463. That means the balance of the rest of the population in Sumter County was 62,093.

Here is an introductory breakdown of key indicators and statistics that represent the county as compared to state averages when available.

INDICATOR	SUMTER	S.C. AVERAGE
Population	105,556 (20th of 46 counties)	
African American	48,876	
White	47,406	
Hispanic/Latino	4,302	
Asian	1,432	
Median age	36.7	40.5
65-and-older population	17.6%	19.1%
Education (Bachelor's or higher)	25.7%	32.6%
Veterans	15.3%	8.4%
— Male	83.2%	
— Female	16.8%	
Median Household Income	\$56,937	\$64,227
Per Capita Personal Income	\$46,582	\$53,618
Poverty rate	14.4%	14.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and other sources

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the Sumter ITEM

Government

What to expect for the November 2024 general election

BY BRYN EDDY
bryn@theitem.com

In less than nine months, Sumterites will be voting for leaders for local, state and national seats.

The South Carolina Democratic and Republican primaries are done, with President Joseph R. Biden as the state's Democratic nominee and Donald Trump as the state's Republican nominee.

And here are some of the South Carolina state and local Sumter elections in 2024 and current elected officials:

- **5th Congressional District**, Rep. Ralph Norman
- **6th Congressional District**, Rep. James E. Clyburn
- **29th Senatorial District**, Sen. Gerald Malloy
- **35th Senatorial District**, Sen. Thomas McElveen
- **36th Senatorial District**, Sen. Kevin Johnson

- **House District 50**, Rep. William W. Wheeler III
- **House District 51**, Rep. David Weeks
- **House District 64**, Rep. Fawn M. Pedalino
- **House District 67**, Rep. Murrell Smith
- **Sumter County Council District 1**, Councilman Carlton B. Washington
- **Sumter County Council District 3**, Councilman Jimmy Byrd Jr.
- **Sumter County Council District 5**, Councilwoman Vivian Fleming-McGhane
- **County Council District 7**, Councilman Eugen Baten
- **City of Sumter Ward 2**, Councilman James Blassingame
- **City of Sumter Ward 4**, Councilman Steven H. Corley
- **City of Sumter Ward 6**, Councilman Gifford Shaw
- **City of Sumter mayor**, David Merchant

Filing for the following offices opens at noon March 16 and closes at noon April 1:

- **U.S. House of Representatives**
- **Solicitor**
- **Multi-county district offices**
- **State House of Representatives**
- **State Senate**
- **Sumter County Council**
- **Countywide officers**
- **Auditor**
- **Clerk of court**
- **Coroner**
- **Sheriff**
- **Treasurer**

Filing for Sumter School District Board of Trustees and for Sumter City Council seats opens at noon Aug. 1 and closes at noon Aug. 15. Filing for city seats will be done with the city clerk.

Sumterites will also be voting on the Penny for Progress initiative in November.

Sumter officials are continuing to prepare for the Capital Penny Sales Tax to be on the ballot.

If it gets a majority approval from voters, there will be an added charge of 1% of the sales tax imposed that will fund capital projects, and it will be active for no more than seven years if voters approve it. This added charge of 1% of the sales tax would apply to most items except non-prepared food items (groceries), prescription drugs and medical supplies.

The Sumter EDGE will be heading up the marketing and advertising campaign for the penny tax initiative.

"That has to be done with the private sector," County Administrator Gary Mixon said about having a promotional campaign for the penny tax during the Feb. 27 special called meeting of Sumter County Council. "[Government officials] can obviously advocate for the penny, but we cannot spend any public resources on that effort."

The Sumter EDGE is a 501c6

organization under Sumter Economic Development.

"[The Sumter EDGE] will be leading the charge on the education and marketing efforts for the optional Penny Sales Tax for the November 2024 Ballot," Erika Williams, communications and strategic initiatives manager for Sumter Economic Development, told *The Sumter Item*. "Plans have yet to be finalized how the EDGE will move forward with this task as they wait for the commission to be formed and the full project list to be developed."

The last time the penny appeared on a ballot was in 2022, and according to the county's website, the question asked voters to mark whether they are in favor of or opposed to "imposing the tax and issuing General Obligation Bonds."

County officials have not determined how it will be worded on the 2024 ballot, and they have not confirmed if it will be worded differently than it was in 2022.



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Government

Recent changes made by Sumter City Council impact chicken keeping, military memorabilia, business licenses

BY BRYN EDDY
bryn@theitem.com

Each month, Sumter City Council has at least two public meetings. And items on these agendas and the decisions made during these meetings affect City of Sumter residents. Here are a few of the most notable decisions made during those meetings recently.

CHICKENS

Before October, City of Sumter residents were not limited on how many fowl they could own. As long as the birds were not disturbing the peace, city residents were allowed as many chickens or roosters as they wanted.

After city council passed changes to its code of ordinances, city residents living in single-family lot residential zoning districts or agricultural zoning districts can keep up to 12 female chickens and no other types of fowl, such as roosters. The city also set standards for how the female chickens are to be housed.

The public seemed relatively split down the middle in terms of being supportive of or against changes to the fowl ordinance. Some said roosters are too loud to live in city limits, while others said they moved to Sumter specifically because of the once-loose rules surrounding chickens and roosters that allowed them to feed their family fresh eggs and make more

chickens when one would stop laying.

SUMTER MILITARY MUSEUM

Late last year, Sumter City Council also approved a request that will expand Sumter County Museum, making room for Sumter Military Museum.

The museum will be a result of the largest state appropriation that the city received during the 2022-23 fiscal year — an \$8 million grant.

The museum is coming to North Washington Street and West Hampton Avenue, and it will be the new home of what is currently housed at Sammy Way's Sumter Military Museum at 129 S. Harvin St.

Way's museum is filled with all things military history, including 400 uniforms, more than 9,000 samples of original war memorabilia and more than 10,000 images.

BUSINESS LICENSES

Additionally, the city made the grounds under which a business license could be de-

denied, revoked or suspended more strict.

Before the city passed the amendment in September, the ordinance stated the city could deny, suspend or revoke a business license if the applicant or licensee had been convicted of a business-related crime within the past 10 years, but now, after the amendment, crimes unrelated to the business could also bar someone from keeping or applying for a business license in the City of Sumter.



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

City of Sumter passed changes to its code of ordinances regarding chicken keeping in October 2023.

Public meetings you can attend

BY BRYN EDDY
bryn@theitem.com

Public bodies throughout the Sumter area hold public meetings throughout the month you can attend, some of which have public comment periods.

Sumter School District's Board of Trustees

Sumter school board generally meets twice per month on the second and fourth Mondays at 6 p.m. at the district office, 1345 Wilson Hall Road.

The first meeting of the month serves as the monthly board meeting and includes public participation. Regarding public participation, any member of the public wanting to make a comment to the board on any topic must arrive before the 6 p.m. start time — as early as 5:30 p.m. — and complete a form to speak. The second meeting of the month is the board's monthly work session and does not include public participation.

Upcoming meeting dates are Monday, March 25, and Monday, April 15. Because spring break is in April, there is only one meeting for the month.

For those not physically attending, the district broadcasts meetings live on YouTube.

Anyone wanting to attend the meeting virtually can do so via YouTube Sumter School District Board Meeting and the district's Facebook page, @SumterSCSchools.

Sumter County Council

Sumter County Council meetings are typically held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month unless stated otherwise. There is a calendar of meetings available on the Sumter County Government website.

Meetings are held in council chambers, which are on the third floor of 13 E. Canal St. in Sumter.

There is a public comment section during each regularly scheduled meeting. Residents are limited to three minutes, and if there are questions, they will be answered after the meeting.

There are Sumter County Council meetings coming up on March 26 and April 9.

Anyone wanting to attend the meeting virtually can do so via YouTube through the Sumter County Government channel. They are not live, and the videos are typically uploaded the following day.

Sumter City Council

Sumter City Council meetings are held the

first and third Tuesday of each month, excluding the first Tuesday in July or unless otherwise stated.

The first meetings of each month are held at 1 p.m., while the second meetings of the month are held at 5:30 p.m. in council chambers on the fourth floor of Sumter Opera House at 21 N. Main St. in Sumter, but you must enter through the back parking lot entrance and take the elevator to the fourth floor.

City council hosts a public comment period at each third Tuesday meeting. Residents who wish to speak have to sign in upon arrival, and comments are limited to three minutes.

There are upcoming Sumter City Council meetings scheduled for March 19 at 5:30 p.m. and April 2 at 1 p.m.

These meetings are not available for viewing online.

Sumter City-County Planning Commission

The planning commission covers both the City of Sumter and Sumter County matters.

The commission generally meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month at 3 p.m. in council chambers on the fourth floor of Sumter Opera House at 21 N. Main St. in Sumter, but you must enter through the back parking lot entrance and take the elevator to the fourth floor.

Sumter City-County Board of Zoning Appeals

The board of zoning appeals covers both the City of Sumter and Sumter County matters.

The board generally meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 3 p.m. in council chambers on the fourth floor of Sumter Opera House at 21 N. Main St. in Sumter, but you must enter through the back parking lot entrance and take the elevator to the fourth floor.

SUATS

SUATS, or the Sumter Area Transportation Study, meets on an as-needed basis in council chambers on the fourth floor of Sumter Opera House at 21 N. Main St. in Sumter, but you must enter through the back parking lot entrance and take the elevator to the fourth floor.

According to the SUATS website, SUATS is the decision-making body of the Sumter Area Transportation Study and is comprised of elected officials representing municipal, county and state governing bodies within the study area.

Meetings are posted online in advance.

Government

8 things to know about owning a business in City of Sumter and county

BY BRYN EDDY
bryn@theitem.com

As of late February, the number of active businesses in the City of Sumter is 3,868, and in the county, there are 3,066 active businesses.

Business owners in the City of Sumter and in Sumter County have started receiving their renewals, and they are due back by April 30, according to the city's website.

The city and the county share the same online page, which is through the city's website, for information regarding business licenses.

The Business License Department serves both the city and the county, and all operational businesses within either must have a business license.

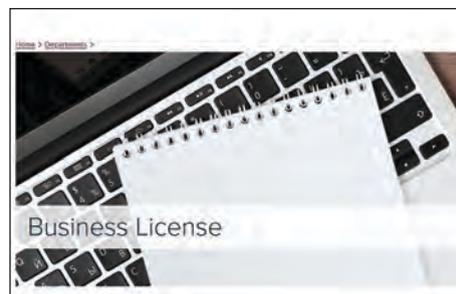
Here are some important things to note, per the city's website, if you're looking to obtain a business license in either the county or the city:

1 There are two forms one must fill out and submit to the Business License Department at 12 W. Liberty St. in Sumter. The two forms are an application and a clearance form.

2 The type of clearance form one must fill out varies based on the nature of the business. The types of clearance forms include home-based, mobile food vendor and commercial business. Booth renters, seasonal events and peddlers do not need to fill out a clearance form.

3 The application and the appropriate clearance form are to be submitted to the Business License Department at the same time. One is not to be submitted and reviewed without the other.

4 The department will ask to make copies of all business owners' driver's licenses, and if the business is home-based, the address on the driver's license must match the address of the business.



The City of Sumter website at www.sumter-sc.gov/businesslicense has links to forms to complete.

5 If your business is home-based, a food truck, a seasonal event or if you are a peddler, there are additional forms to fill out and submit that can be found on the city's website.

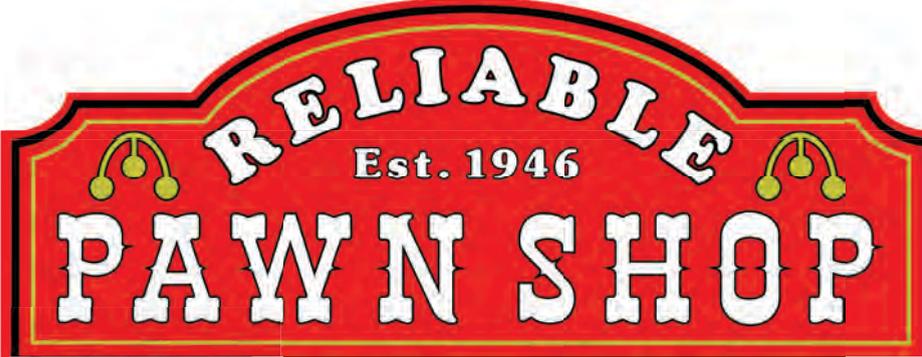
6 The business license application does not ask the applicant about their criminal history, but each type of clearance form does. Both the city and the

county have ordinances that enable the licensing official to deny someone a business license on account of a criminal conviction, but the licensing official is not required to deny someone a business license on account of a criminal conviction. According to earlier reporting from *The Sumter Item*, there have been no business licenses denied, revoked or suspended in either the city or the county.

7 Per the city's business license ordinance, a license may be denied if the applicant has been convicted of a crime within the past 10 years.

8 Per the county's business license ordinance, a license may be denied if the applicant has been convicted of a business-related crime within the past 10 years.

There is more information on this process on the city's website, and you can call the Business License Department with questions at (803) 774-1601.



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Opinion

Mayesville leaders need to follow Robert's Rules of Order closely if they hope to make any progress

I don't think government meetings are supposed to be entertaining.

That's not to say they can't be interesting or informative, but if government meetings entertain in the same way a reality television show or an overheard fight between your neighbors entertains, then those meetings might not be entirely productive.

I haven't been in this business for very long, but I have never seen a government meeting as entertaining as those in the town of Mayesville.

On North Main Street in Mayesville is the Mary McLeod Bethune Learning Center, where town officials hold government meetings, but that building isn't even government-owned, as you might have read in my reporting, and only a few yards in front of it on South Main Street is Mayesville Town Hall, and it's painted with mold.

I was at a public hearing put on by Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments in February, and the speaker told the people of Mayesville who were in attendance they could go to their town hall to receive documents on grant-funded projects.

And people laughed.

Because no one is stepping foot in that town hall for fear of illness.

I felt I was taking a risk when writing the lede to my story called, "3 interviewed for Mayesville town attorney;

council members disagree with mayor and public's preference."

My lede was as follows:

"During the recent town of Mayesville council meeting, multiple people addressed council like a mother would address an unruly child in a grocery store. With reprimand, embarrassment, frustration."

But my observation was accurate and backed up by what was said during public comment.



Bryn Eddy

I write all of this not to poke fun at anyone but to give readers who do not live in Mayesville a glimpse into what the people who do live there are dealing with.

I was asked whose fault is the Mayesville drama.

I do not know.

And I also do not think it's that simple.

I do know, however, that hardly ever is a conflict completely the fault of one side. It is incredibly rare that one side is completely blameless.

So, who are the sides? Well, the sides might be recently elected Mayor Chris Brown along with some Mayesville residents, and the other side might be council members along with the clerk and some Mayesville residents.

That's at least the impression given during government meetings, but I did

hear from one resident something that really made me hurt for the people of Mayesville.

This person, a resident, told me that the Mayesville drama is the fault of the people who live there.

I was shocked. And I asked why this person thought that. And this person told me the people of Mayesville let leadership go awry right under their noses. They didn't start paying attention until it had graduated from odd to wild, this person thought.

I disagree with this. This is not the fault of the people of Mayesville.

When a government operates smoothly, amicably and efficiently, there should not be any reason for the people who live there to keep such a keen eye on them. Sure, no matter what, citizens should keep an eye on their leaders (and journalists should watch them incredibly closely no matter what), and citizens should also take advantage of the ways they can have a say in governmental affairs, but citizens should be able to go about their daily lives without fear that their government is going awry.

So the people of Mayesville have gone about their daily lives, and no one could have expected them to see this coming.

But when did "this coming" happen? Again, I don't know. I don't know if it began with the former mayor or the current one or before either of them was even born.

Regardless, there is work to be done. Work to be done for the people of

Mayesville who are in need of a team of leaders who really do operate as a team.

I think a simple place to begin is for council meetings to follow Robert's Rules of Order. I credit this idea to Erin McArthur, who was in a committee to interview potential town attorneys and told council this idea outright during a meeting.

According to *robertsrules.com*, "Robert's Rules of Order is America's foremost guide to parliamentary procedure. It is used by more professional associations, fraternal organizations, and local governments than any other authority."

In other words, it's a guideline that formal meetings with boards or councils often follow in order to remain on task and efficient. It's the "I call for a motion to," "I second that motion," "All in favor say, 'I,'" and so on.

Mayesville leaders attempt to follow this. That much is clear. But they don't follow it very well.

Following Robert's Rules of Order won't fix all, but I think it is a good start.

On another note, I do want Mayesville leaders to know that I have enjoyed meeting all of them I have had the pleasure of speaking to so far. I personally have no gripes with any of them. I can't imagine the huge task they have at hand, and I hope they are going forth with the people of Mayesville as their priority.

Bryn Eddy is newsletter editor and reporter for The Sumter Item.

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Get to know

Sumter Sheriff's Office Capt. Petrina Wiley

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysha@theitem.com

There are a plethora of reasons an individual will pursue a career in law enforcement. It could be to continue a family legacy or to fulfill those childhood dreams of being a local superhero.

"I wanted to make a positive change" was the reason Sumter County Sheriff's Office Capt. Petrina Wiley gave ahead of her 27th anniversary with the agency.

In awe of family members embellished with the "finery" and brass on military uniforms, Wiley has spent the last 26 years — March 29 will make 27 — devoted to locally protecting and serving her community filled with people who lovingly know her as "Trina," while donning her pristine black-and-gold uniform. Assigned to the agency's Civil Process Division, she has experienced the civil and criminal side of the law, each of which has its good and bad aspects — but in all, it's been "a privilege" to serve.

Having earned her stripes — in a physical sense given the five reflective stripes on her forearm representing her years of dedication — Wiley has seen many changes within the agency, from its move from East Hampton Street to its current headquarters to being the first African American female promoted to lieutenant at the agency, alongside Lt. Virginia Dailey, who was one of the first women to be promoted. To make such strides can weigh heavily on one's emotions, but Wiley defied the odds because her place serves a bigger purpose: inspiring the next generation of movers and shakers, regardless of race, gender or age.

She credits many for her resil-

ience to stand strong — from her faith to family and friends to co-workers, whom she often cares for as she does her own child. She's faced adversities of all kinds, and without her faith or her personal and professional family, she would not be where she is now — that includes being recently promoted to captain this February.

In light of Women's History Month, Wiley shared her thoughts on her tenure, her trials and triumphs and what it takes to be a woman in law enforcement.

THE SUMTER ITEM: Law enforcement is a male-dominated career, so for you as a woman and as an African American woman at that, is it encouraging to see other women in this profession do so well?

WILEY: "[It's] empowering to be able to see them grow in the ranks, and you've been there to watch them grow because it's not too many of us. And when I say us, [I mean] the ones that were hired around the time that I was hired, it's not too many of us left.



PHOTOS BY ZAC HOOKS / THE SUMTER ITEM

SEE **WILEY**, PAGE A11

Sumter County Sheriff's Office Capt. Petrina Wiley has worked 27 years with the agency.



ZAC HOOKS / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter County Sheriff's Office Capt. Petrina Wiley has worked 27 years with the agency.

WILEY FROM PAGE A10

“When I was hired, if I'm not mistaken, it was only two of us back in 1997. You have to demand respect, and you can do it gracefully. Sometimes you have to be a little firm, but to see them come into this profession and to do it so gracefully is so rewarding. It's like being a proud parent, you know, especially when you say, 'I supervised her, I contributed to her;' it really feels good.”

THE ITEM: Talk about what it took for you to get to this point and what [your] promotion [to captain] means both professionally and personally.

WILEY: “It took a lot of prayer first and foremost. And of course, as you go throughout your tenure in any profession, your training, the experience that you have ... in order to become the commander or to become a leader, you have to go through those steps to get to where you need to be. I can honestly say that just watching my mentors and my supervisors along the years, just imitating what they've done or trying to better what it is that they have been doing — not to say that they've been doing it incorrectly or poorly — it's just that I just want to make sure that I remind myself there's always room for change.”

THE ITEM: Given your years of ex-

perience in your career, is there anything that you wish your younger self knew before coming into law enforcement?

WILEY: “Being more confident. If I could go back, that's the one thing that I would constantly tell myself. Yes, you can; yes, you can. I forbid my daughter to say 'I can't' as I got older and I became [wiser], especially within the sheriff's office. And I'm not saying this because he's my sheriff, but our sheriff, Sheriff Anthony Dennis, he has no idea how he changed my life with one gesture.

“We have our staff meetings, and we used to sit and speak from our chair. He changed that. He made us get up and go to the podium and stand before everyone else that was seated; you have no idea how terrifying that can be, especially if you're not a public speaker or if you're not comfortable speaking, period. When he did that, it, it just changed; I don't know what happened, but it gave you more confidence in who you were and what you were saying.

“If I could go back, I would tell my younger self, ‘Girlfriend, you have no idea the power that you possess when you have confidence like that, you have no idea.’ And as I progressed in my rank, I was like, I could do it. Sometimes I still have to tell myself, 'Yes, you can. Yes, you can. And yes, you will.'”

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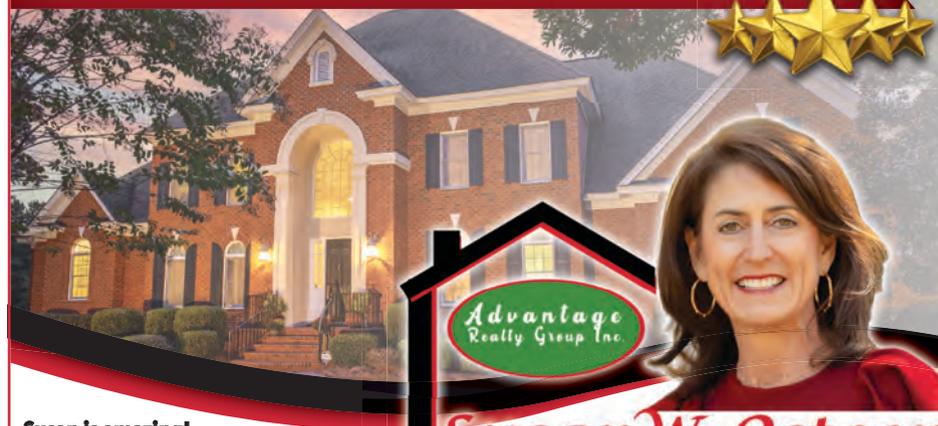
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-Martin Smith, Zillow Review



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Dexter Davis wants to help lead Sumter to more success through Liberty STEAM school

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

Education paved the way for Dexter Davis to be successful in life after football, and now he is working to affect the next generation locally and statewide in a similar way.

A former Sumter High School standout, Clemson Tiger football great and National Football League player for six years, Davis found himself returning to college in his 30s to finish his undergraduate degree to “reinvent” himself, he said. Through hard work and perseverance, he was able to do so, and he wants others to be able to do the same.

In recent years, Davis has become more active locally through serving on the board of directors for Sumter’s first public charter school — Liberty STEAM Charter School — and in January, he was appointed to the South Carolina

Public Charter School District Board of Trustees to help carry the vision of Liberty STEAM forward to the state level.

After earning his degree in 2002 at Morgan State University, Davis said doors opened for him to become a business owner, entrepreneur and team chaplain/sports missionary.

“Education has allowed me to be more than just a football player,” he said. “I have been able to create these new pathways because I chose to get immersed in different academics. I did not know anything about running a business until I went to an entrepreneurship program, and that was like another certification for me. I had to go learn how to start a company and so forth.”

He knows how to be an asset to his community as an entrepreneur because he has done it himself, Davis said.

“You cannot tell me that is not possible because I have done it,” he said. “And nothing gives me the platform to do it more than simply I chose to. This is America, and

SEE DAVIS, PAGE A13



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Dexter Davis speaks to students at Sumter’s Liberty STEAM Charter School recently.

Part of the solution is when white and Black men and women can get together and work through tough stuff. In this case, it was working in education together. Greg Thompson was the chairman, and I was the vice chairman, and we worked together.

DEXTER DAVIS

Former NFL player, SHS and Clemson great and now serving on Liberty STEAM Charter School board



Greg Thompson, left, and Dexter Davis stand outside the Quixote Club recently. The Quixote Foundation is Liberty STEAM Charter School’s philanthropic arm.

PHOTO PROVIDED

DAVIS FROM PAGE A12

if you choose to apply yourself, then you can create a pathway to be an asset in your community if you want to. It is as simple as that.”

Positive influencers in his life also helped him with his tenacity for work in his 30s and when he went back to school. Now, he sees that part can be done at a much earlier age through Liberty STEAM.

Pathways to success do not always involve a traditional four-year degree after high school, though, he said. Alternative pathways through certifications and the military are also available.

“The only time kids are going to know that is if somebody has come out of that and can tell them,” Davis said, “and that is my duty to our young people. That is why I am so excited to be a part of education. You can create a pathway through a certification program, leveraging relationships and keeping a good name.”

A solid faith in God also helps by putting one’s steps in order to achieve more than most people might expect.

Davis, 53, moved back to his hometown of Sumter last year specifically be-



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Dexter Davis speaks with a student and guardian at Sumter’s Liberty STEAM Charter School recently.

cause of Liberty STEAM and the relationship that he formed with its founding chairman, Greg Thompson.

Thompson piqued Davis’ interest in the school when it was still in its planning stages. After the school became official and was authorized in 2020, Davis became vice chairman of its board of directors.

“My wife and I were all in with Greg when he started talking about the school,” he said. “Then, going to the meetings and so forth, we realized we were going to need to be here. Being on the board and being a part of the com-

munity, you have to be intentional about that. I am adamant about having people on the team who are in the community.”

Liberty is in its third year as a school with an enrollment of 586 students, and Davis said a “kids first” intentional mindset has been the key agenda item since Day 1.

Preparing them for the future and meeting the changing needs of business, industry and the military are top priorities. School leaders are also committed to an aggressive growth strategy of adding one grade per year.

“We have had tough and heated conversations about that, but it is all about the kids,” Davis said. “It is only kids first. It is not about adults and wanting to hear a bunch of stuff about adults. Instead, we want to hear things about young scholars.”

A measure of success for Liberty is when a larger percentage of local companies’ employees decide to live here in the community because they can send their children to Liberty and receive a great education, he said.

“They can make this their home,” Davis said. “Sumter is a beautiful place to live, beautiful place to retire in, and I think Liberty can be part of that solution. Our goal is to have our scholars

want to eventually work in our community, want to be their own entrepreneurs, teachers, work at Shaw Air Force Base and become nurses in our hospital here, for example.”

‘BEING PART OF THE SOLUTION’

Racial issues can divide men and woman when they believe that color is the biggest concern, Davis said. On that front, individuals can be “part of the problem or part of the solution.” He said he thinks God was calling him back to Sumter to be “part of the solution.”

“Part of the problem is when people think everything is based on race, and they sit on opposing sides,” Davis said. “Part of the solution is when white and Black men and women can get together and work through tough stuff,” he said. “In this case, it was working in education together. Greg Thompson was the chairman, and I was the vice chairman, and we worked together. Here, we were doing something bigger than ourselves, and you could not say either of us was racist. He actually did not need me, and I did not need him, but nevertheless together we wanted to be intentional about Sumter. This is about Sumter. I am proud to say that I represent Sumter.”

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Entertainment

Isaiah's top 5 TV series

Unbelievably, TV series throughout the years have become the new modern art form of cinema. These days it is not a shock to see popular to legendary A-list actors appearing in shows compared to the silver screen. For years, viewing audiences have become actively engaged with shows on syndicated TV or streaming outlets.



ISAIAH RIDLEY

I am a collector of films, series, anime and cartoons. Here

are my top five recommended series that are deserving of accolades because of how they changed TV forever.

1 "24" — The first show I remember dedicating an entire summer to binging in 2010. It stars Kiefer Sutherland as federal agent Jack Bauer, and audiences follow Bauer attempting to thwart sinister threats in the United States. Every season presents the concept of episodes filmed using real-time scenarios. Threats that Bauer must avert are governor and presidential assassination attempts, nuclear devices, sleeper cell terrorist units, biological viral attacks and government espionage threats infiltrating the foundation of politics. Bauer's characterization sparked debates on whether his methods pertaining to torture are acceptable in obtaining information. He is CTU's most capable, proficient agent, blurring the lines between hero and anti-hero. Episodes offer intense nar-

ratives of conspiracies, betrayals, moles and adrenaline-fueled action sequences that provide never-ending excitement and revelations. (nine seasons and one TV movie)

2 "The Shield" — One of FX's most controversial series beginning in the early 2000s. The show focuses on a group of law enforcement officers called The Strike Team. Michael Chiklis portrays Vic Mackey, leader of the Strike Team. It explores police corruption with intense, emotional character development. Each season tells a different story of various obstacles Vic faces in guaranteeing his criminal activity remains concealed and still attempting to live life as a devoted husband and father. Themes of racial tension, drug addiction, politics and police brutality offer expositions that would have the series canceled if aired in our current societal climate. (seven seasons)

3 "Breaking Bad" — Simply put, one of the greatest shows ever created. Starring Bryan Cranston, Aaron Paul, Anna Gunn and Dean Norris, "Breaking Bad" tells the story of mild-mannered chemistry teacher Walter White, diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Struggling to make ends meet as an instructor, he collaborates with former student Jesse Pinkman, entering the world of cooking/distributing meth and building the necessary wealth to secure his family after his passing. Gradually White becomes increasingly ruthless and unsympathetic. We fall into a world of domestic



Root (Amy Acker), left, and Finch (Michael Emerson) race to save The Machine, which has been located by Samaritan, while Reese (Jim Caviezel), right, is caught in the middle of the final showdown between rival crime bosses Elias and Dominic, on "Person of Interest."

WARNER BROS. ENT. INC. / CBS BROADCASTING CORP.

and foreign cartels, forever changing the lives of White and those closest to him. (five seasons/one spin-off series titled "Better Call Saul" and one Netflix film titled "El Camino")

4 "Person of Interest" — This was a show that caught me by complete surprise. Jim Caviezel, Michael Emerson, Taraji P. Henson, Amy Acker, Kevin Chapman and Sarah Shahi portray a unique set of characters in this science-fiction espionage thriller. Reclusive billionaire technological genius Harold Finch created computer programs after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks as a means of monitoring various surveillance details. The computer predicts crimes and terrorist threats before they occur. Finch recruits former CIA operative John Reese to assist him in his quest of exposing government and law enforcement, and their bond develops as they remain determined to help the helpless. (five seasons)

5 "Angel" — My father introduced me to this show randomly one night in 2000/2001, if my memory serves me correctly. An extension of "Buffy the Vampire Slay-

er," the main character Angel, portrayed by David Boreanaz, presents a unique and exciting concept. Angel is a vampire cursed with a soul for his deeds of prevalent evil. Experiencing severe pain and regret for his past, he sets out to atone for his sins. It is one of the earliest examples I can recall of finding myself emotionally invested with every episode. Joss Whedon highlights his creative, innovative genius overseeing a vast array of different characters at the same time. Whether it is Angel, Cordelia, Gunn, Wesley or Fred, every character offers powerful growth and development, impacting the viewer in diverse ways. I always preferred this show over "Buffy" for its darker, more mature and grounded scenarios. Unfortunately, it ended on a cliffhanger with the story continuing in a comic titled "Angel: After the Fall" after its syndicated cancellation. It is an underrated show I highly recommend as an example of early classic television. (five seasons)

To watch Isaiah Ridley's movie reviews online, find him @Izzy's Cinematic Escape on YouTube.

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the Sumter ITEM



Spring into the festivities: Sumter March flings in full swing

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysa@theitem.com

As the leaves begin to flourish with their vibrant green hues and daylight lingers a bit longer, Sumterites are encouraged to enjoy finer things this coming spring.

March signals the coming of spring. And while we enjoy getting cozy by the fire, there's nothing like the sunshine and a good time, which is why this month comes chock full of experiences for the whole family to enjoy.

From cook-offs to comic conventions to all-day music festivals to celebrate a good cause, the festivities will be in full swing this March, and you don't want to miss it.

CELEBRATING WOMEN COMPOSERS

In celebration of Women's History Month and as part of the Sumter Opera House's Acoustic Cafe Series, vocalist Kara Grover and pianist/composer Lois Henry will showcase work by historical female composers on Thursday, March 21, at 7:30 p.m. in the City Centre, 21 N. Main St. The duo will perform selections from Amy Beach, Fanny Mendelssohn and Florence Price, as well as

their latest masterpiece, "BELLESONGS," to honor Colorado mountain woman Belle Turnbull. Tickets are \$30 and on sale at sumteroperahouse.com/acousticcafe.

SUMTER SPRINGFEST

If you're looking for eight hours of fun, look no further than downtown Sumter on Saturday, March 23. The inaugural Sumter Springfest will take place from 2 to 10 p.m. along Main Street. Local and out-of-town bands will offer musical entertainment to carry you through the night as you enjoy savory burgers, fire-roasted pizza or some Southern fine dining; no need to fret about our little ones, as there will be kid-friendly options as well.

There will be five bands performing throughout the day: Eddie Rogers and the Sundown Band at 2 p.m.; The Jake Bartley Band at 4 p.m.; Lewis Brice at 6 p.m.; Honey & The New Era Band at 7:30 p.m.; and 20 Ride at 8 p.m.

All this comes at a great price for a good cause to fundraise for United Way of Sumter, Clarendon and Lee counties. As you soak up some fun in the sun, your money will support families in need. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit sumterspringfest.com.

ANNUAL BARBECUE COOK-OFF BENEFITING BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Prep your ingredients and get ready to grub as the annual Barbecue Cook-Off benefiting Boy Scouts of America happens Friday-Saturday, March 22-23, at the Sumter American Legion Fairgrounds, 700 W. Liberty St. Wing ding will be held from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Friday, and the barbecue tasting and competition will be held from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday.

13TH-ANNUAL SHEEP SHEARING DAY

Old McCaskill's Farm will host its annual Sheep Shearing Day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, March 23, at 337 Cantey Lane. The family friendly event will allow visitors to learn about farm living as well as watch border collie demos,

participate in horseback rides and hayrides, enjoy live bluegrass music and more. For more information, visit oldmccaskillfarm.com or follow Old McCaskill Farms on Facebook.

SUMTER SWAN CON

Swan Con: Sumter's Comic Arts Festival is back! Presented by USC Sumter and Sumter County Cultural Commission, the family friendly free event will feature collectibles, comic books, comic strips, artwork, costumes as well as artist talks, meet-and-greets with comic artists and more related to pop culture. The event will begin at 11 a.m. on Friday, March 29, and go on until 3 p.m. on Saturday, March 30, at 200 Miller Road.

DAZR ROCKS SUMTER ORIGINAL BREWERY

American rock band DAZR will return to the local brewery to deliver the electrifying rock 'n' roll that everyone loves. The show starts at 8 p.m. on Saturday, March 30, at 2 S. Main St. Admission is free; visit eventbrite.com to reserve your spot.



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Sumter Opera House to begin \$15M renovations this June

Venue announces shows to enjoy in the meantime

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysa@theitem.com

A serene stroll into downtown Sumter will bring you sights of unique ceramic butterflies, savory smells from local restaurants and brick buildings filled with history — one in particular being Sumter Opera House.

As one of the city's oldest and most iconic venues for the arts, Sumter Opera House has experienced its fair share of renovations.

It was first destroyed in December 1892 by a fire, and renovations that would produce its current exterior would be completed in 1895. The venue would serve as a movie theater, its debut showing being "Earthworm Tractors," costing 35 cents for adult tickets and 10 cents for children. The venue would close its doors in 1982 before reopening in 1984 after being purchased by the City of Sumter and renovated into office space by 1987.

While its rear is still home to many city department offices, including City Council chambers, its front still shines as a focal point for the city and the arts community. And it will soon undergo a makeover meant to better utilize its space and its purpose.

Beginning no later than June, the Opera House will break ground on its \$15 million renovation first proposed by South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster in 2020.

"Renovations have always been part of the history of the Opera House. This next renovation step aligned with our

mission and vision of being an indispensable cultural asset and providing diverse creative experiences," said Seth Reimer, cultural manager for the City of Sumter. "It may be workshops, it may be master classes, it could be Q and A, it could be meet-and-greets; if the Opera House is going to be around for another 100 years, it's time to step in that direction for our community and in providing diverse creative experiences."

Sketches are still under wraps, but Reimer detailed plans to expand the venue's lobby and entrance along with its dressing room and backstage amenities, connecting the current venue, at 21 N. Main St., to its neighbor at 19 N. Main St. The stage and seating within the house will remain untouched, preserving the intimate vibe the venue is known and loved for.

With these renovations come new opportunities. Though its main doors will be closed until a projected date in 2026, Reimer ensured patrons will still get their fill of the arts in the months to come.

"I hope the different spaces within the Opera House will draw the community in — whether it's historical in nature, entertaining in nature or by invitation, making people feel not only welcome, also that we took the extra time to make it accessible for them," he expressed.

"We're gonna be doing some performances in the City Centre, which is not a part of the renovations. We're going to continue with our YES! Programming and our

matinee shows — but those may be in alternate locations throughout the community," Reimer explained. "We're not only trying to invite people to the Opera House for these diverse creative experiences, but also get into the different neighborhoods and the different areas of Sumter that maybe people who aren't able to get transportation here might be able to walk to see a performance."



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS

Renovations to the Opera House were being made in July 1986. More shows will be announced throughout 2024. To stay updated on the latest shows to take center stage, follow the Opera House on social media or sign up for its newsletter at sumteroperahouse.com.

UPCOMING SHOWS

GEORGIA PLAYERS GUILD'S "TO THE LIMIT"

MARCH 15

Georgia Players Guild, a tribute show booking agency, will present an electrifying tribute show reminiscent of the timeless spirit of The Eagles. The guild will recreate the Eagles' iconic harmonies and guitar-centric sound, allowing audience members to go on a metaphoric flip through the band's catalog. Expect to hear chart-topping hits like "Hotel California" and soulful ballads like "Desperado" and, most importantly, expect to have a good time. Tickets are on sale for \$28-\$32.

CELEBRATING WOMEN COMPOSERS WITH LOIS HENRY AND KARA GROVER

MARCH 21

In celebration of Women's History Month and as part of the Opera House's Acoustic Cafe Series, vocalist Kara Grover and pianist/composer Lois Henry will showcase work by historical female composers, including Amy Beach, Fanny Mendelssohn and Florence Price, sharing their latest masterpiece, "BELLESONGS," to honor Colorado mountain woman Belle Turnbull. Tickets are \$30.

RICKY SKAGGS & KENTUCKY THUNDER

APRIL 5

With more than 60 years in the music industry, Ricky Skaggs is still looking to bring good music and good times to folks everywhere — and Sumter is next. The 15-time Grammy Award winner and 12 consecutive Grammy-nominated mandolin and fiddle master came from bluegrass roots that propelled him into mainstream country music, and he will share his musical stylings with Sumter. Tickets range from \$57-\$62.

JUKEBOX SATURDAY NIGHT

APRIL 26

Take a trip back in time to the 1930s-'50s, when the iconic sounds of Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington and more filled our jukeboxes. Tickets range from \$23 to \$28.



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Government

How to file a Freedom of Information Act request in S.C.

BY ASHLEY MILLER

ashley@theitem.com

Access to agency records and certain information is protected under federal law to allow the public access to information that has not been disclosed through government entities or other officials.

This information may be provided through a Freedom of Information Act request if it has not already been released to the public, but some might not know the proper way to send a request and how the law works. It's not something widely taught in school or common knowledge to most.

Before making a request, first see if the information you are interested in is already made public.

When sending in a request, there are key things to remember. Be as detailed as possible about what you are requesting, if the fee is more than \$100 ask the agency/person to contact you before proceeding with the request, and consult the FOIA booklet at <https://tinyurl.com/bdhhpkk8> during the process.

Most agencies have a form on their website or office that you can fill out, but you can also send an email requesting the same information. Usually on an agency's website there is a specific person to contact for FOIA requests, but if not, try to reach out to the top person of a specific department the request is tailored to.

Whichever way the request is being sent, email or form, make sure to be detailed about what you are requesting. This is key to not only make sure the documents received are exactly what you want, but also so the agency/person gives every document without missing anything. It also helps both parties form a proper fee.

In the South Carolina Code of Laws, which can be found on the South Carolina state House website, section 30-4-30(b) states "the public body may establish and collect fees as provided for in this section. The public body may establish and collect reasonable fees not to exceed the actual cost of the search, retrieval, and redaction of records. The public body shall develop a fee schedule to be posted online."

It also helps in the request if you ask for an itemized list of what is being charged through the fee given, if applicable.

After sending the request to the appropriate party, the law states in section 30-4-30(c) "each public body shall within 10 days, (excepting Saturdays, Sundays and legal public holidays) notify the person making the request of its determination and reasons for it. If the record is more than 24 months old the response time is 20 days instead."

Once the determination has been given if the agency will disclosed the information requested, it has 30 business days to provide the requested documents.

S.C. PRESS ASSOCIATION SAMPLE FOI REQUEST

Date to get clock running, month, day, year

Example: May 16, 2019

Send to record custodian

Example: Custodian name; address

Be specific in your request

Example: "This is a request for access to the public records listed below pursuant to the S.C. Freedom of Information Act, SC Code 30-4-10, et seq. I would like to review [specify documents as narrowly as you can]. I can be reached by telephone at [insert your number] to schedule a time to examine the records."

Protect yourself from high copy costs

Example: Since this request primarily benefits the general public, I request that any search or copying fees be waived. If there is a charge for providing me access, please advise me of your estimate of the charge and its basis when you contact me to arrange access.

Politely remind you're keeping track

Example: "I look forward to hearing from you within the time limits set by the law."

SUMTER SPRINGFEST

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MARCH 2024

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Education

3 highlights of Sumter school board activity in past year

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

1. SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY FOR TEACHERS TO BE CONDUCTED

At the Feb. 26 board meeting, Sumter School District's Board of Trustees voted unanimously to engage an external group to administer a school climate survey of teachers.

Teacher retention is critical for all districts, given nationwide teacher shortages, and school climate related to student behavior/discipline can play a large factor in retention issues, according to widespread research.

The district's code of conduct previously allowed students at times seven chances before some severe actions were taken under previous Superintendent Penelope Martin-Knox.

In the revised code adopted for the current school year under Superintendent William Wright Jr., those chances were reduced to four.

Some trustees, including Jeff Zell and Daniel Palumbo, have suggested recently that more steps need to be taken for a stricter code of conduct in the future.

Board Chairman the Rev. Ralph Canty said the trustees have authorized Wright to try to identify potential companies that might be able to conduct the survey.

"We are going to look to the superintendent to provide us some guidance in this area," Canty said, "and we will expedite this as quickly as we can and as cost effectively as we can."



BRUCE MILLS / THE SUMTER ITEM

The Mayewood Middle School football press box was repainted and new speakers and a new microphone were installed as part of improvements made in the fall by Superintendent William Wright Jr.

2. SALARY ADJUSTMENTS MADE AS A RESULT OF 2023 SALARY STUDY

District employees' paychecks for Feb. 29 reflected salary adjustments as a result of the district-wide salary study that was conducted by an outside group last year.

The full board approved salary study recommendations in the fall, but it took until recently to enact changes across all employee levels, factoring in individual experience and job duties. The comprehensive salary study was the first of its kind for Sumter School District and looked at establishing a competitive pay structure in the region. The study also analyzed district staffing levels and organizational structure.

As a result of the study, first-year teacher pay with a bachelor's degree was raised from the state minimum of \$42,500 to \$44,625. First-year teacher pay with a master's degree was raised from \$47,576 to \$49,955.

3. BOARD OKS NEW MAYEWOOD ATHLETIC BUILDING AFTER 4-MONTH DELAY

A new bathroom and concession stand area is set for a middle school football field in Sumter School District after the school board voted 6-3 on a new building concept in February.

An option for a wood-framed building not to exceed an allotted amount of nearly \$400,000 for the project work won out over potentially a smaller-cost approach to use existing facility space on site at the now-closed Mayewood Middle School with the district's Board of Trustees.

The new bathroom and concession stand area will be for use by students and the general public at R.E. Davis College Preparatory Academy home football games and track-and-field meets. The school's football team continues to play its home games at Mayewood, which is 1.3 miles from the R.E. Davis campus.

Learning and the brain

If you've never held a sheep's brain in your hands, I recommend it. I cradled this woolly quadruped's brain and, like Mufasa lifting a baby Simba into the air, displayed it for 100+ PK-12 educators in February 2020.

Participants took turns holding the sheep's brain at their table, while I asked them to imagine they were holding one of their students' brains. I wanted them to feel its impressionable surface, its impossible fragility, hoping the reality of their daily mission would sink in even more profoundly — every



Brent Kaneft

day, teachers shape brains; they are, literally and figuratively, brain changers.

Rarely do educators have the opportunity to physically feel the sacredness of their calling, but this is what I offered them during this sheep's brain dissection. Today's teachers have the distinct advantage — and all the consequent challenges — of knowing more about how the brain learns than any previous generation. Since the 1990s and largely due to the advent of fMRI machines, information about the brain has been flooding into academic journals, the news media and bestselling books. Some of this information is helpful, while some has been misleading, if not wildly quixotic. In this column, I will distill some of this research and consider its im-

plications for education primarily, but certainly parenting, coaching, leading youth groups or any role that engages with children and young adults will benefit from this knowledge.

The foundational concept of my field — referred to as Mind, Brain & Education research (MBE) — is "neuroplasticity." We used to believe intelligence was fixed at birth, but now we know that though there is a "significant genetic component to the architecture of each individual's brain," our

brains are always being shaped by learning and experience, which is the definition of neuroplasticity. A neuroteacher — one who effectively understands how the brain learns and can apply these principles to their teaching practice — can employ strategies that promise to shape the brain in more positive ways. MBE research empowers teachers, and we know that nothing has a greater influence on student outcomes than teacher quality ("Neuroteach: Brain Science and the Future of Education" 33 & 3).

Remember, education is not broken, it's distracted — and we have forgotten two essential truths: learning is hard, and it takes effort. Any solution or technology that bypasses those realities leads to superficial learning and unprepared students. In this column, we will explore concepts and research that, if implemented, will lead to improved student outcomes.

Brent Kaneft is head of school at Wilson Hall.

Women's History Month

Mother-daughter duo lives by 'heads up, hammer down' motto, finding success in male-dominated careers

BY ASHLEY MILLER
ashley@theitem.com

A mother-daughter duo, defying gender norms in traditionally male-dominated fields, live by their saying, "Heads up, hammer down."

Meet Patty Jaye G. and Anastasia Patterson from Sumter. Both names probably sound familiar to the local community, with Patty Jaye being the first Black female police chief in the City of Sumter and her daughter Anastasia being an up-and-coming female angler in the bass-fishing world.

Although the pair differ in careers, they share one simi-

larity across the board — both are or have been in male-dominated careers, and both said it was not easy.

"When you talk about Women's History Month, it's really talking about uplifting and empowerment, mentorships and leadership of women throughout history that have had an impact,"

SEE **DUO**, PAGE A20



Patty Jaye G. and Anastasia Patterson, mother and daughter, spend time together Feb. 26 in Sumter. Both women work or worked in fields traditionally held by men. Patty Jaye was the City of Sumter's first Black female police chief, while her daughter has a career in fishing.

ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

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PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

LEFT: Patty Jaye G. Patterson said if she could perfect the same skills as men, she should have “a seat at the table” regardless of her gender.

RIGHT: Anastasia Patterson said her goal is to compete at pro fishing’s highest level, in the Bassmaster Elite competition. She was recently featured on the cover of Bassmaster magazine.

DUO FROM PAGE A19

Patty Jaye said.

Patty Jaye served in law enforcement for decades, and in 2011, she announced her retirement as the chief of police after 10 years of service in the head role. In 1991, she joined Sumter Police Department as major of operations second in command under former Chief Harold B. Johnson. In 2001, she was appointed the city’s first Black female chief of police.

She said it was not easy going through the ranks because of struggles in her personal life and as a female in law enforcement. Patty Jaye served numerous roles in law enforcement and has won many awards and recognitions for her accomplishments. She has taken many classes on the federal and state level and said her time as chief of police was not always well loved by even females in the field.

“Some liked it, some didn’t like it. Men and women that were externally outside of the department as well as in the department,” she said. “Even when I went on to be in the SWAT team and was the first female there, some of the older



Patty Jaye G. Patterson’s collection of police memorabilia is seen Feb. 26.

guys questioned why I wanted to do this.”

Patty Jaye thinks if she could perfect the same skills, offer what she could to the table and be able to perform the same skills, “Why shouldn’t I have a seat at the table? Regardless of my gender. I was born a woman, and I am going to be a woman, and that is not going to be a crutch for me not to be able to do something.”

She and her daughter Anastasia share the same belief, but Anastasia grew up hunting and fishing with not a thought of going into law enforcement.

“I grew up fishing before I could even walk,” she said. “I was raised out in the woods

and on the water.”

Anastasia never thought she could turn her love of fishing into a career even when she played with the idea of turning it into a profession.

“There was a guy who told me a woman will never make it in the fishing industry,” she said.

But one phone call turned her passion into a profession.

Anastasia has now become the first non-model female on the cover of Bassmaster magazine, and her biggest catch has been a 12-plus-pound bass she pulled from a lake in Florida. But she is not done, as her main goal is to compete at the highest level — Bassmaster’s Elite competition.

“You’re seeing more women in the fishing industry now,” she said. “It just made my heart smile that something so simple but complicated at the same time brings people together.”

Anastasia said someone doesn’t have to be a professional to be good at something.

“Do what your heart desires, and let the Lord lead you in your path,” she said. “I can’t say it’s not hard; it’s lonely being a woman that travels and there’s guys staying in a house with 15 people, but I am at a house for 12 to 15 days by myself.”

Patty Jaye said it can be difficult in a male-dominated world, industry and profession but for little girls and women to not give up.

“You just have to overlook the others. There is always going to be naysayers that will say you’re just a girl, you’re just a woman, you can’t do this or you can’t do that,” Patty Jaye said. “But the way I look at it is, I get up every morning just like you do, I put my pants on, just like you do. If we are both given the same tools, we ought to be able to perform the same task.”

Anastasia said she has learned many lessons from

her mom but one that sticks out to her is, “You have to reach out and reach back and pull others forward and applaud one another for success because it’s not something that is achieved alone.”

“You have to work hard, pray hard and do everything to your fullest. Like I always say, ‘Heads up, hammer down,’” Anastasia said. “Mentally you have to be tough, especially in a male-dominated industry. There are some things women will go through that a man will never have to experience.”

Both women said there will always be people who want to see you fail but to keep the negatives going through one ear and out the other and keep pushing forward.

“I have had a lot of firsts, but it’s not about that. I am just one woman, my hand in God’s hand, trying to do the right thing,” Patty Jaye said. “Realistically, it’s about believing in a girl, knowing they can be part of history because you make history every day you live. We need to be proud of these accomplishments and make sure they get recognized so that tomorrow’s generation will continue to do the same thing because they are our future.”

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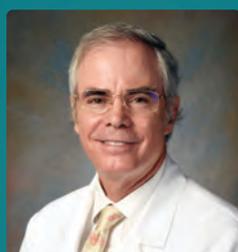
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McLeod Health Clarendon



'A mix between science and art': Controlled burns help land

BY ADAM FLASH
adam@theitem.com

“It's a natural process. Before there were people here, there was fire,” said Kenny Robertson, unit forester for the Lynches River Unit of the South Carolina Forestry Commission.

Robertson, his local team and a visiting group of trainees from the National Interagency Prescribed Fire Training Center in Tallahassee, Florida, set fire to Sumter County's Poinsett State Park on Thursday, Feb. 22, as part of a prescribed burn to revitalize the land. They covered a 100-acre distance in the

'This is a good thing. It's not a bad thing. It's going to help our forests.'

BEN CASANOVA

Fire engine operator,
NIPFTC trainee

They also hope to reduce the amount of debris on the ground, often referred to as “fuel,” in order to mitigate the risk of uncontrolled forest fires starting.

“It's a time bomb sitting there,” Robertson said. “All that fuel is just building up. You want to burn it when you can somewhat control it and not let it get away from you.”

Most of the controlled burns in South Carolina take place in the dormant season from December through March, according to Robertson,

northeast part of the park, last burned in 2011, using drip torches to drop fire in lines throughout the forest. Their goal: to burn out unwanted vegetation taking nutrients from plants and specifically longleaf pine trees common to the area.

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Most of the controlled burns in South Carolina take place in the dormant season from December through March, according to Robertson,

SEE **FIRE**, PAGE A23



ABOVE: Smoke rises from the ground during a controlled burn at Poinsett State Park on Thursday, Feb. 22.

LEFT: Lighter Patrick Valentine walks among the trees setting fire to the ground with a drip torch during a prescribed burn at the park.

PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM



FIRE FROM PAGE A22

when weather is ideal and time allows for plants to resprout and provide food and shelter for wildlife come spring and summer.

South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster recently proclaimed March as Prescribed Fire Awareness Month in an effort to promote and educate the public on the practice.

“I think fire gets looked at as this bad thing. It’s gonna destroy this. We’re gonna destroy that,” said Ben Casanova, Fire Engine Operator and NIPFTC trainee. “This is a good thing. It’s not a bad thing. It’s going to help our forests.”

“This time of year, especially in South Carolina and the Southeast, there’s going to be a lot of smoke in the atmosphere. People just need to be kind of aware of that,” Mike Bozzo said.

Bozzo worked for the South Carolina Forestry Commission for 39 years and is now a part-time prescribed fire coordinator helping to increase the amount of burns throughout the state. “A lot of homes and residences are being built next

to forest land, and so by burning the lands near it, that actually helps protect those homes as well.”

Before burns are conducted, factors such as weather are taken into consideration and a burn plan is created long before each outing to reduce risks both onsite and of smoke affecting life elsewhere. However, as Robertson described it, remaining adaptable is also very important.

“It’s well thought out. It’s well planned. It’s not something that’s just kind of thrown together at the last minute. It’s science, but it’s kind of a mix between science and art because it’s not something you can sit down and just on a calculator figure it out.”

Robertson stressed the importance of public awareness on how and why pre-

scribed burns are done. More information can be found at scfc.gov.

“We’re trying to mimic nature in a safe way. There is a purpose behind it. It is science, and in this part of the country, it is a necessity. It’s not a matter of if the place is going to burn, it’s a matter of when. It’s a lot better to be able to do it in a controlled way,” he added.



Ben Casanova, a trainee from the National Interagency Prescribed Fire Training Center who was visiting for the day, shows his dirty hands after conducting the burn.



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Lighter Jackie Hannifan is seen at Poinsett State Park after conducting a prescribed burn on Thursday, Feb. 22.



Hannifan examines a map of where the burn will take place during a prescribed fire at the park.



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PHOTOS BY ASHLEY MILLER / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter County Library offers a massive collection of reading materials, from children's and teens' books to newspapers and magazines.

Sumter County Library known as hub of knowledge and resources

BY ASHLEY MILLER

ashley@theitem.com

The library is a hub of knowledge that holds the scent of aged paper, each book an entrance to a new world to explore. Time stands still in a world of adventure, and from young to old, visitors can lose themselves in the endless imaginations of the authors.



HARDEN

Does this sound like an adventure you might want to partake in? There is a local hub of imagination, knowledge and events to

explore at the Sumter County Library at 111 N. Harvin St.

"Libraries are a huge contributor to the community," said Library Director Robert Harden. "Reading is one of those things you can do at any age; it's a pastime, and there are so many things you can read about that you might have an interest in."

Harden started working at the Sumter library in 1980 and worked his way up to the director's position. In 40 years, although the library has evolved with

technology and in other ways, he said print books will always be there.

When one thinks of the library, they might think of it as a world of books, but at Sumter County Library, there is so much more offered to patrons. Not only can residents get a free library card and eCards for adults and children, but there are also several events the library hosts for its patrons and the local community.

From book clubs and therapy dogs to movie afternoons, Harden said the mission at the library is to create a space for people to come learn, explore and grow their knowledge in any way possible.

If you need a quiet space for homework, studying, filing paperwork or doing any type of computer work, Sumter County Library has a floor dedicated to the use of computers. There are also printing and faxing services available.

"We (the staff) are here to provide resources for anyone. Some people might need help navigating our online resources or help with something on the computer," Harden said. "We are here to help find that online source or that one book you might need."

Students can get homework help via free internet access at the library, educational databases and digital content using



The Children's Department at Sumter County Library offers resources for parents and teachers as well as books, events and more.

their library card. For kids, there are several online resources such as *Tutor.com*, Tumble Book Library, Tumble Math and BookFlix to help with reading, math homework and more.

The library provides programs and services for children from birth to 12 years old. There is a massive collection ranging from picture and board books for babies and toddlers to materials for older children.

"There is also a children's service department where they provide materials for parents and teachers as well as bilingual materials in Spanish and English," Harden said.

The Children's Department provides year-round involvement for the younger patrons with story times for preschoolers, outreach programs for children in daycare centers, an extensive summer program and special events throughout the year.

These are free of charge and open to the public.

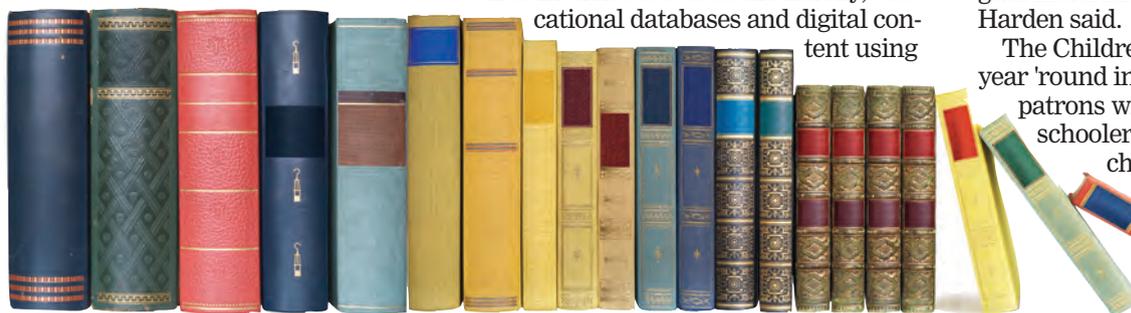
"One thing that comes to mind is an experience I had when I was walking through the children's department," Harden said.

He said there was a little girl looking at a few different books, and her parents were using the copy machine. When the little girl saw Harden, she quickly put down the books, scared of getting in trouble. He made sure she knew she was not in trouble and asked where her parents were.

"I said, 'well, go and get her and tell her to go get you a library card,'" he said. "Her face lit up and went running to get her mother so she could take many books home with her to read."

Harden said "that is what it is all about," keeping the younger crowd wanting to read and learn and have a local hub of fun and resources.

For more information about the library, visit sumtercountylibrary.org.



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Growth and development

Construction projects underway and planned in city and county of Sumter

BY BRYN EDDY
bryn@theitem.com

Sumter is building. That's no secret.

Here are some projects in Sumter County and in the City of Sumter that are either currently under construction or could be under construction soon.

NEW NEIGHBORHOOD

More than 260 single-family homes might be coming to the City of Sumter on Beckwood Road not very far from Sumter Airport.

Sumter City-County Planning Commission unanimously approved a request on Feb. 28 that allows the developer, Wilder Land Development, to move forward in the process to build 166 single-family detached units and 96 single-family attached units in the area of 1855 Beckwood Road in city limits.

The 140.56 acres of land are currently undeveloped and in city councilman Anthony Gibson's Ward 1.

The proposed name of the development, according to public documents, is Beckwood Estates.

Major subdivision approvals, such as this one, stop with planning commission, so this item will not show up on any other agendas.

The developer wants to build in five phases, with between 42 and 61 lots being built in each phase.

PARKS

The South Sumter Park revitalization project is about to be underway.

The park is at 630 S. Sumter St., and as it stands today, there are basketball courts, a playground area, a splash pad and lots of grassy areas.

Revitalization plans, however, include a pickleball court, new playground equipment, restrooms, a pavilion and sidewalks. The basketball courts will also be replaced, and there

is a possible phase two of the project city officials are still working on that may put an airnasium over the new basketball courts so they are covered.

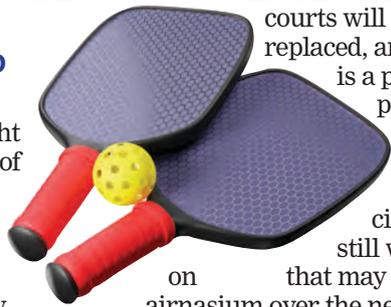
JF Contractors of Sumter is doing the job for \$1,747,925, according to public documents.

The city is paying for the revitalization out of a state appropriation, or grant, that it was awarded specifically for the project thanks to Rep. J. David Weeks, D-Sumter. There are also private contributions helping to pay for the project.

Construction should be completed about October of this year, officials say.

This park project is one of three South Sumter park projects city officials are working on.

Construction has begun on the South Sumter Art Park on the corner of Orange Street



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

New housing construction is seen in the Hunters Crossing neighborhood off Old Field Road.

and Manning Avenue where the former Sumter County Sheriff's Office substation used to be.

Upon completion, there will be two basketball courts, an art-themed playground, bathrooms, parking and a wall for various creative installations.

And recently, the city announced plans for an African American history-themed park to be built at 341 Manning Ave. and 8 E. Fulton St., not far from Bostick Tompkins Funeral Home of Sumter.

There are not a lot of details available on it, but that project, as well as the South Sumter Art Park project and the South Sumter Park revitalization, were made possible by state grants.

TROPICAL SMOOTHIE

A Tropical Smoothie Café is coming to Sumter this year. A commercial building per-



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

mit was filed with Sumter Building Department late last year for its construction.

The long-vacant Checkers Drive-In burger restaurant at 1293 Broad St. in front of Walmart Supercenter was demolished last year. The marquee sign outside the drive-in has read "Closed for remodeling" for a few years. Once the smoothie joint is constructed, the address will be 1301 Broad St., according to the permit.

The Sumter Item has

reached out to Tropical Smoothie's corporate office and requested information on an official opening date and renderings of what the café will look like.

The nearest Tropical Smoothie currently open is in Columbia, but there are franchises across the country offering healthy food options including smoothies, of course, salads, wraps, flatbreads, their own version of a quesadilla and kid-friendly items.

Dining



Good food and fun

Guignard Diner is one of the last mom-and-pop restaurants in Sumter

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

It has not been around as long as some people might think, but 23 years of fine “country cookin’ with all the fixin’s” for breakfast and lunch crowds makes Guignard Diner a classic Sumter business.

Co-owners Wayne Lowder and



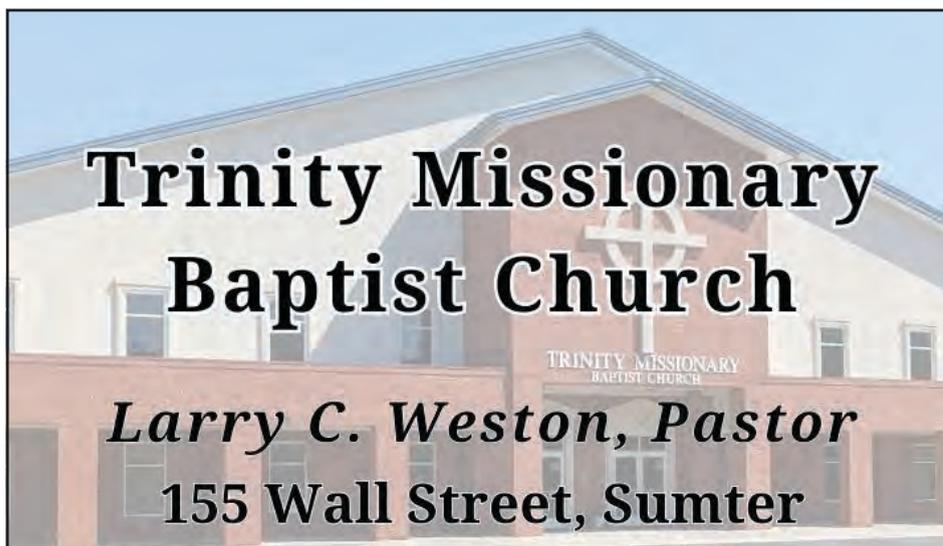
PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumterites gather for breakfast at Guignard Diner on Feb. 29. The restaurant at 439 N. Guignard Drive has been around for more than 20 years, serving country cooking and acting as a gathering point for groups of friends.

Mickey Brewer opened the diner in July 2001 at 439 N. Guignard Drive, and not much has changed over time with the restaurant, they said.

It is still a staple for good food, friendly service and finding out what

SEE **DINER**, PAGE A28



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DINER FROM PAGE A27

is going on around town, according to customers.

Guignard Diner has 20 employees — when including full-time and part-time — and serves about 400 to 450 customers per day, according to Lowder. That translates to about 2,000-plus customers per week for the restaurant, which is open Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Many patrons are repeat customers, some coming in for breakfast daily as part of breakfast clubs that gather and socialize. Others may come for breakfast one day and then lunch the next day.

Both Lowder and Brewer have been in the restaurant business for about 40 years each. Lowder puts in between 60 to 65 hours per week at the diner, he said, and serves as “a jack of all trades.” He comes in early and stays late and can be found cooking, wiping down tables and handling all the paperwork involved with running a small business.

Lowder recently sat down with *The Sumter Item* to offer an insider’s



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Guignard Diner serves daily specials Monday through Friday.

perspective on Guignard Diner.

Question from Item: What are staples and favorites on the menu?

Answer from Lowder: “It’s country cooking. We have lunch specials every day. Staples include fried chicken, pork chops and turkey and dressing. As far as vegetables and sides, staples include cabbage, hash-brown casserole and pineapple casserole, collards.

“Breakfast is a standard menu every day, but favorites include pan-

cakes. The pancakes are excellent. The Country Benedict is good — it’s a split biscuit with two eggs and sausage/gravy over the top.”

Item: Which is bigger, breakfast or lunch?

Lowder: “It’s about the same. We probably serve about the same number of people. But breakfast is longer. We serve breakfast from 6 until 10:30 a.m. and basically lunch is only about three hours (11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.)”

Item: Who was your main competition in the early years of business?

Lowder: “Buster’s and Big Jim’s also was still open when we first opened. I guess Big Jim’s was open for about five years after we opened. Cole’s Restaurant had already been closed for a few years by then.”

Item: What do you think makes the restaurant so popular?

Lowder: “I think it is the camaraderie in here. Everybody knows everybody, and some tables have kind of merged together over the years. Sometimes, tables have eight to 10

SEE DINER, PAGE A29

GUIGNARD DINER BY THE NUMBERS

2,000

Customers served in an average week

1,200

Eggs served per week

375

Pounds of chicken served per week

150

Pounds of cabbage served per week

138

Gallons of tea served per week

20

Total employees

6

Time the doors open Monday through Friday

Source: Guignard Diner

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DINER FROM PAGE A28

people at them now.

“We try to focus on customer service as well.”

Item: What is the secret to the diner’s success and longevity in Sumter?

Lowder: “I will tell you a story as to why the motivation and drive have always been there for me.

“We opened in July 2001, so this was probably around the first of July. We had just got the parking lot resealed and painted, and I was out there one day, and it must have been at least 100 degrees on that fresh black top, and I was putting the parking bumpers back out there in the parking spaces.

“Then, an older gentleman drove up in a truck, and he asked what we were doing here? I told him, ‘This is going to be a restaurant with breakfast and lunch and country cooking.’

“He said, ‘No dinner?’

“I responded, ‘No, sir. We are probably just going to be open 6 a.m. to 2:30 or 3 p.m.’



A Guignard Diner employee speaks with customers on Thursday, Feb. 29.

ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

GUIGNARD DINER

439 N. Guignard Drive
Sumter, SC 29150

Ph: (803) 418-5532

Hours: Monday-Friday, 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.;
(Breakfast 6 to 10:30 a.m., lunch 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.)

“He said, ‘You will never make it.’ Then, he drove off.
“That is when I knew no matter

how many hours it took that I was going to make it.

“Another factor that has helped us is being blessed with good employees. Some of our current employees have been here about as long as we have been open.

“Another key is being willing to put in long hours. You don’t walk in at 6 a.m. and leave at 2:30 p.m. There is a lot of time being here before and after that. I get here early and stay late with paperwork and all the extras.”

WHAT THEY’RE SAYING

“The atmosphere is consistent and enjoyable. You get to take a little time away from work and just have a good time. The food is always good. The conversation is different every time, but the people are the same.”

— Gerald Lyles

“It’s a good way to start the day. Have a little breakfast and find out the news in town and what is going on.”

— Harold Nixon

“First thing, it’s a place, if you come in here at lunch time, they will turn it over about three times. They are very efficient, and it is probably the place that most people enjoy eating. It’s country cooking, and they put the menus on the wall. It’s also very friendly.”

— Bobby Richardson

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Sumter corners, then and now

THEN



Buildings on corner of East Liberty and North Harvin streets looking northwest

NOW



Uptown parking lot, corner of East Liberty and North Harvin Streets looking north-west

THEN



Lutheran Church, southeast corner of Hampton and Washington streets

NOW



Prisma Health Tuomey parking garage, southeast corner of Hampton and Washington streets



Sammy Way
REFLECTIONS

This Sumter Reflections photo essay takes a look at how popular corners in the city have changed through the years.

THEN



YMCA, northwest corner of West Liberty and Sumter streets

NOW



Vacant lot, northwest corner of West Liberty and Sumter streets

THEN



Booth Livery Stables, southeast corner of North Harvin and East Liberty streets

NOW



Former Carolina Hardware and Sam's Service Station, southeast corner of North Harvin and East Liberty streets

THEN



Motor Inn gas station, southeast corner of West Liberty and Sumter streets

NOW



The Item building, southeast corner of West Liberty and Sumter streets

Social Security Matters

Should I claim SS at 68 or wait until I'm 70?

BY RUSSELL GLOOR

National Social Security advisor at the AMAC Foundation, the nonprofit arm of the Association of Mature American Citizens

Dear Rusty — I have a question regarding my SS benefits. I turned 68 this month and work part time. I earned \$28,000 last year but will probably gross \$36,000 to \$38,000 this year. My husband collects his SS, and he earned \$25,000 last year. I was told by a financial planner that I should apply for my benefits now, instead of waiting until I'm 70. I would collect \$1,700/month at 68 and \$1,944/month if I wait. Which is the smarter move?

Seeking Answers

Dear Seeking — I'm sure your financial advisor would agree that your decision on when to claim your Social Security comes down to just a few basic things – 1) how badly you need the money, 2) your life expectancy, and 3) whether you will receive a spousal boost from your husband when you claim.

Because you have already passed your

full retirement age (FRA) of 66 years and 4 months, your work earnings won't negatively affect your monthly SS benefit amount. If you claim now, however, your work earnings will affect how much of your SS benefits will be subject to income tax. Assuming you file your income tax as "married/filing jointly," up to 85% of the Social Security benefits you receive during the tax year will become part of your income taxable by the IRS. If you do not urgently need the extra money that your SS will provide, then waiting longer to claim will also postpone paying income tax on your received benefits, and that may be a consideration.

Your life expectancy is key in making your decision on when to claim. You already know that your benefit will be \$244 per month more if you wait until you are 70 to claim. If you claim at 68 (e.g., this month), you will collect about \$40,800 by the time you reach 70. If you, instead, wait until age 70 to get that extra \$244/



GLOOR

month benefit, it will take you about 14 years collecting at the higher rate to offset the \$40,800 you would have received had you claimed now (in other words, you would break even moneywise at about age 84). If your life expectancy is longer, then waiting to claim may be the better choice. Of course, no one knows how long they will live but, for general guidance, average life expectancy for a woman your current age is about 87. Family history and your current health are obviously influencing factors as well. If you wish to get a more personal estimate of your life expectancy, I suggest using this tool:

<https://tinyurl.com/42daxn3y>

In the end, if you believe you will attain at least average life expectancy and you don't urgently need the money now, waiting longer will not only give you a higher monthly benefit in your later years, but also the most in cumulative lifetime benefits. If, however, you have reason to suspect you won't achieve at least average life expectancy, or you need the SS money sooner, claiming before age 70 is likely the better move.

One other thing to consider: If your benefit as your husband's spouse will be

more than your own earned maximum SS retirement benefit, then you should claim your SS benefit now. Your maximum benefit as a spouse would be 50% of your husband's full retirement age entitlement and, if that is more than your own benefit will be at age 70, then claiming now to get your maximum spousal benefit would be your best choice. To get a spousal benefit from your husband, your personal FRA entitlement (not your age 68 amount) would need to be less than half of his FRA entitlement. If that isn't the case, then you should make your decision based only on your own Social Security entitlement, as described above.

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An inside look at Lady Gamecocks' championship HC Schaffer through the eyes of key people in the program

BY **TIM LEIBLE**
tim@theitem.com

Jeff Schaffer brought the Sumter High girls basketball program to new heights this winter, leading the Lady Gamecocks to their first state title in four decades.

To celebrate the victory, I talked with some of the program's brightest stars, seniors Kiara Croskey, Rickell Brown and Keziah Sanders, as well as his right-hand woman, assistant coach Chris Vandevander, to get a new perspective on the longtime coach.

Croskey has played for Schaffer since she was in seventh grade, while Brown and Sanders got the call to varsity as freshmen. Vandevander joined Schaffer during the coach's first stint as the head coach, eventually replacing him when Schaffer stepped away in 2008 to take over as director of golf at Oak Hills Golf Club in Columbia. The two reunited when Schaffer took the program back over in 2017, and the rest is history.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST INTERACTION WITH COACH SCHAFFER?

BROWN: My first interaction with Coach Schaffer was very memorable and exciting. It was my first varsity practice, and my emotions were high, but he made sure that I felt welcomed and was sure to let me know that he was aware of what I could do on the court and was ready to do whatever to help to succeed.

SANDERS: My first interaction with Coach Schaffer was very exciting and outgoing!

He boosted my confidence on how great of a player I am and what he saw in me in the future.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO COACH ALONGSIDE HIM?

COACH V: We think a lot alike. We both focus on the details. We both knew we had a lot of talent here, and the ultimate was to win the big one. We've both been in it for a long time, and we thought if we stick around long enough, keep working hard at it, we had enough talent to pull this out. He makes it real easy. He just lets me focus on the basketball and handles all of the administrative side of things. He's really great at that, the organization, the prep.

WHAT WOULD PEOPLE BE SURPRISED TO LEARN ABOUT COACH SCHAFFER?

CROSKEY: One thing people would be surprised to know about him is that he's a very funny and goofy person. He looks so serious all the time, so people kind of don't get to see his chill side, but he's such a clown. He'll always give you a good laugh when you need it.

BROWN: He is very emotional and treats you as if you're his own child.

WHAT MAKES COACH SCHAFFER A GREAT HEAD COACH?

COACH V: He's really hard on them when it comes to basketball and doing what they're supposed to do. He very much shoots them straight. Most people don't see this side of him, but he's really a softy. He wants to do right by the kids,



Sumter High head coach Jeff Schaffer, second from left, raises the state championship trophy while flanked by, from left, Superintendent William Wright Jr., Principal Anamaria Sandor and Athletic Director Crasten Davis after beating Rock Hill on Friday, March 1.

PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

he wants to give them experiences, he's got a lot of love for them.

CROSKEY: Because he sees so much of the potential of his players and he just wants the absolute best for anyone who has the opportunity to play for him. He'll always remind you that everything is a process and you have to trust it, and the hard work you put in now will most definitely pay off later. He's also very supportive in anything you do, but he will also let you know when you're wrong, and that's what you want from a coach so you can learn from your mistakes and be better. He's like a second father.



Sumter High head coach Jeff Schaffer, center back, hugs Araina Ross in the locker room after their championship win.

The Grind quick hitters: Fun facts with Wilson Hall's Clark Kinney

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

We featured Wilson Hall's Clark Kinney last month on The Grind, which is presented by The Bank of Clarendon. While we covered a lot in our story with Clark, there were a lot of great responses that didn't have a perfect place in the story. Now we have a chance to share some tidbits on Clark that touch on everything from his approach on the mound to his favorite meal.

WHO DID YOU GROW UP MODELING YOUR GAME AFTER AND LOOKING UP TO ON THE DIAMOND?

I'm a big Braves fan, so I love Austin Riley, the third baseman. I love his swing and the way he carries himself. I think he's a great role model. I do love a little bit of flashiness, a little emotion on the field and a couple of names that come to mind are Marcus Stroman, he's



Wilson Hall's Clark Kinney is a star on the diamond, but he can also smoke a mean brisket.

ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

a pitcher that I've always loved to watch pitch, just the way he competes every pitch. And I used to be a big fan of Javier Baez. We went to Chicago and watched him play. His flashiness and the way he carried himself with a little swag.

WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH ON THE MOUND AS YOU ATTACK AN AT BAT?

Since I've played with a lot of these people before, I kind of know their tendencies and what they like or don't like at the plate when I'm facing them. That'd be the first thing is just do I know some of their weaknesses and

what are their strengths? From there, you have better days than others, but days where I can throw all (my) pitches for strikes, I do like to work backwards a lot. A lot of people say to start with a fastball and try to get ahead, but if I can get ahead with my curve that's even better.

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE RIVALRY WITH LAURENCE MANNING?

A lot of respect for Laurence Manning and everything they do. The rivalry, every time we play them, it's going to be a good game, no matter how much better they are than us or us better

than then, every time it's going to be a close one. They've been good for a long time, they have a great coach and great players that know what to do and are coached well. It makes it tough. And they have a great environment on the road and at home, so it's tough to play them but it's a blast. It's something I look forward to and us seniors are all going to miss once we're gone.

HOW HAS WILSON HALL PREPARED YOU TO MAKE THE JUMP TO COLLEGE AT WASHINGTON & LEE?

They challenge you. I'm going to face a challenge next year, and it's nothing that I haven't seen before because they challenge me here every day, not just with schoolwork, but with anything. Being able to recognize the challenges and overcome them. They also push us to do well. They want you to do well, but they won't do it for you. Finding it inside you to do it and do it right has prepared me to not just go off to college but for my life. I'm super grateful for this place and everything they've done for me and my family. I'm gonna miss it but I'm ready to head off.

WHAT'S YOUR PREGAME ROUTINE AND MEAL/SNACK?

I try to get a good pregame meal in. Same thing with football, I like to be

pretty light. I like to feel light on the field. I get to the field pretty early, hit in the cage, then I'll go stretch out and do my bands and plyo. I'll throw and then I'll run a little bit, and then we'll take infield and be ready to go. I'm really into yogurt and granola. It's the Nature Valley Protein Granola and this certain time of yogurt that I probably eat once a day.

SUNFLOWER SEEDS OR GUM?

Both, but not at the same time. I like the Bigs Sizzlin Bacon, that's probably my favorite sunflower seed, and you've got to go with the Double Bubble for baseball, for sure.

FAVORITE TEAMS ACROSS SPORTS?

I'm a Braves (fan) and I like the A's too. My next door neighbor (JP Sears) is on the A's. They're not great, but I've gotta rep the Athletics good. In football, the Panthers are the closest, so I'm a Panthers fan at heart, sadly. Same with the Hornets.

FAVORITE FOOD?

I'd have to go with steak. It's a classic.

FAVORITE NON-ATHLETIC ACTIVITY?

A fun fact about me, but I'm actually a pretty big cook. I do like to cook a lot. I love to smoke a brisket.

EPPS ORTHO

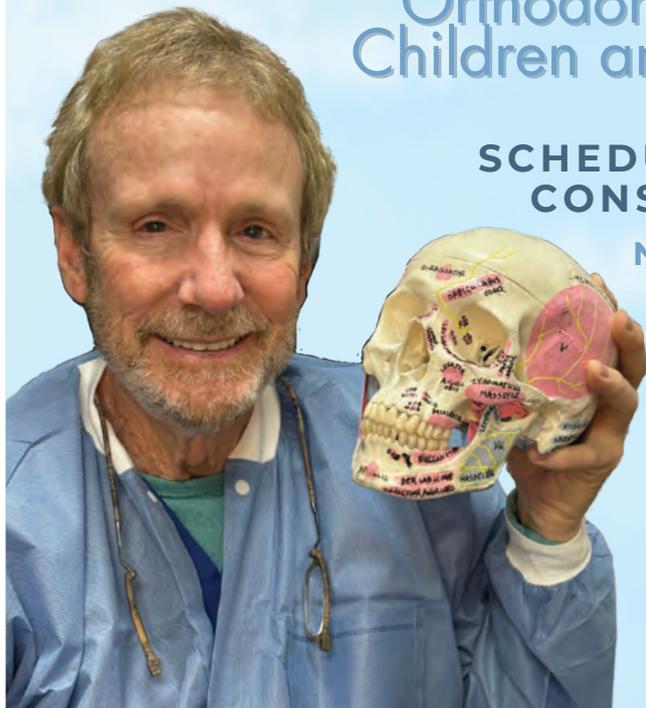
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Sumter High guard Keziah Sanders, left, talks with head coach Jeff Schaffer during the 5A state championship game against Rock Hill.



Sumter High head coach Jeff Schaffer fist-bumps a student during the Lady Gamecocks' parade through the halls to celebrate their state championship on Friday, March 8.

GAMECOCKS

FROM PAGE A32

SANDERS: What makes Coach Schaffer a good coach is how he pushes us and never lets us settle for less. He always tells us if he stops yelling then we already failed. So when he gets on me, I know he can see the better in me, and I know he wants the better for me.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE MEMORIES WITH COACH SCHAFFER OUTSIDE OF THE STATE CHAMPIONSHIP WIN?

BROWN: My junior year at our Christmas tournament at Hilton Head was my favorite memory of Coach Schaffer. We all wore Christmas PJs and laughed until our stomachs locked up.

SANDERS: My favorite basketball memory with coach was going to Hilton Head. We got to see everybody's lives a little bit outside of basketball and spending more time with each other and just enjoying each other's company wearing matching pajamas, going out to eat and shopping.

CROSKEY: My favorite basketball memory with coach would be when we played Carolina Forest at Carolina Forest this year and won. He would always be anxious about playing there because we always lose there, but I told him we got them this year, and we

did. He was so proud of me and almost shed tears because I told him that this year was ours. It was a special moment between us because we've grown so much over the years.

COACH V: I think for me it's when I realized how soft he was; that was one of the turning points. I'd seen that very hard side of him, but I think when we had one of our first banquets, he got really emotional. That was a turning point that he's here for these girls.

WHAT IS YOUR LASTING MEMORY OF PLAYING FOR COACH SCHAFFER?

BROWN: Going undefeated and winning the state championship with the best girls team in Sumter High history.

CROSKEY: My lasting memory of playing for him at Sumter High will always be winning a state championship because that's something no one could ever take from us. Knowing that he wanted one on the girls side, especially for us knowing we've been with him for the last four to five years and now that we got one is such a huge blessing and accomplishment.

WHAT DID THIS STATE CHAMPIONSHIP MEAN TO YOU?

CROSKEY: It was very important to win this state title all together because it's been something not only just me, but the rest of the team including the senior group has been wanting since



Sumter High head coach Jeff Schaffer, right, talks to his team during a timeout during the SCHSL 5A state championship game.

the beginning of the season. We've always been doubted by people because of our size, so every game we came across we just had to play with a chip on our shoulder. All the hours in practice and time outside of practice working on our craft individually and staying dedicated was something that brought us closer together to win it all.

BROWN: It was very important to win the state title this year. It shows the dedication and commitment that we've put in for the last four years! We overcame a lot of adversity knowing that we lost at such a high stage nu-

merous times in previous years. We stayed patient and waited for what we knew was ours for the taking.

SANDERS: It was very important to win the state championship this year because we been close three out of four years, and our excuse was we were young and we would always be back. It was very important to the seniors because we deserve this and we been there before, and we felt like this year was our reason. I'm never cocky, but I feel like nobody could stop our starting five, even knowing we didn't have the height. We wanted to prove it's always heart over height!



ADAM FLASH / SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Former Thomas Sumter football coach Brannon Tidwell, center, seen speaking at *The Sumter Item* Football Media Day, is going back to college after accepting a job at Murray State.

Former TSA AD Tidwell excited about chance to jump back into college football at Murray State

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

Former Thomas Sumter athletic director and head football coach Brannon Tidwell had the intention of leaving the Generals this spring. But when new Murray State head coach Jody Wright came calling, Tidwell couldn't say no to a good friend.

So, Tidwell packed his bags and made the move to Murray State, jumping back into the world of college football for the first time since leaving Florida State in 2006. He'll serve as the director of player personnel, a senior analyst, and he'll run high school relations.

"I always told myself I wouldn't get back into college football unless it was for the right person, no pun there," Tidwell said with a chuckle. "He's just gold to me. It's just a good opportunity. I'm excited to be here. The staff is really good, guys coming from South Carolina, Georgia, all over, a couple from the NFL. He put a really good staff together, and I'm glad to be a small part of it."

Tidwell's ties to Wright date back to a connection with one of his closest friends, John Lilly. Lilly and Wright coached together with the Cleveland Browns in 2019, leading to an introduction to Tidwell. There weren't many coaches who could pull Tidwell back into the college ranks.

"You always want to be with the right kinda person, the right kinda leader, someone that you trust and that person trusts you," Tidwell said. "It was just a group of guys that I'm familiar with, and I guess it was the right time to make this move."

Tidwell has plenty of experience in college football, having served under Bobby Bowden at Florida State after a run at Mississippi State. The landscape of college football has changed wildly since he left the college ranks in 2006 with the rise of the transfer portal and name, image and likeness deals. Luckily, FCS football isn't the same wild west that the FBS faces in terms of NIL deals.

SEE TIDWELL, PAGE A36



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TIDWELL FROM PAGE A35

“We’re FCS, so in a way, it’s like what college football was when I was in it in the mid-2000s where you’re not dealing with the NIL. Kids transfer, but you’re not dealing with paying the players. You don’t have to where we are,” Tidwell said. “You’re still dealing with the transfer stuff, which is new. But the kids are great and the work hard. We’re just going to try to flip the program.”

Tidwell will do a lot of behind-the-scenes work for the Racers with an emphasis on recruitment. As a former high school coach in South Carolina, Florida and Georgia, he certainly has a wealth of connections that will pay dividends in his new gig.

“I think it’s three-fold. One, I can help in the recruiting process with the high school kids. I can help with the high school coaches because I’ve been one for a long time,” Tidwell said. “And it’s been a bonus being in three different states as a head football coach, but now my problem is I have 200 friends from those three states that have reached out and sent me film. I’m trying to work on the hiring process to

get some people to dissect some of these kids because there are a lot of good football players out there, and you don’t want one to slip through the cracks.”

Wright came to Murray State from Shane Beamer’s coaching staff at South Carolina in January and quickly reached out to Tidwell. That began what turned out to be a very quick process. The former TSA coach credits head of school Ben Herod for being understanding of the situation.

“Coach Herod is a football guy, and he understood completely when I said this thing could work out,” Tidwell said. “It was a Thursday before I left, and (Wright) called me and said, ‘Can you start on Monday?’ I said I needed a few days to get organized and finish some stuff up at Thomas Sumter. That’s just the way it works in college football.”

It’s been full steam ahead since Tidwell walked in the door. He got to Murray State the day before spring practice began, and it’s been non-stop ever since.

“I got here on a Thursday, and we started spring practice on a Friday,” Tidwell said after the team played its spring game during the weekend. “I’ve



Former Thomas Sumter head football coach and athletic director Brannon Tidwell is excited to spend plenty of time in meeting rooms at Murray State.

PHOTO PROVIDED

kinda been drinking through a fire hose trying to keep up.

“I’m pretty dang busy. It’s a lot of getting up at 4 a.m. because we practice at six in the morning, and at seven at night, we’ve got player meetings,” Tidwell said. “The days are exciting, but it’s definitely a grind.”

While Tidwell hates to leave a young, growing program at Thomas Sumter behind, he thinks the future is

bright for the Generals.

“It’s a good job. Mr. Herod is a stud when it comes to the whole vision for a school. The leadership is there,” Tidwell said. “The work ethic and the buy in is there with the kids. Whoever the next head coach is, and I have a feeling it’s going to be a good one, is going to be walking into a really good situation.

“I’m excited to watch them and see how it unfolds.”

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Outdoors

Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic has something for outdoor lovers and their family members

STAFF REPORT

Calling all those who love the outdoors. The Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic is returning to the S.C. State Fairgrounds, 1200 Rosewood Drive, Columbia, from Friday to Sunday, March 22-24.

The S.C. Farm Bureau-sponsored event has something for every family member, including your dog.

If your dog loves to run, jump and swim, this canine aquatic competition is for you. If you don't have a dog, you still don't want to miss seeing these amazing dogs on all three days of the event. The schedule is:

Friday: Onsite registration/practice, noon; Big Air Wave #1, 1 p.m.; Big Air Wave #2, 3:30 p.m.; and Big Air Wave #3 – 6 p.m.

Saturday: Onsite registration/practice, 9 a.m.; Big Air Wave #4, 10 a.m.; Big Air Wave #5, 12:30 p.m.; and Extreme Vertical Competition, 3:30 p.m.

Sunday: Onsite registration/practice, 11 a.m.; Big Air Wave #6, noon; Speed Retrieve Competition, 2:30 p.m.; and Big Air Finals, 5 p.m. (Pro, Semi Pro, Contender and Amateur Finals)

If fishing is your thing, you have several attractions to choose from. On Friday only, visitors will have the chance to meet two world-class anglers, Jimmy Houston and Roland Martin, both renowned in the outdoor TV hosting realm.

Children will love SCDNR's Aquatic Education Pond. Numerous children have caught their first fish at this pond over the years of the Classic. DNR's

aquatic education staff, biologists, technicians and volunteers will be on hand to help kids catch a catfish.

Jim Vitaro's Hawg Trough, a mobile 5,000-gallon fish tank that is transported to locations across the country as an attraction at boat shows, sportsman expos, fairs and festivals, will be part of the fun. The tanks are filled with water

and stocked with fish. Using the PA system, the fishing expert/tank operator provides periodic seminars and fishing demonstrations for education and entertainment of attendees.

If looking to the sky is more interesting to you, check out the Extreme Raptor Show, the world's largest traveling collection of raptors with stunning birds of prey from diverse habitats. The show includes eagles, hawks, falcons and owls

from around the globe. The 30-minute show is exciting, entertaining and educational and has choreographed music and special effects performed by master falconer Jonathan Wood. There will be free-flight demos with a variety of birds and a meet-and-greet photo-op afterward with most birds on display up close and personal. The Raptor Project birds are regularly highlighted on national TV including Animal Planet, The Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel, National Geographic Explorer, The Today Show, Good Morning America, The Early Show, Fox News Channel, CNN, ESPN, PBS, CBN and TBN.

Wood, master falconer and wildlife rehabilitator, has assembled a collection of feathered predators that is unrivaled



The Extreme Raptor Show includes eagles, hawks, falcons and owls.



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Jim Vitaro's Hawg Trough, a mobile 5,000-gallon fish tank, is just one of the many attractions at the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic set for Friday-Sunday, March 22-24, at the S.C. State Fairgrounds.

in scope and size. Operating from two home bases in New York's Catskill Mountains and the Texas Gulf coast enables Wood, wife, Susan, and daughter, Rachel, to tour in a large RV that serves as home, office and traveling bird exhibit.

Besides the numerous exhibitors, there will be vendors of all kinds. Visit www.pscvender.com/allvendors to see the list.

HAVE YOUR ANTLERS SCORED AT THE CLASSIC

Each year at the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic, SCDNR wildlife biologists and wildlife technicians have an antler scoring station, in the Ellison building at the S.C. State Fairgrounds, where hunters can bring their antlers to have them scored. Depending on the score, the antlers may be ranked on South Carolina's all-time antler records list.

The objectives of the state records list are to recognize outstanding animals and to identify areas that produce quality deer. This information allows biologists to take a closer look at habitat and deer herd conditions in order to make future management recommendations.

Please fill out forms in advance to ensure the line moves as quickly as possible. Waiting times will vary depending on attendance. Drop the mount off at the beginning of the Classic, shop

around, and then return to the antler scoring station to pick up your mount on the way out of the Classic. Hunters must provide the necessary documentation, such as the date and county of the kill, and must sign a "fair chase" statement when they bring in a set of antlers for measuring. An accurate weight measurement at the time of the kill is also helpful. To see a score sheet, visit www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/deer/pdf/ScoreSheet.pdf.

Antlers in velvet or those that are broken and repaired or antlers separated from the skull plate cannot be officially measured for the state records list. If the lower jawbone of the animal was extracted during taxidermy or otherwise saved, it should be brought to the measuring session so biologists can determine the deer's age. Antlers don't have to be from this year's deer season.

Though the scoring process is free, you must purchase a ticket to the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic online or at the gate to enter the Classic.

The hours of the March 22-24 Classic are: Friday, noon-8 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m.; and Sunday, 11 a.m.-6 p.m. General admission is \$10, with children 12 and under admitted for free. Senior citizens, military, veterans and first responders receive a discount at the gate. Fairground parking is \$5. To purchase tickets online, visit www.pscvender.com/tickets.

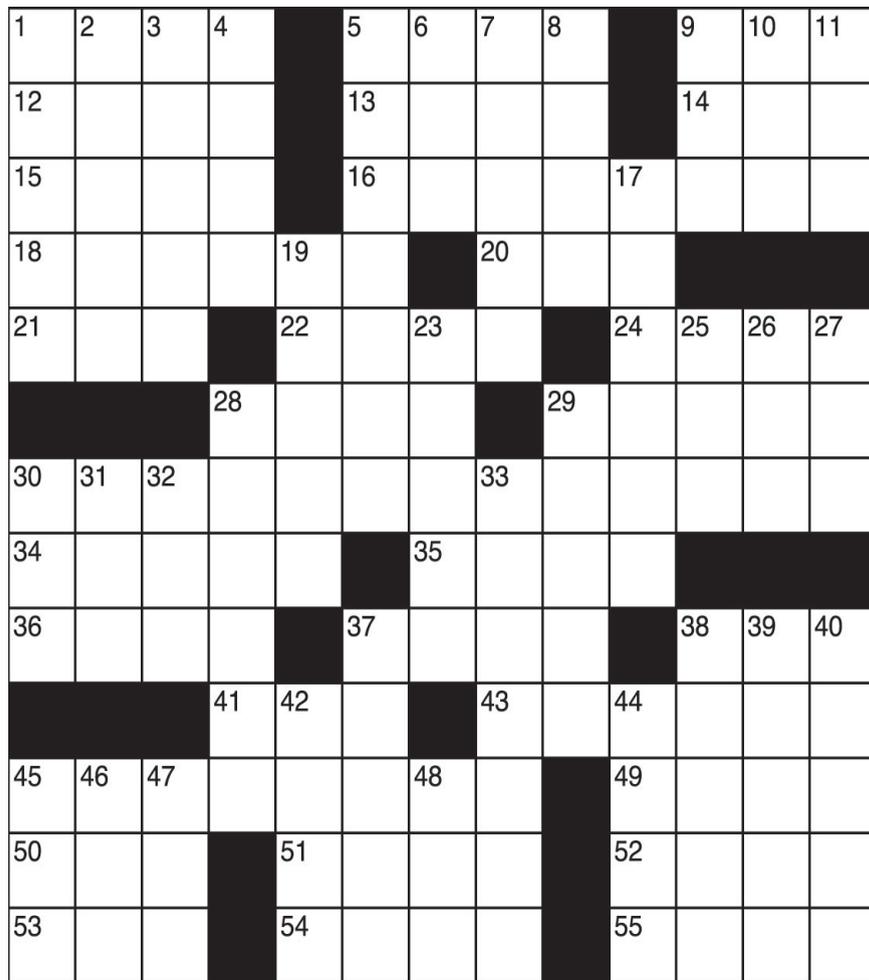
CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. Begone!
5. Skidded
9. Shirt sleeve
12. Ripped
13. Mexican snack
14. Reminder
15. Real-estate unit
16. Cooperative
18. Not as tight
20. ____ and reel
21. Statute
22. Chats
24. Race units
28. Olympic sled
29. Ultimate
30. Separately
34. Contaminate
35. Haul
36. Went over the limit
37. Utilizes
38. Dunk
41. Long time
43. ____ of Liberty
45. Lures
49. Bowling area
50. ____ soup (fog)
51. Escape
52. Clock's noise
53. Lobe's place
54. Ship off
55. Single bills

DOWN

1. Booth
2. Cold-weather treat
3. Cupid's missile
4. Ball supports
5. Stockroom
6. Testing center
7. Bakery workers
8. Extinct bird
9. Person who excels
10. Hurry
11. Had a session
17. In neutral
19. Explode
23. Hangs
25. Aardvark's snack
26. Good buddy
27. Sneaky
28. Borrower's friend
29. Lavish meal
30. "____ a Wonderful Life"
31. Tot's time-out
32. Spotted cube
33. Attired
37. Mom's brother
38. Sully
39. Small weight
40. Glimpses
42. Nincompoops



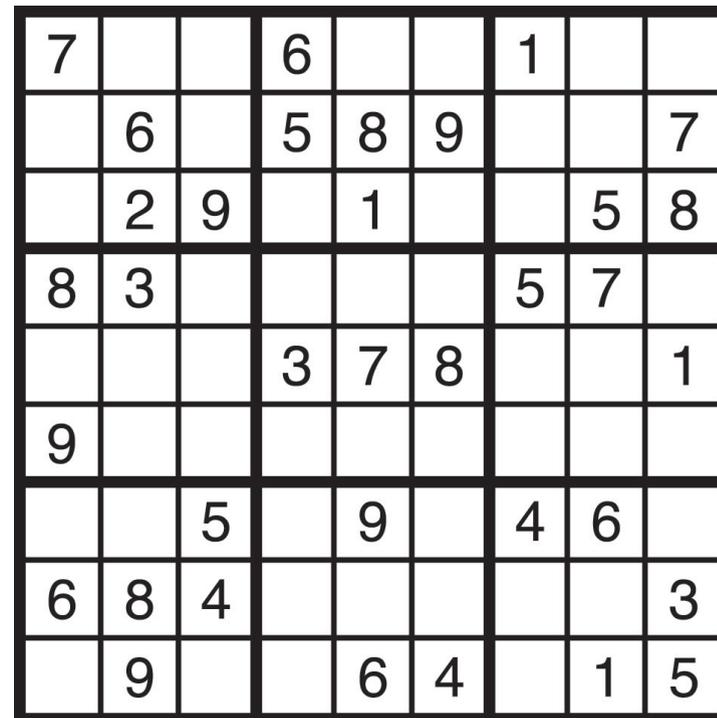
44. Voice range
45. Tarzan's chum
46. British brew
47. Asphalt
48. Five and five

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SOLUTION



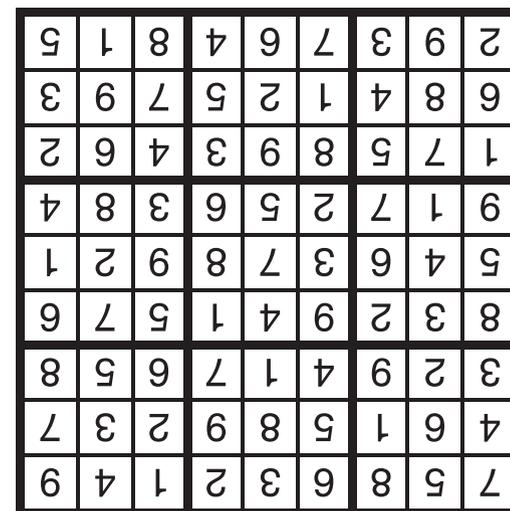
SUDOKU



HOW TO PLAY:

Fill the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 only once. Each 3x3 box is outlined with a darker line. You already have a few numbers to get you started. Remember: you must not repeat the numbers 1 through 9 in the same line, column or 3x3 box.

SOLUTION



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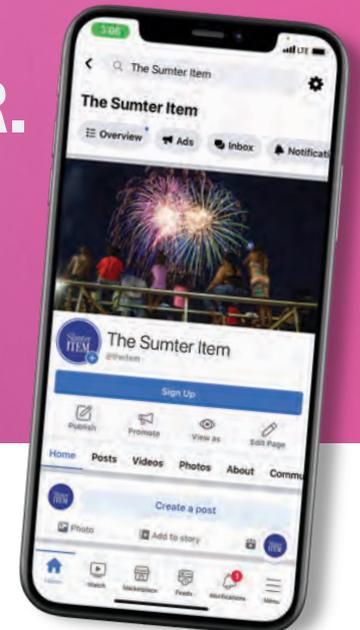
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