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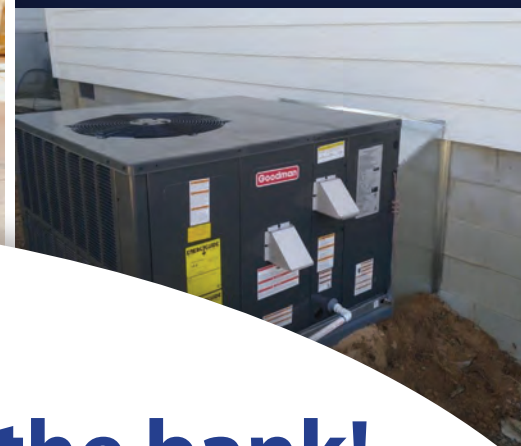
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## The Sumter Item is working to keep you informed by customizing news to your needs

**W**e've received a great response from the first editions of *The Sumter Item Impact*, and we're excited about the future of this newspaper that reaches more than 28,000 each month — more than any other regularly printed product in Sumter history.

Having an "Impact" is a big theme of 2024 at *The Item*.

We want to impact your life by making you more informed. We want you to know about events happening around you, know more about options for citizens regarding local government and to shine a

light on some of the great people in our area.

We also hope you read this and think "these *Item* reporters are really important to Sumter and doing amazing local reporting, and I want to get more," and subscribe to *The Item* at [TheItem.com/subscribe](http://TheItem.com/subscribe).

Even if you don't subscribe, we still want you to be informed. We know it's important for the health of the local community.

We've put a lot of emphasis in the past few years on

reaching locals who haven't traditionally been *Item* readers. One recent example I'm excited about is our

focus on reaching Gen Z, an initiative led by Alaysha Maple and comprised of our Sumter's Next Generation print and video series, regular visits by *Item* staff to schools, student field trips to our office and more.

This extends to sports as well, with The Grind, Athlete of the Week and the upcoming "Biggest Night in Sumter Sports" event,

The Bobbys.

Different groups within Sumter have varying wants and needs from local news, and our goal is to meet those needs where they are — in print or online, on social media or through video, through email newsletters or the USPS.

It's an incredibly challenging task, a challenge local media has never had to face in quite the same way before. Local news is no longer "one size fits all," and we're working every day to make it more customized to your needs.

Thank you for joining us on the journey. Let's make an impact.



**Vince Johnson**

## Sumter – What's in a name?

### All Southern counties named for Revolutionary War hero

**BY BRUCE MILLS**

[bruce@theitem.com](mailto:bruce@theitem.com)

Sumter County dots the map not only in South Carolina, but also in three other Southern states to include Alabama, Georgia and Florida. All are named for Gen. Thomas Sumter of our state, who was an American Revolutionary War hero.

Sumter County, Alabama, is by far the smallest with 12,345 residents as of the 2020 Census. Our Sumter County is the second largest behind Sumter County, Florida, which had 129,752 residents in 2020.

Although historically rural, Sumter County, Florida, has grown exponentially since the 1990s as a retirement community. Of all

counties in the U.S., it has the oldest median age at 68.3 years old. (Share that fact with your friends!)

#### COUNTIES WITH THE SAME NAME AND THEIR CURRENT POPULATION

Sumter County, Alabama, 12,345

Sumter County, Georgia, 29,616

Sumter County, South Carolina, 105,556

Sumter County, Florida, 129,752

#### WHAT ABOUT CITIES AND TOWNS?

It may seem unusual, but there is only one city or town named Sumter in the U.S., and you are living in it. But, put a "P" in the name, and the U.S. Census Bureau has four Sumpters listed. All are relatively small, with Sumpter, Michigan,

the largest with 9,660 residents. Sumpter, Arkansas, is the smallest with 119 people.

#### MUNICIPALITIES WITH SIMILAR NAMES AND THEIR POPULATION

Town of Sumpter, Arkansas, 119

City of Sumpter, Oregon, 204

Town of Sumpter, Wisconsin, 1,055

Township of Sumpter, Michigan, 9,660

City of Sumter, South Carolina, 43,463

#### AND WHAT IS UP WITH SUMTERVILLE?

According to online sources, there is one Sumterville in the U.S., and it is an unincorporated community in Sumter County, Florida. Given it is not designated as a city or town, the U.S. Census Bureau does not record the population in the community.



## Health

# Learn to recognize the signs of mental illness

BY S.C. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND HUMAN SERVICES

Mental health disorders cover a wide range of conditions. These disorders can affect your mood, thinking and actions. Lots of people may have mental health concerns. But when there are signs or symptoms that cause stress and your ability to live a normal life, this may be a sign of mental illness. May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Trying to recognize the signs of a mental illness isn't always easy. The National Alliance on Mental Illness has some common signs to look out for:

- Lots of worrying or fear;
- Feeling very sad or low;
- Confused thinking or problems learning;

- Extreme mood changes;
- Strong feelings of anger;
- Avoiding friends or social activities;
- Changes in sleeping habits;
- Low energy;
- Changes in eating habits like lack of appetite;
- Overusing drugs or alcohol;
- Thinking about suicide; and
- A serious fear of weight gain or concern with appearance.

Learning about mental health is important. It can help you detect signs of mental illness in yourself or others. Don't be afraid to reach out if you or someone you know needs help. Read more about these signs on NAMI's website, [www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Warning-Signs-and-Symptoms](http://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Warning-Signs-and-Symptoms).

If you or someone you know is in a crisis, call or text 988 for help.

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## Government

## Sumter ballot names to know before June 11 primaries

BY BRYN EDDY

bryn@theitem.com

The 2024 primaries are on Tuesday, June 11, for both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. You can vote in either but not both. The early voting period for them is from May 28 to June 7. Early voting centers are open from 8:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. See page A7 to find your precinct.

The deadline to apply for an absentee ballot for the primaries is May 31 by 5 p.m.

Polling places are open on June 11 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Here are some of the South Carolina state and local Sumter elections in 2024 with current elected officials and candidates who have filed for those seats below each current elected official (this is the most recent information shown on the state's election commission website):

**5th Congressional District, Rep. Ralph Norman**

Ralph Norman – R

Evangeline Hundley – D

**6th Congressional District, Rep. James E. Clyburn**

James E. Clyburn – D

Duke Buckner – R

Gregg Marcel Dixon – United Citizens party

Joseph Oddo – Alliance party

Justin Scott – R

Michael Simpson – Libertarian party

**29th Senatorial District, Sen. Gerald Malloy**

Gerald Malloy – D

JD Chaplin – R

**35th Senatorial District, Sen. Thomas McElveen**

Lindsay Agostini – R

Christina Allard – R

Jerry Chivers – R

Austin B. Floyd Jr. – D

Jeffrey R. Graham – D

Mike Jones – R

Lucy Mahon – D

Dwight C. Moore – D

Melissa J. Weeks-Richardson – D

**36th Senatorial District, Sen. Kevin Johnson**

Kevin Johnson – D

Eleazer Leazer Carter – D

Leon Winn – R

Jeff Zell – R

**House District 50, Rep. William W. Wheeler III**

William W. Wheeler III – D

**House District 51, Rep. David Weeks**

David Weeks – D

**House District 64, Rep. Fawn M. Pedalino**

Fawn M. Pedalino – R

Quadri Bell – D

Arthur Moyd – D

**House District 67, Rep. Murrell Smith**

Murrell Smith – R

**Sumter County Council District 1, Councilman Carlton B. Washington**

Carlton B. Washington – D

Angus McDuffie – R

**Sumter County Council District 3, Councilman Jimmy Byrd Jr.**

Jimmy Byrd – R

**Sumter County Council District 5, Councilwoman Vivian Fleming-McGhaney**

Vivian Fleming-McGhaney – D

Shery White – R

**County Council District 7, Councilman Eugene Baten**

Tasha Gardner-Greene – D

Gloria Lee – D

Michael Leviner – R

Filing for Sumter School District Board of Trustees and for Sumter City Council seats, both non-partisan boards, opens at noon Aug. 1 and closes at noon Aug. 15. Filing for city seats is done with the city clerk.



Republican and Democratic primary voting will be held Tuesday, June 11, with early voting from May 28 to June 7.

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## Party primary voting FAQs

## STAFF REPORT

Party primaries that will set the stage locally and nationally for the November election will take place Tuesday, June 11, but there are opportunities to cast your vote early.

Two early voting centers will be available for the June primary election, according to Pat Jefferson, Sumter County Registration and Elections director. They will be at:

- Sumter County Courthouse — 141 N. Main St., Sumter, Room 114 and Room 211; and
  - Delaine Elementary School — 5355 Cane Savannah Road, Wedgefield.
- Early voting begins on May 28 and ends June 7.

Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. On the day of the primary election, all regular polling precincts will be open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

To help prepare you to properly cast your ballot, here are answers to a few commonly asked questions.

**Q: DO I HAVE TO SPECIFY OR DECLARE A PARTY PREFERENCE?**

A: No, you do not have to specify a party when registering to vote. During a primary election, a voter can participate in either party's primary; however, you can only vote in one primary for a particular election.

**Q: WHERE WILL I GO TO VOTE?**

A: The voter registration certificate you will receive will contain the name of your voting place. You can also search your polling place at <https://vremms.scvotes.sc.gov/Voter/Login>. See page A7 for your precinct's voting location.

**Q: I HAVE LOST MY VOTER REGISTRATION CARD. WILL I NEED IT IN ORDER TO VOTE?**

A: It is not necessary to have your voter registration card with you when you go to the poll to vote; however, you must have either a valid S.C. driver's license or identification card issued by the Division of Motor Vehicles.

If you choose the Democrat ballot, these are the races you will potentially see on your ballot, depending on where you live in Sumter County:

- U.S. Senate, District 35
- U.S. Senate, District 36
- State House of Representatives, District 64
- Sumter County Council, District 7

If you choose the Republican ballot, these are the races you will potentially see on your ballot, depending on where you live in Sumter County:

- U.S. House of Representatives, District 6
- U.S. Senate, District 35
- U.S. Senate, District 36
- State House of Representatives, District 64

64



Government

Sumter County precincts

There are two early voting centers for the June Primary election:

- **Sumter County Courthouse**, 141 N. Main St., Room 114 and Room 211
- **Delaine Elementary School**, 5355 Cane Savannah Road, Wedgefield

Early voting for the primaries begins May 28 and ends June 7. Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and closed weekends and state holidays.

- Barrier Free** — Voter Registration Office, 141 N. Main St., Room 114, Sumter
- Bates** — Bates Middle School, 715 Estate St.
- Birnie** — Birnie HOPE Center, 210 S. Purdy St.
- Burns-Down** — Alice Drive Middle School, 40 Miller Road
- Causeway Branch 1** — Millwood Elementary School, 24 Pinewood Road
- Causeway Branch 2** — Millwood Elementary School, 24 Pinewood Road
- Cherryvale** — Cherryvale Community Center, 4340 Confederate Road
- Crosswell** — Crosswell Elementary School, 301 Crosswell Drive
- Dalzell 1** — Hillcrest Middle School, 4355 Peach Orchard Road, Dalzell
- Dalzell 2** — Hillcrest Middle School, 4355 Peach Orchard Road, Dalzell
- Delaine** — Delaine Community Center, 5400 Cane Savannah Road, Wedgefield
- Ebenezer 1** — Ebenezer Middle School, 3440 Ebenezer Road
- Ebenezer 2** — Ebenezer Middle School, 3440 Ebenezer Road
- Folsom Park** — Willow Drive Elementary, 26 Willow Drive
- Furman** — Furman Middle School,



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- 3400 Bethel Church Road
- Green Swamp 1** — Sumter School District, 1345 Wilson Hall Road
- Green Swamp 2** — Sumter School District, 1345 Wilson Hall Road
- Hampton Park** — Meeting House at Memorial Park, 407 W. Hampton Ave.
- Hillcrest** — Hillcrest Middle School, 4355 Peach Orchard Road, Dalzell
- Horatio** — Horatio Fire Station, 7720 Sumter Landing Road
- Lemira** — Lemira Elementary School, 952 Fulton St.
- Loring** — Crosswell Elementary School, 301 Crosswell Drive
- Magnolia-Harmony** — South Sumter Resource Center, 337 Manning Ave.
- Manchester Forest** — Wedgefield Fire Station, 2035 S.C. Highway 261 South, Wedgefield
- Mayesville** — Mayesville Fire Station, 20 S. Main St. E., Mayesville
- Mayewood** — R.E. Davis College Preparatory Academy, 345 Eastern School Road
- McCrays Mill 1** — Sumter County Career Center, 2612 McCrays Mill Road
- McCrays Mill 2** — Sumter County Career Center, 2612 McCrays Mill Road
- Millwood** — Millwood Elementary School, 24 Pinewood Road
- Morris College** — North HOPE Center, 904 N. Main St.
- Mulberry** — North HOPE Center, 904 N. Main St.
- Oakland Plant 1** — Oakland Primary School, 5415 Oakland Drive
- Oakland Plant 2** — Oakland Primary School, 5415 Oakland Drive
- Oswego** — Crestwood High School, 2000 Oswego Road
- Palmetto Park** — Central Carolina Technical College, 660 N. Guignard Drive, Building 700
- Pinewood** — Manchester Elementary School, 200 Clark St., Pinewood
- Pocotaligo 1** — Lakewood High School, 350 Old Manning Road

- Pocotaligo 2** — Lakewood High School, 350 Old Manning Road
- Privateer** — Pocalla Springs Elementary School, 2060 Bethel Church Road
- Rembert** — Rembert Fire Station, 7045 Post Office St., Rembert
- Salem** — Rural Fire Station, 6090 Myrtle Beach Hwy., Gable
- Salterstown** — Chestnut Oaks Middle School, 1200 Oswego Road
- Savage-Glover** — South Sumter Resource Center, 337 Manning Ave.
- Second Mill** — USC Sumter Arts/Letters Lecture Room, 200 Miller Road
- Shaw** — Shaw Heights Elementary School, 5121 Frierson Road
- South Liberty** — American Legion Home Building, 28 Artillery Drive
- South Red Bay** — South HOPE Center, 1125 S. Lafayette Drive
- Spectrum** — Kingsbury Elementary School, 825 Kingsbury Road
- St. John** — Shiloh Community Center, 475 Puddin Swamp Road, Lynchburg
- St. Paul** — Cherryvale Elementary School, 1420 Furman Drive
- Stone Hill** — Jehovah Baptist Church, 803 S. Harvin St.
- Sumter High 1** — Sumter High School, 2580 McCrays Mill Road
- Sumter High 2** — Sumter High School, 2580 McCrays Mill Road
- Sunset** — Kingsbury Elementary School, 825 Kingsbury Road
- Swan Lake** — Willow Drive Elementary School, 26 Willow Drive
- Thomas Sumter** — Hillcrest Middle School, 4355 Peach Orchard Road, Dalzell
- Turkey Creek** — Lemira Elementary School, 952 Fulton St.
- Wilder** — Wilder Elementary School, 900 Floral Ave.
- Wilson Hall** — Wilson Hall School, 520 Wilson Hall Road

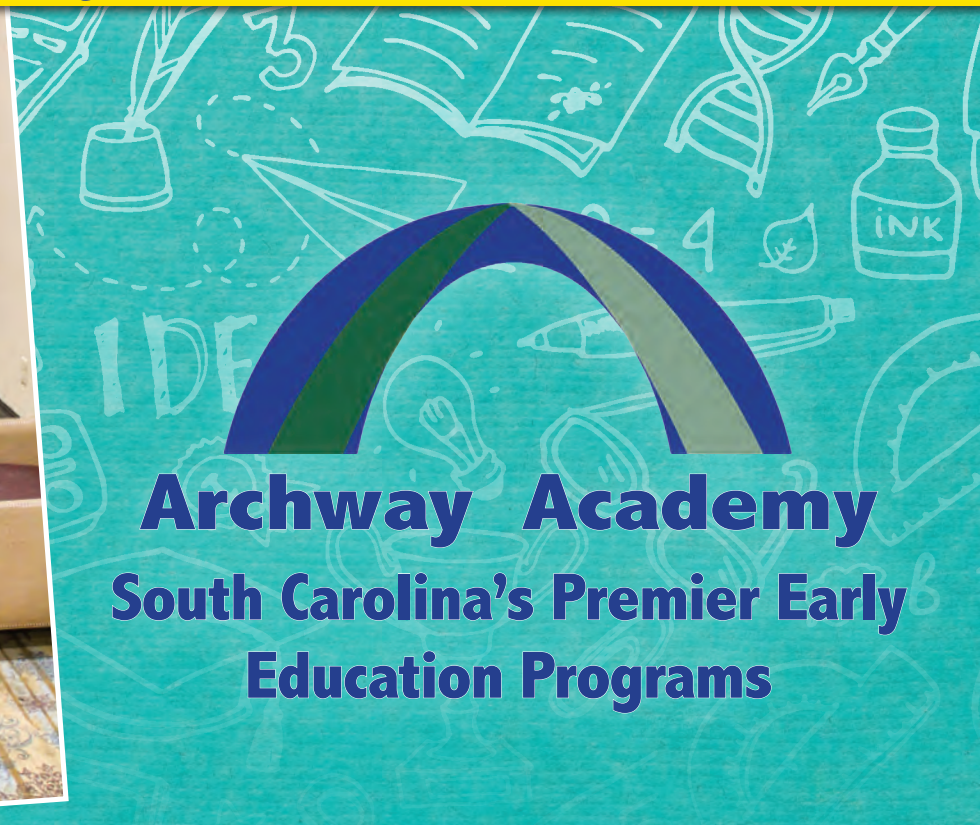




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## Government

# Private road work, downtown development, penny tax, dilapidated homes have all been on city, county agendas in the past month

BY BRYN EDDY

bryn@theitem.com

Both the City of Sumter and Sumter County have had dense meeting agendas during the last month, discussing topics ranging from private road maintenance to development. Here are some of the main headlines:

### COUNTY LEADERS CONSIDER MAKING PRIVATE ROAD WORK POSSIBLE WITH SPECIAL TAX DISTRICTS

County Administrator Gary Mixon told Sumter County Council in April there is still a need to do extensive research on what's involved in the upkeep of private dirt and gravel roads through implementing special tax districts, as he only knows of one other area in the state that has gone through with the strategy.

Newberry in recent years has created special tax districts for some private roads to fall under.

This solution, if feasible for Sumter County, which is yet to be determined, would make it so the county does not have to take ownership or liability of the roads but can still perform minimal road maintenance. This potential solution would, however, make it so the cost would be divided up among all the property owners on that road, and that will be added to their tax bill.

"This is where the real challenge is gonna be," Mixon said. "What can we do to hold down that cost as best we can because these folks already are in a situation where they are having difficulty paying taxes, so we don't wanna overburden them."

A story published in the *Newberry Observer* on Jan. 22, 2020, titled, "Newberry County Council discuss special tax districts," details the creation of two special tax districts in the county for the sake of road maintenance.

Voters living in the Mountain View subdivision approved the creation of the special tax district by a margin of 16-2 in December 2019, reporter Andrew Wigger wrote.

"The purpose is to maintain the unpaved roadways of their subdivision," Newberry County Administrator Wayne Adams is quoted as saying in the article. "The approved referendum calls for a not-to-exceed \$150 annual uniform service charge to offset

expenses incurred by Newberry County in providing this service."

To make this possible, the county council there had to approve an ordinance, and the property owners living in that area had to be in support as well; the same would apply in Sumter County, too.

Today, Sumter County has 110 miles of dirt road and 85 miles of gravel road, Public Works Director Karen Hyatt said during an April 23 committee meeting.

Earlier reporting from *The Sumter Item* details multiple county locals voicing to government officials the struggles they face daily just leaving their driveway. There are numerous private dirt and gravel roads in Sumter County that are challenging to drive on, leaving some locals living on those roads spending more at the car mechanic than one might have to otherwise, and more frequently discussed have been the challenges emergency vehicles have traversing these private roads that are not the county's legal responsibility to provide upkeep on.

County leaders will discuss this further during upcoming public meetings.

### DOWNTOWN SOUTH MAIN STREET PROPERTY TO BECOME RETAIL, APARTMENTS SPACE

Sumter County owns property at 13 S. Main St. that officials hope will be converted into a retail and living space.

The property, which is near Sumter Original Brewery, has been vacant for several years.

County officials are incentivizing the potential developer to make the first floor of the property a retail space and turn the second floor into apartments.

County attorney Johnathan Bryan told council that the developer would have certain deadlines to meet to acquire loan forgiveness and that the goal is to increase the value of the property to \$1 million three years after the sale of the property.

### SUMTER PENNY SALES TAX PREP CONTINUES WITH COMMISSION MEETINGS

The six residents appointed to the 2024 Capital Penny Sales Tax Commission have started discussing how the penny might

address public needs throughout Sumter County.

There have been four meetings during the last week of April and the first week of May, each of which mostly took place in executive session. The topics discussed during the executive sessions, as detailed on the agendas, include public safety, transportation, infrastructure, economic development and quality of life.

Here are the six people who Sumter County officials have named to the 2024 Capital Penny Sales Tax Commission (documents detail what area each person represents as well as race and gender to show whether the committee is representative of the county's demographics):

Herb McClary represents Sumter County and is a Black man.

David Bagwell represents Sumter County and is a white man.

Traci Nelson represents Sumter County and is a white woman.

Earl Wilson represents the City of Sumter and is a Black man. He was selected to be the chairman.

Kimberly Rauschenbach represents the City of Sumter and is a white woman. She was selected to be the vice chairwoman.

Nancy Williams represents the Town of Mayesville and is a Black woman.

If the Capital Penny Sales Tax, also called the Penny for Progress initiative, gets a majority approval from voters this November, 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. There is currently no penny tax.

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.

### DILAPIDATED HOMES

Talk of demolishing dilapidated homes across the city and county has been happening during local government meetings for a while now, and officials are nearing the next demolition.

City Manager Deron McCormick told council during the April 16 meeting that city officials have an ongoing list of homes that will be torn

down to eliminate blight in the area but that they're having to go about executing the process in a specific way so that the demolitions will be covered by grants. This process is also being done in collaboration with the county, he said.

"We know what the addresses are," McCormick said. "And what's had the clearance, what's had the environmental and what's ready to actually tear down."

According to 2023 reporting from *The Sumter Item*, demolition will be made possible through two grants, one from Congressman Jim Clyburn's office and one from Sen. Lindsey Graham's office.

This money, however, will be seen in the form of reimbursement from the federal government.

The county will be fiscally responsible and will be reimbursed with the grant.

The process to make these demolitions happen is strenuous and takes a while because every homeowner of the abandoned homes needs to be contacted and sign a release allowing the city or county to take ownership of the property and demolish the structure.

Reasons the homeowners are hard to reach vary, but for many of the dilapidated properties, the most recent resident is dead, so the home likely belongs to a relative who lives far away and does not perform upkeep on the property, according to McCormick.

And on the other side of the process, local officials have to wait for the go-ahead from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Codes director for the city John Macloskie said late last year there are about 200 homes in the city and about 100 in the county that could soon be slated for demolition, but odds are some property owners whose homes are on the list will not consent, so there may be leftover funding that could be used for other demolitions once the current list is exhausted.

The city and county applied for the grants at the end of 2022 but had performed an abandoned housing survey more than a year ago. The next survey will be done in about three years, as the survey is done every four years.

Most of the homes on the list, according to Macloskie, are in South Sumter.



## Education

## Top recent storylines from Sumter School District

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

**1. BOARD TO NOT SEEK MILLAGE INCREASE FROM COUNTY**

For the first time in numerous years, Sumter School District and its board of trustees will not pursue a millage increase from Sumter County Council.

According to district Chief Financial Officer Shatika Spearman, there has been a push from the state legislature this spring for school districts to use fund balance to offset increased expenditures, and districts have agreed to follow suit.

First reading on the fiscal 2024-25 budget was on Monday, May 6, and Spearman provided a presentation. At that time, projected expenditures

for the new fiscal year exceeded projected revenues by about \$2.4 million. Administration proposed the projected shortfall be covered by the district's fund balance, which was \$51.4 million as of June 30, 2023, and the board unanimously approved the recommendation.

In recent years, the district's general fund balance has grown considerably because of teacher and staff vacancies. The \$51.4 million in reserves represents about 4.5 months of expenditures on hand for the district. State law requires districts to have one month of expenditures in reserves.

**2. CROSSWELL DRIVE ELEMENTARY WINS REGIONAL HONOR FOR INTERVENTIONS**

The Southeastern School Behavioral Health

Community, which consists of 12 states, named Sumter School District's Crosswell Drive Elementary School as its 2024 School of the Year for its comprehensive social/emotional approach to student well-being since the COVID-19 pandemic. Elements of the school's new behavioral and mental health programming include the addition of three mental health counselors, two outside mental health agencies now providing services for more intense student needs and the installation of a collective belief system for students focusing on their success, ability to conquer challenges and be a great student.

Changes in student discipline have been noteworthy. According to Principal Shawn Hagerty, office-based discipline referrals went down 60% last school year from the prior year.

Those referrals represent more intense student behaviors and can result in in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, a phone call to the home and possibly expulsion.

**3. DISTRICT NAMES TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS**

As part of naming its 27 campuses' teachers of the year in April for next school year, Sumter also named its three finalists for district teacher of the year. The three finalists are Terri Johnson, a math interventionist at Cherryvale Elementary School; third-grade teacher Rachel Pressley at Shaw Heights Elementary; and seventh-grade science teacher Octavia Green at Furman Middle. The district teacher of the year will be named July 30 at the annual opening meeting for the new school year.

## LEARNING AND THE BRAIN

## Debunking the myth of personal learning styles

When educators read scholarly research on the brain, there is always the potential for misinterpretation.

In the field of Mind, Brain, and Education research-informed teaching, these errors are called "neuromyths," defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as "a misconception generated by a misunderstanding, a misreading or a misquoting of facts scientifically established (by brain research) to make a case for the use of brain research in education and other contexts." There are some incredibly potent neuromyths in circulation, but none bigger than the myth about personal learning styles.

The learning styles myth goes something like this: "Students are either visual (sight), auditory (hearing) or kinesthetic (touch) learners, and

teachers need to design their lessons based on the student's preferred learning style to improve student outcomes." But the research does not support this claim (i.e., in the words of psychologist and professor Dan Willingham, when "[y]ou give people the opportunity to use their preferred style or you prevent them from using their preferred style[,] you should see some difference in the effectiveness of the learning of the two groups — their comprehension of whatever task you set, their memory, something. That's the evidence that's lacking.).

Despite the lack of evidence, as of 2020, 29 states and the District of Columbia's "free, state-provided study materials reference student learning styles." Those materials are studied by aspiring teachers for their licensing exams, and so the neuromyth continues to be perpetuated ("Education Next"). Many school websites or admissions and marketing teams will trade on this myth — at this school, we identify



Brent Kaneft

your child's learning style and can then tailor the lesson to his/her needs. Either the school doesn't know the research on this topic, they're intentionally misleading you or they're just lying.

The claim that everyone has a learning style is not supported by research. We "may have a preference for the way [we] want to learn. However, this is not the same as having a learning style. A preference is what you like the most, not necessarily the way you would learn best" (Busch & Watson, "The Science of Learning," 2019). We would never, for example, tell a basketball player to just practice with their right hand since that is their dominant hand and feels the most comfortable. Can you imagine asking the opponents to play defense in a

way that supports your preference? Of course not. It's good they can dribble well with their right hand, but it's better if they can develop both hands. Experienced coaches will tell you good players become great when they improve their weaknesses. Likewise, good learners become great when they improve their weaknesses.

Debunking the myth of learning styles rarely wins me any friends. Students, teachers and parents often want to hang on to this idea. It feels intuitive. It feels "student-centered," that cliché in education that has led many schools to fear student discomfort and failure. I've said it before: learning is hard. It takes effort — it is not a tailored, clean process; it's messy, and when you try something you've never done before, you're going to be bad at it. That's OK. That's normal. With deliberate practice, you'll improve. But telling a student they are a visual learner, for example, will produce an inflexible, fixed mindset in that

child, a mindset that potentially leads students to complain, blame or quit when they are presented knowledge and skills in a different modality.

Could we discover one day that there is such a thing as learning styles? Maybe. But right now, the research points us in a different direction. Research supports and recommends teachers choosing the modality of their instruction based on the content of what they teach. In geometry, a teacher may use visual-spatial materials; in a writing course, a heavy verbal emphasis makes sense (Pashler et al, 2008). Instead of learning styles, I coach teachers to refer to a student's "current strengths and weaknesses," knowing, because of neuroplasticity, that the brain can change and that our weaknesses, if not avoided, can become our greatest assets.

*Brent C. Kaneft is an English teacher and head of school at Wilson Hall.*

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## Education

## Sizzlin' summer camps in Sumter about to start

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysa@theitem.com

School is almost out, so prepare to scream and shout as summer camps for kids of all ages begin to pop up across town.

From thrilling outdoor adventures to creative art experiences and everything in between, Sumter's summer camps will have it all to appeal to your budding explorer, art genius and sport enthusiast.

## YMCA

The local YMCA looks to give parents a break and kids a fun place to play this summer with full-day and specialty camps. With programs that ensure learning, fun and character-building will continue after the last school bell rings.

## Full-day camps

**Fun Factory** is for children ages 3-10 and includes traditional indoor camp, held at the main YMCA building at 510 Miller Road. Kids will engage in energizing, independent physical activities such as yoga, Zumba, nature walks and more. Children must wear closed-toe shoes.

**Teen Scene** is available for ages 11-14 and includes arts, crafts, games and field trips designed for them. Closed-toe shoes must be worn daily.

**Camp Mac Boykin** is an outdoor camp, fit for ages 7-14, focusing on building friendships, learning new skills and having fun in the sun. The camp sits on more than 50 acres of land with a natural swimming area with water features and activities.

## Specialty camps

**Aquatics Camp** is open to ages 9-14



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS

Dominique Hodge gives instruction during his Fantastic Beasts and Superheroes Art Camp at the Sumter County Gallery of Art in 2022. The gallery will host six weeks of camps this summer, starting June 3.



Kids enjoy a game during a summer camp at the YMCA in July 2023.

from 7:30 to 11:30 a.m. June 24-28 and/or July 15-19. Participants will have one-hour swim lesson instructions, scheduled activities, competitions and more.

**Gymnastics Camp** begins June 10-14 and July 8-12 for ages 5-12. The coaching staff at 220 Pine St. will ensure gymnasts grasp the understanding of

proper shapes and use of equipment as they rotate through four events, developing skills and having fun through games and drills. The camp is held noon to 4 p.m.

**Boxing Basics Camp** is open to campers ages 5-13 from June 24-28. Campers will learn the jab, footwork, proper form and the necessity of stretching, all while learning discipline, persistence and hard work. The camp is offered from 9 a.m. to noon.

**Athletics Camp** is available to ages 7-12, and campers will enjoy playing basketball while learning the fundamental skills of the sport and embracing Christian principles. The camp

will be held from 7:30 to 11 a.m. June 24-28.

Specialty Camp Extended Care is available to campers of the aquatics or gymnastics specialty camp. Campers will start their day in the Community Health Room near the entrance of the YMCA before being assisted in transferring to their specialty camp by counselors. At the end of the day, campers are escorted to extended care with the Fun Factory in the Y's Youth Department. Extended Care is open to ages 5-14.

Registration for all camps is open. A

SEE **CAMPS**, PAGE A15



## CAMPS FROM PAGE A14

one-time enrollment fee of \$25 is required along with a copy of your child's immunization records given to Sumter YMCA. A \$25 deposit per child, per week is required at registration. You may mix and match camp sessions throughout the summer; for example, a week at Fun Factory, a week at a specialty camp, etc.). Online registration is not available. For more information on the camps and costs, visit [ymcasumter.org/programs/camps](http://ymcasumter.org/programs/camps).

### SUMTER GALLERY OF ART SUMMER ART CAMP 2024

Sumter County Gallery of Art returns with another year of creative fun with the 2024 Summer Art Camp. The camp offers three hours of creative fun for campers ages 4-7 and ages 8 and older. The camp spans from June 3-28, July 8-12 and July 22-26. Split into morning and afternoon sessions, classes offer campers Fun in the Mud, an introductory course to pottery; Art without Limits, where campers explore a wide range of surfaces and structures to create art on and

with like 3D pens; FX Makeup, where campers learn to use special effects makeup like face paint, liquid latex and foam prosthetics and much more.

A limited number of tuition scholarships are available for students who would otherwise not be able to attend for financial reasons. Scholarships are awarded based on scholarship need and availability. To nominate your child or any other child ages 4-17 or for more information on the camps offered, visit [sumtergallery.com](http://sumtergallery.com). Donations to the scholarship fund are welcomed.

Morning camp will be held from 8:45 to 11:45 a.m. and afternoon camp from 12:45 to 3:45 p.m. at 200 Hasel St.

### WILSON HALL ABOVE AND BEYOND CAMP

Wilson Hall will offer more than 35 summer camps for all ages. From robotics to art to cheerleading to equestrian, campers can try their hand and indulge their interests all summer long. The deadline to register was April 1; however, late registrants may be accepted until May 20.

For more information, contact Summer Camp Director Brooke Tidwell at [brooketidwell@wilsonhall.org](mailto:brooketidwell@wilsonhall.org).

### SUMTER CAMP BBC

If you're looking to keep your kid active, creative and involved, then Archway Academy's Camp BBC is the place to be. Organized around a thematic camp approach and broken up into tracks, the camp offers Camp Kitchen, Art Explosion, Mad Science and Physical Domination. New themes are added each year, so campers can look forward to new and exciting activities each time.

Campers can also look forward to weekly trips to destinations like EdVenture, Whirling Wheels and Velocity Air Sports as well as water days, camp canteen and the camp store.

Camp kicks off at 2049 McCrays Mill Road and at 416 S. Wise Drive on June 3 and ends July 26. For more information, visit <https://archway.academy>, call (803) 773-6480 or (803) 773-4300.

### RAGIN PREP CHRISTIAN ACADEMY CAMP TRIPLE A

Ragin Preparatory Christian

Academy will host Camp Triple A — academics, arts and athletics — to get campers up, active and engaged with various activities from June 3 to July 19.

The camp will be split into two classes: infants to preschool at Little Lambs Learning Center at 4107 Thomas Sumter Highway in Dalzell and kindergarten and older at 68 Market St. The camp will run Monday-Thursday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and

on Fridays from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Registration is \$25, and tuition is \$85 weekly.

Campers will be venturing out on multiple field trips and will participate in many hands-on activities. Parents can register via QR code on the flyer or apply in person at 68 Market St.



Ragin Preparatory Christian Academy will host its Camp Triple A from June 3 to July 19. Hover your phone's camera over the QR code to sign up.



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## Education



ZAC HOOKS / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter School District's Pilgrim's Mobile STEM Explorer and its cybersecurity unit give a hands-on approach to learning about technology, math and science.

# Innovation on wheels

## District debuts mobile units for 21st-century learning

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

Technology is changing the way children learn, and two mobile STEM-related buses are helping to drive the future of science and math education in Sumter School District.

This school year the district has unveiled the Pilgrim's Mobile STEM Explorer and a cybersecurity unit to take 21st-century learning in science, technology, engineering and math with a hands-on approach to all the district's schools.

Year 1 has been an introductory year to the various concepts for all the district's students, according to district STEM Innovation Specialist Leroy Steigerwalt and district Cyber Security Instructional Specialist Aaron Johnson.

The duo visits schools together in the Pilgrim's Mobile STEM Explorer, and while Steigerwalt discusses the foundations of the engineering design process with students, Johnson pro-

vides an introduction to cybersecurity and protecting yourself in online gaming and being a "positive gamer."

The unit has also been on hand for more than 40 after-school events at schools to include STEM nights.

Because not every school in the district has a STEM lab, the goal this year has been to ensure all students received a foundation in STEM, Steigerwalt said.

Both men are former classroom teachers and design classroom extension lessons for teachers at the schools to continue teaching concepts throughout the year.

"Our programs will look completely different next year versus this year," Steigerwalt said.

The STEM bus unit features three rotation stations for hands-on learning experiences in coding, programming, robotics and circuitry. The STEM Explorer is equipped with computers, 3D printers, mini-drones, LEGO, robotics and more.

Johnson said the implementation is going in phases.

"It is almost like we are throwing the fish net out now for our students, so we are trying to learn our students



BRUCE MILLS / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter School District STEM Innovation Specialist Leroy Steigerwalt and district Cyber Security Instructional Specialist Aaron Johnson travel to schools across the district in the new STEM buses, bringing more opportunities to students to learn about changing technology and science.



Steigerwalt said the goal for this first year of the STEM buses is that every student in the district has a foundation in STEM learning, and next year the goal is to double their exposure to the programs on each bus.

ZAC HOOKS / THE SUMTER ITEM

first before we go in-depth with the other concepts," he said.

Children today are "digital natives" and have been receptive to the new concepts, they said.

The two men have researched the data and note that discipline referrals are down considerably at a school location on days when they are visiting.

Johnson shared an interesting story about how Millwood Elementary School children did not mind missing recess time for a lesson in cybersecurity.

"A teacher's class was scheduled to come and see me during their recess time, and they came in and were upset about that," he said. "But after I was done with them, they did not care that they missed their recess because they actually had fun with the cybersecurity lesson."

Next school year, both buses will be visiting schools at the same time, and the goal is for every district student to have two sessions with both programs so exposure will be doubled, Steigerwalt said.



## The Arts

# Get creative, get involved in Sumter's art community

**BY ALAYSHA MAPLE**

[alaysha@theitem.com](mailto:alaysha@theitem.com)

Sumter's arts and entertainment community is always looking for fresh, new faces to add to carry on its creative legacy. If you're looking for a place to stretch your artistic talents, then try these local organizations on for size.

## Sumter Civic Chorale

Performing on stages far and wide, Sumter Civic Chorale has used its voices to uplift spirits since January 1986. Founded with the assistance of Sumter County Cultural Commission, the chorale appeals to singers of all ages, backgrounds and beliefs. You do not have to be able to read sheet music in order to join, just have a want to sing and desire to inspire.

Rehearsals are on Mondays at 7 p.m. at 155 Haynsworth St.; no audition is required to join. For more details, email [sumtercivicchorale@gmail.com](mailto:sumtercivicchorale@gmail.com).

## Sumter Community Concert Band

For more than 40 years, Sumter Community Concert Band has provided free entertainment to its community, all to fulfill its mission to allow musical expression, contribute to the community's musical environment, provide opportunities to connect with seasoned musicians and reaffirm the community concert band's position in American music. Members come from near and far and from a wide range of professions, from teachers to lawyers to students and more.

No auditions are required; however, members must have played an instrument in a concert band in high school or college. Rehearsals will begin on Aug. 29. Contact Concert Band President Barbara

Rearden at (803) 469-0508 or Band Publicity Chairman Rick Mitchum at (803) 983-6370 for more information.

## Sumter County Gallery of Art

Since 1969, the community-based gallery has brought artwork from artists all over the world to our community doorstep. Its three formal galleries are considered one of the best exhibition spaces in South Carolina.

The gallery offers classes in pottery, painting, fiber art, sculpture, colored pencil drawing, sequential art, jewelry making, claymation, yoga and more throughout the year for adults and children, with its summer art camp being a big draw for youth. Various exhibitions are available year-round for art enthusiasts to browse.

For more information on art classes and exhibitions, visit [sumtergallery.com](http://sumtergallery.com) or call (803) 775-0543.

## Sumter County Museum

Resting on the outskirts of the Old Sumter District and featuring exhibits, living history events and special programs seeking to bring folks together, Sumter County Museum is a hub of history and community. Book signings with renowned writers and cooking, sewing and woodworking classes are offered year-round at the Williams Brice House and the Backcountry.

Recently, the museum announced plans to break ground on a new venue that will house exhibitions dedicated to Sumter's military history and renowned artist and Sumterite Grainger McKoy; there will also be rotating exhibits throughout the year. The museum plans to break ground in September 2024.

Visitors can also venture over to Temple Sinai Jewish History Center to explore Sumter's connection to survivors and liberators of the Holocaust.

For more information, visit [sumter-museum.org](http://sumter-museum.org) or call (803) 775-0908 to

schedule a guided tour.

## Sumter Little Theatre

This community theater brings comedies, dramas, musicals and more using talented actors of all ages and levels of acting experience. The benefits of live arts are that it is both intimate and immediate, as the passionate line delivery of actors promotes conversation among audience members about difficult topics in a safe space.

If you're looking to be a part of the good times over at our little theater, newcomers are always welcomed to volunteer at the box office, usher during a show, help with costume and set construction, makeup and hairstyling or audition for a show. For more information, call SLT at (803) 775-2150 or send a note on its contact page at [sumterlittletheatre.com](http://sumterlittletheatre.com).

## Sumter Opera House

Nestled in the heart of downtown Sumter, Sumter Opera House invites people in on its rich history and endless variety of artistic offerings. Its stage has served many artists from around the world with its 550-seat auditorium. Alongside its main-stage performances, the Opera House offers various series, including the Acoustic Café series, Cinema series which begins June 6 and numerous special events throughout the year.

Those looking to witness the goodness of the Opera House can attend a show or get involved by volunteering at concessions, in the box office or ushering at a show. To become a volunteer, visit [sumteroperahouse.com/volunteer](http://sumteroperahouse.com/volunteer).

To learn of upcoming shows, visit [sumteroperahouse.com/events](http://sumteroperahouse.com/events).





# Sumter School District's Seamless Summer provides meals for children

## STAFF REPORT

The Seamless Summer Option, Summer Feeding Program, allows school food authorities to provide free, nutritious meals and snacks to children 18 years of age or younger during summer vacation periods. A person 19 years of age and over with a mental or physical disability as determined by a state or local educational agency and who participates during the school year in a public or private nonprofit school program may participate in the program.

The program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

According to the South Carolina Department of Education, "During the school year, many children receive a free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch through the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Program. When schools let out, many children are at risk of going hungry. Lack of nutrition during the summer months may set up a cycle for poor performance once school begins and make children

more prone to illnesses and other health issues. The Summer Food Service Program and the Seamless Summer Option are designed to fill that nutrition gap and provide children with the nutritious meals they need and deserve. They are federally funded programs that provide free meals to school-aged children, 18 years old or younger, living in an area-eligible location."

Participating sites may choose either breakfast and lunch, breakfast and a snack, or lunch and a snack per day, per child per site. Sites may be a school, church, recreation center, camp, playground and community park.

## DATES OF OPERATION

The Summer Feeding Program will operate from Monday, June 3, 2024,



through Thursday, July 18, 2024.

## TYPES OF MEALS PROVIDED

• Breakfast meals consist of one serving of fluid 1% or nonfat milk, one serving of a vegetable or fruit or full-

strength juice and one serving of grain or bread.

• Hot or cold lunch meals consist of one serving of fluid 1% or nonfat milk, one serving grain, one serving meat/meat alternate, one serving of fruit and one serving of vegetable.

• Snack meals consist of two food items from two different food components. Food components are 1% or nonfat milk, vegetable or fruit, grain and meat/meat alternate.

All meals must be consumed on-site, with the exception of whole fruits or closed packaged grain products.

According to the department, "There are many organizations in South Carolina that are providing free healthy meals to children throughout the summer months. Please use one or more of the following resources to find a location near you: locate a site on the USDA Summer Meals Map at <https://tinyurl.com/2h769j3>, call 1-866-3-HUNGRY (348-6479) or text 'FOOD' to 304-304."



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## Religion

### Trying a little harder to be kind: Part II

Last summer I was serving at a church in North Carolina (They think everything is better there than it is in South Carolina. We don't have to tell them the truth, or they will all want to move down here). In the summer, folks typically take vacations, and so worship attendance is a little thinner. Sometimes for a change of pace I like to do a lighthearted sermon series for those who are around. I preached a sermon titled, "Can You Be a Christian and Drive a Car?"

We have serious issues that we must deal with as a community like our neighbors going hungry and gun violence, but each and every day we can exert a little more effort, spend a little more energy thinking about how we act toward others. And when we get behind the wheel of the car, perhaps there is no better time to stop and think about who we want to be.

My thoughts on this very important daily opportunity come from my own personal experience. When I climb into the driver's seat and get behind the wheel, I find it difficult to remember that as a person of faith I am



**Rev. Stewart Rawson**

A year ago, I was turning right, and I was in a hurry (when are we not in a hurry?). There was a car opposite me

called to love others. It is so easy to focus on what I need to do, where I need to go, how late I am and forget that anyone else exists. When the light changes and the car in front of me hesitates even for two seconds, it is difficult for me not to lose my religion.



that was turning left. They had the right of way, but I thought I could take advantage of the small gap and go quickly. The driver laid on their horn (literally I think they were lying on their horn). We were both going to the same drive-through, and so we made the same turn into the parking lot. When she got out of her car, she was screaming at me, and I was afraid for what might happen next. I got out of line and left, hoping to diffuse the tense situation. As I said, it was my hurry that started the chain of events.

I committed that day to work hard on being a more patient driver. I made a pledge to myself that I would try to stop at yellow lights rather than trying to fly through them. I vowed that I would take a deep breath and count to 10 when the actions of another driver made me angry. Don't ask me (or my wife) how I am doing, but I am still trying harder each day.

*Stewart Rawson is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Downtown Sumter.*

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## Entertainment

## Top 5 television season series recommendations

This composition is going to reflect my season recommendations of various series throughout the years. Before offering my analysis, I would like to express the greatness of the seasons requires beginning the show from its onset. Each recommendation varies from genre to genre within the television outlet. It is vital to remember these reviews will contain minor spoilers. Also, these specific recommendations contain mature themes, gruesome violence and various innuendos. Parents, use discretion before introducing children to these series.

## 1. "TRUE DETECTIVE" (SEASON 1)

The "True Detective" series serves as an anthology set of various stories focusing heavily on themes pertaining to philosophy, religion and the more menacing elements residing within the fabric of human nature. Matthew McConaughey portraying Detective Rustin Cohle and Woody Harrelson as Detective Martin Hart mesmerize viewers with their magnetic, raw and intense acting performances as two detectives investigating mysterious, grisly crimes. The story unfolds through flashbacks and present-day interrogations. Its innovative format kept viewers guessing as well as being on the edge of their seats. Running eight episodes, the series presents an intense atmosphere, leaving elements of horror to the imagination, gradually challenging the viewer in thinking outside of the box. My analysis is intentionally vague, the reason that any detailed revelations will spoil the masterpiece of this first season. "True Detective" Season 1 contains no filler, as every episode rides on the momentum into the next sequence of the story with beautiful ease.

## 2. "DEXTER" (SEASON 4)

A serial killer adhering to a moral code instilled in him by his deceased father who recognized his violent tendencies, Dexter Morgan, portrayed by Michael C. Hall, utilizes his skills and knowledge as a forensic specialist hunting down far more gruesome criminals and was powerfully intriguing. I had never read or heard of that level of creativity explored in such a fashion. To say I was immediately sold on the concept would be an understatement. In



A REVIEW BY  
ISAIAH RIDLEY

the fourth season, Dexter continues adjusting to his double life as a doting husband and father along with his vigilante serial killing. A new threat lurks in the shadows with the moniker coined the Trinity Killer. "Dexter" absolutely peaked with this season. Everything from beginning to end remains pure gold. John Lithgow earned the much-deserved Emmy for his performance as The Trinity Killer. He captured the essence of an unassuming figure with evil, sinister motivations hidden deep beneath the surface. Each episode demonstrates the clear dynamic differences between the two killers in this deadly game of cat and mouse. Michael C. Hall, Jennifer Carpenter and John Lithgow are amazingly at the top of the acting game, resulting in a chilling and unforgettable ending.

## 3. "VICE PRINCIPALS" (SEASON 1 AND 2)

This underrated comedy series premiered on HBO, lasting only two seasons. I found myself curious after seeing the cover of the DVD, catching my interest upon noticing Danny McBride and Walton Goggins were involved with the series. "Vice Principals" is a quirky, unique, hysterical two-season affair with McBride portraying Neal Gamby and Goggins as Lee Russell. Both explosive characters are feuding over who will receive the promotion to head principal at



Jodie Foster, from left, Issa Lopez and Kali Reis attend the red carpet event for their HBO series, "True Detective: Night Country," in Mexico City on Jan. 11, 2024.

AP PHOTO / EDUARDO VERDUGO

their respective educational institutions. What follows is a series of hysterical misfortunes and unexpected alliances. McBride and Goggins display amazing comedic timing and chemistry with memorable lines, realistic facial expressions and dynamic physical comedy, creating genuine tear-inducing laughter. I will say the humor on display is crude, rude, lewd, and innuendos in dialogue pieces could bring a degree of an offense. It is best to use your own discretion before watching "Vice Principals."

## 4. "SUPERNATURAL" (SEASON 5)

Lucifer is free from his 1,000-year sentence, completing the biblical prophecy of an emerging apocalypse. Sibling hunters Sam and Dean Winchester are facing the looming threat of Lucifer also releasing the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Various angels and demons with different agendas join the battle, too. Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki continue their quality outing with their humorous chemistry and emotional perspectives as brothers desperately fighting against evil. The fifth season of Supernatural from the beginning was to serve as the complete series finale for the show. Instead, its overwhelming popularity kept the show running for an additional 10 seasons. I have to say

this season is perfect "Supernatural" quality with creepy atmospheric horror elements and darker biblical themes, resulting in a powerful, gripping end will break the hearts and souls of viewers.

## 5. "DRAGONBALL Z" (FRIEZA AND THE CELL SAGA)

Japanese animation is a fascinating medium with intricate, emotional and intense storylines providing significant character development. I have always appreciated realistic, detailed artwork. The Frieza and Cell Saga are two tales that feature a level of writing indicating monumental stakes with world-changing proportions. Goku, Vegeta, Gohan, Piccolo and Trunks unite to face dominating threats seeking to eliminate the world and its inhabitants. Both Frieza and Cell are the perfect villains with no redeeming qualities on the surface and internally. Watching Goku, Vegeta, Gohan and Trunks grow in character development with increasing stakes never ceases in creating authentic emotions. Japanese anime takes character development combined with consequential themes seriously. Out of the entire "DragonBall Z" seasons, I maintain that both the Frieza and Cell Sagas are Japanese animation at its creative and emotional peak.



## Entertainment

# It's festival season in the tri-county area

There's a lot going on in May and into the summer across the area. Pick an event, pack up the family and make some new memories.

## SUMTER COUNTY

**Sumter Farmers Market** is up and running from noon to 5 p.m. Fridays through Nov. 22 at USC Sumter, 200 Miller Road. Grab some lunch at one of the many food trucks and purchase quality, farm-fresh products and unique hand-crafted items all at the market. SFMNP-Senior and WIC vouchers are accepted.

The famous three-day **Iris Festival** surrounding the blooming of the irises at Swan Lake Iris Gardens will include concerts, arts and crafts, plants and flowers, antique and classic car shows, various contests and many children's activities. The festival will be held Thursday-Sunday, May 23-26, at Swan Lake Iris Gardens, 822 W. Liberty St. The festival kicks off with the Taste at the Gardens on Thursday, May 23, from 6 to 9 p.m. with entertainment and food vendors on the Garden Street Gate of the gardens. The theme is "Hawaiian Night," and Hawaiian attire is encouraged. There will be a performance by Charleston Polynesian Dancers along with music by DJ Howie D, food booths and trucks and boat rides. Admission is free. On Friday, May 24, and Saturday, May 25, the festival runs from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and on Sunday, May 26, it will run from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The legacy of African American cowboys and frontiersmen will be celebrated at the annual **Black Cowboy Festival and Rodeo**. Education, recreation and cultural appreciation can be expected throughout the three-day affair. The festival will be held Thursday-Sunday, May 23-26, at Greenfield Farms, 4585 Spencer Road in Rembert.

**Fourth Fridays** starts back up for the summer on Friday, May 24, with Honey & the New Era Band in front of



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

The first Fourth Friday of the season in 2023 brought out a few hundred people to dance, eat and drink on Main Street. This year's concert series begins on Friday, May 24, with Honey & the New Era Band in front of Sumter County Courthouse.

Sumter County Courthouse, 141 N. Main St. Every fourth Friday through September, a different band will take the stage at 6:30 p.m., and the event will last until 9 p.m. with food trucks/vendors, beer and free entertainment. Palmetto Optimist Club will give out free books to kids and have popcorn for sale, and Sertoma Club will sell the beer. Downtown restaurants will also be open during the event. Bands on the schedule are Honey & the New Era Band in May, The Live in the Flesh Experience on June 28, Chief Complaint on July 26, Second Nature on Aug. 23 and Too Much Sylvia on Sept. 27. Bring your own chairs. Coolers aren't allowed.

Enjoy local beach music during the **Multicultural Festival** on the grounds of Patriot Hall on Friday, May 24, with featured guests The Tams from Atlanta and 14-K Gold Band and local singer Terence Lonon. Bring your lawn chairs and get ready to eat good food from a variety of food trucks. The event starts at 6:30 and goes til 9:30 at 135 Haynesworth St. Doors open at 6 p.m. Buy tickets at Patriot Hall or online at <https://tinyurl.com/yrnm3vrn>.

Pick up your paddles for a charity **pickleball tournament** to support a worthy cause on May 25-26 at Palmetto Tennis Center, 400 Theatre Drive.

The event benefits the Gary Sinise Foundation, which supports veterans, first responders and their families. Register for the tournament at <https://tinyurl.com/4zj3mv2k>. Everyone who participates will be entered into a drawing to win prizes. Not a pickleball player? You can come out to watch the games instead. There will be food trucks there and a bouncy house for the kids. Stretch Zone will also be on site both days from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. doing 15-minute stretches per person for free. The action starts at 8 a.m. both days and runs until 6 p.m.





PHOTO PROVIDED

Sawyer Brown will perform at the Palmetto Pickle Festival on May 18 in New Zion.

## EVENTS FROM PAGE A23

Splash around at the **Sumter Aquatics Center** to celebrate the start of summer and the center's opening day on Monday, May 27, Memorial Day. There will be free admission on that day. The center offers classes and activities and a free water aerobics class. You can also rent the center for parties, which includes use of the new lazy river. Usual admission for all guests is \$3, and hours throughout the summer are: Mondays: closed; Tuesday: noon - 5 p.m.; Wednesday: noon - 5 p.m.; Thursday: noon - 5 p.m.; Friday: noon - 7 p.m.; Saturday: noon - 5 p.m.; and Sunday: 1 - 6 p.m.

### CLARENDON COUNTY

**Palmetto Pickle Music Festival** will kick off on Saturday, May 18, at 7301 Salem Road in New Zion. Featured artists will include Charlie Floyd performing at 6 p.m. and Sawyer Brown performing at 8 p.m. Concert gates open at 4 p.m. Tickets are \$30 online

and can be purchased at [ticketleap.com/picklefest](https://www.ticketleap.com/picklefest).

On Saturday, June 1, Clarendon will make its debut on the annual state **Ag+Art Tour**, featuring two stops: Cannon Ag Products, at 2996 Hicks Road in Turbeville, from noon to 4 p.m., allowing visitors to browse the wide array of fresh produce and other on-site crafters, and Richburg Farms, at 4553 Paxville Highway from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., where visitors can check out the roadside market, smell sweet flowers and enjoy the open fresh air at the play area and open-air shed.

Take a ride in a hot air balloon and enter your car, truck, motorcycle or golf cart in the **Auto, Bike and Golf Carts Show at the Monarchs Got Talent and Auto Show** on Saturday, June 8, in Manning. There will also be food, music and games at the event at JC Britton Park, 3057 Raccoon Road. Pre-register your vehicle and buy your hot air balloon tickets at [monarchstrong.com](https://monarchstrong.com). Balloon rides will be from



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Two tourists take a selfie with the Lizard Man at last year's Lizard Man Stomp festival in downtown Bishopville. The third-annual Lizard Man Stomp will be held Saturday, June 29, with plenty of activities and fun for families to enjoy.

8 to 10 a.m., weather permitting, and the auto show is from 9 to 11 a.m. Zumba in the Park will be offered from noon to 1 p.m., and the Monarchs Got Talent Show is from 1 to 3 p.m.

### LEE COUNTY

If you're a bluegrass fan, put the weekend-long **Pickin' in the Park** on your calendar. The fourth-annual music-themed event starts Friday, May 24, at 5 p.m. and runs through Monday, May 27, at noon at Lee State Park in Bishopville. The weekend will be full of food, fun, fellowship, crafts and bluegrass music, and there will be a church service presented by Blue-Faith, a bluegrass and gospel band, to

close the event. Camp at the park to have easy access to all the events, or just stop by the park for the day. The park is at 487 Loop Road, Bishopville.

Look for the Lizard Man and celebrate a local legend at the third-annual **Lizard Man Stomp** event in Bishopville on Saturday, June 29, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. On June 29, 1988, a lizard man, standing 8 feet tall, was allegedly spotted walking in Bishopville's Scape Ore Swamp near Browntown Road, and locals have been fascinated with the legend ever since. There will be a parade, music, arts, crafts, car show and free food for the kids in downtown Bishopville.

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## Get to know

# His humble honor: Sumter County Sheriff's Capt. Chris Moore

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysa@theitem.com

Riding a wave of applause at The Sumter Item's annual Best of Sumter red carpet event on Tuesday, April 30, Sumter County Sheriff's Office Capt. Chris Moore was all smiles as he walked to receive the honor of Best Law Enforcement Officer. Surrounded by fellow winners, friends and family and stunned to be voted on, he couldn't help but give thanks to his humble beginnings and his love for the profession.

## JOURNEY TO THE BADGE

As a military child, Moore moved around the United States and lived in Germany for a few years before settling in Sumter after his father's retirement at Shaw Air Force Base. Growing up in Sumter, he knew a career as a police officer is where he would end up, and at 21 years old, he was hired by Sumter Police Department. After succeeding through the police academy and two years with the depart-

ment, he ventured to the sheriff's office in 2004. At the time, Sheriff Tommy Mims created a CAT team. Assigned to assess issues in the communities, such as shootings, the team consisted of codes enforcement, animal control, traffic control, drug enforcement — and now, Moore.

"It just so happened, my very first day of work, they were like, 'Hey, we're starting this today. We don't really have a place to put you. Would you be interested in doing it?'" Moore recalled. Without a second thought, he replied, "Of course, I'll do it."

Moore would be assigned to the CAT team until 2010, when he went back to patrol after a promotion to sergeant. He would move up the ranks, receiving his most recent promotion to captain in February this year.

## CAPT. CHRIS

As a captain, much of the job consists of administrative work on a set schedule of Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. But Moore isn't so



MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Capt. Chris Moore with Sumter County Sheriff's Office accepts his award for Best Law Enforcement Officer at the annual Best of Sumter readers' choice contest gala in April at Sumter Original Brewery.

keen on that.

"The only way for me to supervise those folks is to actually be out there with them," Moore explained. "As long as I can handle the administrative tasks, I can go out and do stuff in the field with the guys and work different hours."

Rather than get off at 6 p.m., he works well into the evening. On slow days in the office, he takes a short day to get his bearings to work a long night with his fellow deputies. Some of the officers on his shift are the same age as he was when he joined the force, and he has

noticed some distinct differences such as taking sick days.

"Back when I started, it didn't matter those kinds of things. You came to work because you didn't want to leave your shift short. You didn't want to be the one they're like, 'Man, that guy's never here,'" he said. "I try to promote dedication to the job. Not saying you should come to work when you're extremely ill. But sometimes, you take the needs of the office over some of your personal stuff."

Moore also works as a firearms instructor, driving in-

structor, leads active-shooter training for civilians and officers through the SLED State Active Shooter Program as well as does community outreach and school talks on the dangers of social media and importance of cybersecurity.

## A SAFER SUMTER

Making and keeping Sumter safe is Moore's No.1 priority as captain. Since the beginning, he has considered himself "a big traffic enforcement guy," explaining that "people die all

SEE **MOORE**, PAGE A26

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**BEST OF SUMTER  
2024**



## MOORE FROM PAGE A25

the time in traffic-related fatalities or collisions.”

His second reason is the stigma surrounding the blue lights and badge. People often are wary of the blue lights and badge, especially at night, Moore said. Whether he's doing property checks or stopping a car for traffic violations on a stretch of highway, Moore's true desire is to connect with and educate the community.

“If you're out doing proactive police work, then you prevent a lot of things from happening,” Moore reasoned.

Except being recognized for his hard work — that was bound to happen.

### BEST LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

Moore was stunned to learn he won Best Law Enforcement Officer for the 2024 Best Of Sumter readers' choice contest. The sheriff's office, on the other hand, wasn't.

“Capt. Moore was at a meeting probably until around 7:30 p.m.; it's not unusual to have meetings after hours. After that, he was talking with people, offering advice and counseling law enforcement. He's trying to get home, but then I hear him on the radio taking a call somewhere. This is the type of person he is,” expressed Mark Bordeaux, public information officer with the sheriff's office. “When you consider, if you got to know the caliber of men and women that Capt. Moore and I work with, then you know the honor it is that Capt. Moore is receiving this



Capt. Chris Moore with Sumter County Sheriff's Office has been in law enforcement since the age of 21.

PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

recognition.”

Moore, his smile stretching from ear to ear, was flattered by the sentiment as well as humbled by the support shown to him throughout his tenure.

On that evening, as he walked to receive his award, that same smile was displayed before Sumter as he was thankful for their votes and happy they could finally put a face with the name.



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## Shaw AFB

# Checkered Flag 24-2



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Jose Burgos, 79th Fighter Generation Squadron assistant dedicated crew chief assigned to Shaw Air Force Base, marshals a pilot arriving for Checkered Flag 24-2 at Tyndall AFB, Florida, May 8.



A U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon assigned to the 79th Fighter Squadron, Shaw Air Force Base, taxis on the flight line after arriving for Checkered Flag 24-2.



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTOS BY AIRMAN 1ST CLASS ZEESHAN NAEEM

U.S. Air Force Capt. Nicholas Bailey, 79th Fighter Squadron pilot assigned to Shaw Air Force Base, taxis an F-16 Fighting Falcon after arriving for Checkered Flag 24-2 at Tyndall AFB, Florida, May 8. Checkered Flag is a large-force aerial exercise held at Tyndall, which fosters readiness and interoperability through the incorporation of fourth and fifth-generation aircraft during air-to-air combat training.



ABOVE: U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Alexander Prevendar, 79th Fighter Squadron commander assigned to Shaw Air Force Base, shuts down an F-16 Fighting Falcon after arriving for Checkered Flag 24-2 at Tyndall AFB, Florida, May 8.

RIGHT: Prevendar poses for a photo.



U.S. Air Force Capt. Eric Buel-tel, 79th Fighter Squadron pilot assigned to Shaw Air Force Base, prepares to exit the cockpit of an F-16 Fighting Falcon after arriving for Checkered Flag 24-2 at Tyndall AFB, Florida, May 8.



U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons assigned to Shaw Air Force Base sit on the flight line after arriving for Checkered Flag 24-2 at Tyndall AFB, Florida, May 8.



# Predictions call for busy hurricane season

## 23 storms forecasted, including 11 named, 5 major, is well above average

BY KAYLA GREEN

kayla@theitem.com

This hurricane season may turn out to be "extremely active," according to initial outlooks released in April.

Colorado State University's tropical meteorology project releases the first widely used forecast for the season each spring. This year, their prediction is for activity "well above the 1991-2020 average," forecasting 23 storms, including 11 named hurricanes and five that will churn into major storms of Category 3 or stronger with an "above-normal confidence for an early April outlook."

The average is about 14 named storms and three major hurricanes. The outlook for this season, which official-

ly runs June 1 through Nov. 30, is also above the 20 storms, seven hurricanes and three major storms tallied in 2023, the fourth-busiest season since 1950, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

CSU's outlook includes probabilities for at least one major hurricane to make landfall on different coastal areas. It marks a 62% chance for a landfall on the entire continental U.S. coastline, with the average being 43%. There is a 34% chance for a landfall on the U.S. East Coast, including the Florida Peninsula (south and east of Cedar Key, Florida), with a 21% average, and a 42% chance that the Gulf Coast and Florida Panhandle, above an average of 27%, will

get a direct hit.

"As with all hurricane seasons, coastal residents are reminded that it only takes one hurricane making landfall to make it an active season," the CSW report warns. "Thorough preparations should be made every season, regardless of predicted activity."

While these early outlooks almost certainly change, the report notes, it is important to be aware as early as possible.

The beginning of hurricane season is marked by the warming of Atlantic waters to about 80 degrees. In general, without weather outliers or other variables, the warmer and deeper the ocean is, the stronger a hurricane can form.

While the official start re-

mains June 1, named storms have been forming earlier, and water temperatures in the North Atlantic Ocean — and the globe — have been breaking heat records for months on end.

According to NOAA and other outlets, this year's March was the warmest March in the planet's climate record of 175 years and the 12th month in a row that Atlantic water reached record highs for that time of year. North America had its ninth-warmest March and fourth-warmest January-March on record.

2023 was the warmest year on record, according to an analysis by NOAA's National

### HURRICANE NAMES FOR THE 2024 SEASON

Alberto	Leslie
Beryl	Milton
Chris	Nadine
Debby	Oscar
Ernesto	Patty
Francine	Rafael
Gordon	Sara
Helene	Tony
Isaac	Valerie
Joyce	William
Kirk	



SEE **HURRICANES**, PAGE A29



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# HURRICANES

FROM PAGE A28

Center for Environmental Information scientists.

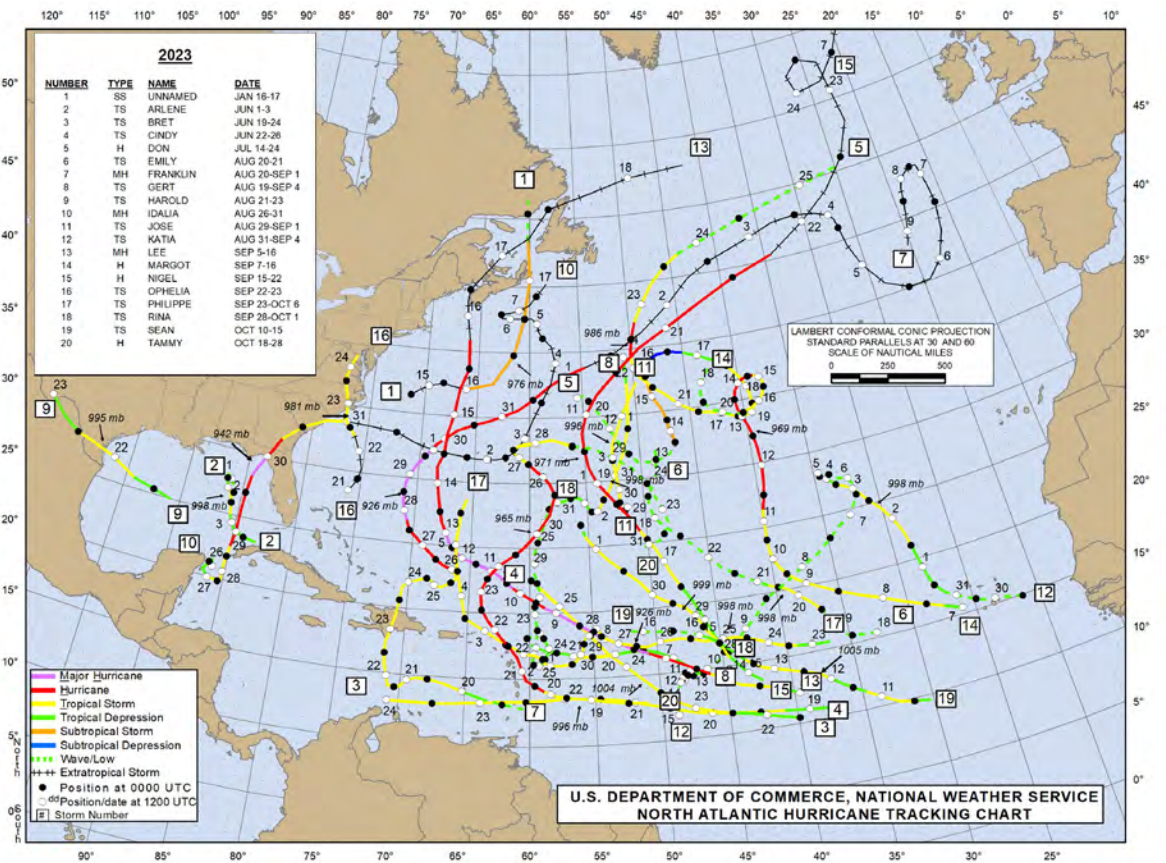
“Sea surface temperatures in the eastern and central Atlantic are currently at record warm levels and are anticipated to remain well above average for the upcoming hurricane season,” the CSU report states. “A warmer-than-normal tropical Atlantic provides a more conducive dynamic and thermodynamic environment for hurricane formation and intensification.”

Building on warm global and water temperatures is the predicted switch from El Niño to La Niña conditions, characterized by a decrease in vertical wind shear, which favors Atlantic hurricane activity, “by the peak of the Atlantic hurricane season.”

Tropical activity was below average in March, NOAA reports indicate, with four named storms swirling across the globe. The average is six. The only major storm, Severe Tropical Cyclone Neville, brought high surf to coastal northwest Australia, and two other storms in the South Indian Ocean impacted Africa.

If these early predictions come to fruition, the season will run past the 21 names identified for 2024. That has happened only twice: in 2005, the 28-storm season that brought Hurricane Katrina to New Orleans as well as Rita and Wilma, and 2020, which saw 30 storms.

A set of six lists of names cycles through rotation. The only time there is a change in the list is when a storm name is retired because it is so deadly or costly that “the future use of its name for a different storm would be inappropriate for reasons of sensitivity,” according to NOAA. When that happens, the World Meteorological Organization selects a replacement.



This map, created by NOAA, shows the paths of storms in the 2023 season.

PHOTO PROVIDED

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**BEST OF SUMTER 2024**



# Building relationships, creating good environment for employees are keys to Hill Plumbing's success

Company still family owned and operated after 99 years

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

It takes a special company to stay in business 99 years and much less still be operated by the same family, but Hill Plumbing and Air meets that mark.

Owner Frank Hill and his son, Trey, and daughter, Lauren, spoke recently on the company's success and longevity, and common themes involve customer relationships and creating a good environment for employees to work in.

Hill Plumbing has come a long way from 1925 and a single employee in Frank's grandfather, K.B. Hill, riding to service calls on his bicycle. Now, the company has nearly 100 employees and a fleet of more than 40 vehicles.

Business is mixed between area service repair to new commercial construction projects across the state to include schools, plants and office buildings. Some projects locally have included the new Sumter County Judicial Center, new fire department and police department, Hyatt Place hotel, Sumter Original Brewery, Prisma Health Tuomey's new emergency room and Central Carolina Technical College's new Academic Student Services Building on its main campus.

The business has four core values to include quality, integrity, professionalism and relationships.

## HILL PLUMBING AND AIR

Address: 438 N. Main St.

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Web: [hillplumbingandair.com](http://hillplumbingandair.com)

## 100TH ANNIVERSARY COMING

Hill Plumbing and Air will celebrate its 100th anniversary in January 2025 and looks to involve its customers and the Sumter community in the festivities, according to the Hills.



ny has added service to Florence and also heating and air-conditioning services.

"It took time and making prudent decisions," Hill said. "The biggest factor that has helped us grow is building

SEE HILL, PAGE A31



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Mike Young works for Hill Plumbing and Air as a senior service technician. The Sumter business has been a fixture in the community for 99 years.

When Frank Hill started with the family business in 1983, the company was nearly bankrupt.

He said that he built it up through hard work and surrounding himself with competent and good people. Now, the company





# HILL FROM PAGE A30

the business through relationships.”

Many key employees have been with Hill for more than 20 years.

Lauren Hill said she loves working with her dad and her brother and said that company success goes back to having strong employees.

“It’s a family owned business by blood,” she said, “but it is also a very family oriented place not by family.”

## ‘HILL PLUMBING UNIVERSITY’

One thing that has changed over time in the plumbing business is that there is more competition these days. Trey Hill noted that more than half of the company’s current competitors locally are former employees of Hill Plumbing. The trend is so common that he calls the business “Hill Plumbing University.”

“Typically, when we lose employees it is due to the fact that they are going out on their own,” he said. “I can count maybe one employee in the last 12 years where we have lost them to a competitor.”

“And that is just part of working in industry. When you have any big outfit, lots of people are going to come through there.”

Here is a closer look at Hill Plumbing and Air with the Hills.

**Question from *The Item*:** What are your most common service calls?

**Trey Hill:** “On the plumbing side, it is sewer calls, water leaks, water heaters, slab leaks and repiping a home. On the HVAC side, it’s residential and commercial installs, repair work, mini-splits, heating and air-conditioning replacements and duct cleaning.”

**Item:** What does customer service mean to you?

**Frank Hill:** “It means doing what you say you are going to do and asking a fair price for a fair job. Another concept is we look at the customer as an opportunity for a continuing relationship. So, in other words, we are looking to build a relationship for a continued service, and a lot of our customers go back more than 20 to 30 years.

And fast, dependable service — that’s everybody’s motto.”

**Item:** Why expand your services in recent years to include heating and air?

**Frank Hill:** “The biggest single reason was to provide a better service to our customers. It fits right in with the plumbing.”

**Trey Hill:** “We felt like adding heating



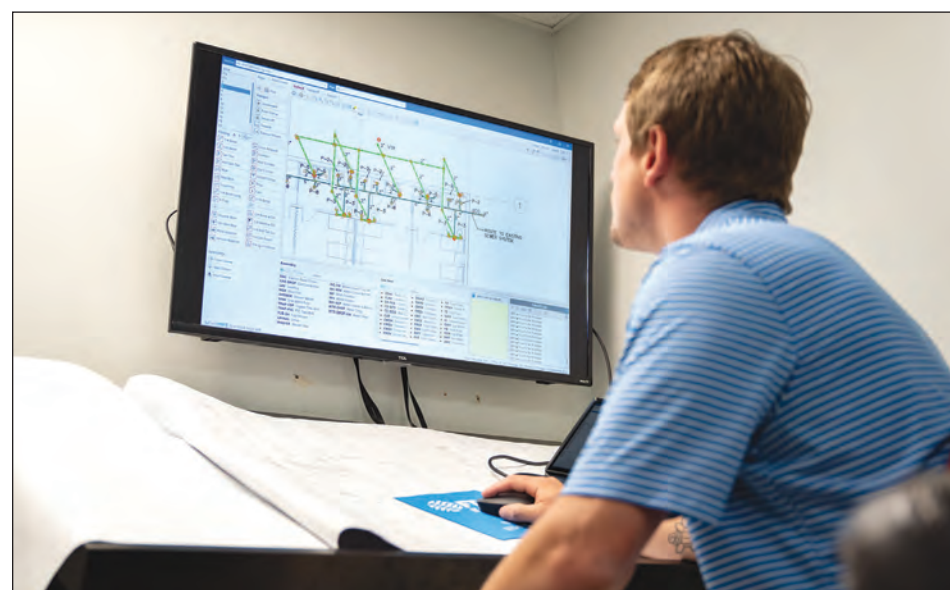
PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Hill Plumbing and Air owner Frank Hill and his son, Trey, and daughter, Lauren, said they try to build relationships with their customers, with some customers being served for decades.



and air gives us a competitive advantage. We can say, ‘Not only do we provide you with plumbing service, now we provide you with heating and air service.’”

**Lauren Hill:** “We already have such a strong customer base with plumbing and lots of loyal customers that we



Blaze Robertson, Hill Plumbing and Air estimator, works at the business in May.

wanted to provide the heating and air as well.”

**Item:** What is the biggest work-related compliment you can get?

**Trey Hill:** “For me, it’s when I get a phone call out of the blue and someone tells me that one of our employees was there, and they say, ‘I just wanted to let

you know, they were fantastic, and they were pleasant.’ That is my biggest compliment or when one of our employees comes and tells me, ‘I really enjoy working here.’

“Those are the two biggest compliments for me. That means we are doing something right.”





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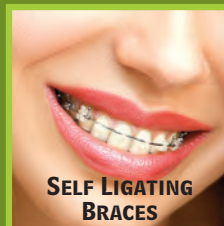
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## Outdoors

## Sumter's Shot Pouch Greenway recognized by explorer Mullikin of South Carolina 7



BY BRYN EDDY

bryn@theitem.com

Shot Pouch Greenway, the more than 3-mile paved pedestrian trail running from Dillon Park to Swan Lake Iris Gardens, was a \$4 million project made possible through a previous Penny for Progress initiative and had a grand opening at the very beginning of 2023.

The scenic path is continuing to make a name for itself since a visit from Tom Mullikin of the South Carolina Seven (SC7) organization on Tuesday, May 7. SC7, according to its website, is a partnership between two nonprofits: Global Eco Adventures and the South Carolina

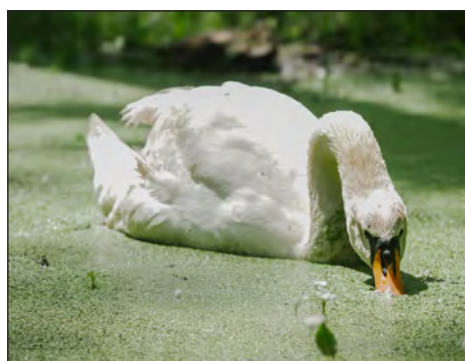
National Heritage Corridor. Its mission is to encourage outdoor adventure and conservation.

"The South Carolina Seven (SC7) expedition will not only provide us with an opportunity to explore some of the most uniquely beautiful places on earth right here in South Carolina, but it will bring attention to — and create international awareness of — the natural treasures our state has to offer,"

SEE **SHOT POUCH**, PAGE A35

Tom Mullikin of the South Carolina Seven (SC7) organization, left, and City of Sumter project manager Jason Stoddard, right, hiked Sumter's Shot Pouch Greenway on May 7 with government officials and members of the public.

PHOTOS BY ZAC HOOKS / THE SUMTER ITEM



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# SHOT POUCH

FROM PAGE A34

Mullikin is quoted saying on the website. "Further, the SC7 adventure will serve as the perfect stage to highlight how South Carolina is leading the way in developing and advancing resiliency strategies to address adverse weather from a changing climate. This is key."

When Mullikin visited Sumter's Shot Pouch Greenway, he and a group, including government officials and members of the public, walked from the part of the trail that starts near the YMCA to where it curves around Swan Lake Iris Gardens.

More information will soon become available on this, but SC7 visited Sumter's greenway to prepare for including it in the organization's annual adventure event celebrating South Carolina's beauty.

"The signature event of SC7 is a 30-day expedition across South Carolina in July and led by world-renowned explorer and South Carolina native Tom Mullikin. Following the Palmetto Trail as the guiding pathway from the mountains to the sea, the annual expedition highlights the 'CAROLINA 7' — so named for the seven geographic wonders unique to the Palmetto State," the website reads. "Along the SC7 2023 route, the expedition team will hold large-scale public events, media events, 'Lunch & Learns,' the 'Adventure Out' weekend in Charleston and a Finish Line Celebration."



Honoring the outdoors is a huge part of the SC7 mission. Tom Mullikin, above and far left, hiked Sumter's Shot Pouch Greenway on May 7 with government officials and members of the public.

PHOTOS BY ZAC HOOKS / THE SUMTER ITEM



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# Sumter community celebrates the best it has to offer

The Sumter Item hosted its annual Best of Sumter red carpet winners' celebration gala on Tuesday, April 30, at Sumter Original Brewery. More than 500 winners, their co-workers, community leaders, friends and colleagues gathered to support all the greatness going on across Sumter County. A welcome message was given by Tami Nix, president of Archway Academy, the event's title sponsor. Other sponsors and local businesses that made the night possible include Builders FirstChoice, Dixie Products, Epps Orthodontics, S.C. Speaker of the House Murrell Smith, Santee Wateree RTA, Tandem Health, Tanners Gas Station, Wright Way Plumbing, A Ring Around the Roses, DJ Howie D Entertainment DJs and Mayo's Suit City. To see and share even more, go to [www.Facebook.com/theitem](http://www.Facebook.com/theitem).



JANEL PRZYBYLA / THE SUMTER ITEM

The contest's six Best of the Best categories transcend topic-based categories, covering the whole county. Here, El Paso Tacos & Tequila was named Best New Business. Below, Dr. Thomas Epps was named Best Boss. Both won other awards throughout the night, too.



PHOTOS BY MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM

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## Sports

# Communication technology makes life easier for high school pitchers, catchers

BY TIM LEIBLE  
tim@theitem.com

Baseball is a sport that is often accused of being incapable of keeping up with the times.

America's pastime hasn't been keen on integrating technology, especially at the high school level. Apps like GameChanger became a life-saver for people wanting to keep up with their favorite teams when they aren't able to make it to the ballpark. On the field, it's always been a mix of hand signals and wristbands containing coded instructions that coaches can shout for the team to hear.

That changed this spring.

South Carolina baseball teams were approved to use communication devices at the high school level. If you make your way to a ballpark, it's now common to see a coiled wire hanging out of the helmet of a catcher, attached to a device on their back.

That technology has trickled down from the upper levels. Colleges have been able to use earpieces since 2018. Professional baseball started moving ahead with advanced PitchCom devices in 2022, which input pitch commands straight to pitchers, avoiding the need for signals behind the plate altogether.

Out at East Clarendon, these new communication systems have made life exponentially easier for head coach Curtis Johnson, catcher KJ Floyd and the Wolverine pitching staff.

"I think it's awesome because it gives us the opportunity to speed



East Clarendon catcher KJ Floyd throws the ball back to his pitcher during a game against Hannah-Pamplico on Thursday, May 2. Throwing is the tricky part of the new communication technology, as a hard throw from behind the plate can unplug Floyd's earpiece.



the game up," Johnson said of the CoachComm system they use at EC. "I'm able to communicate very quickly with KJ. We use it with all

three programs because I felt like if a guy came up to JV or varsity, I

SEE **COACHCOMM**, PAGE A41



PHOTOS BY MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM

East Clarendon High School baseball coach and athletic director Curtis Johnson talks to his catcher, KJ Floyd, through a CoachComm earpiece.



**'I think it's awesome because it gives us the opportunity to speed the game up. I'm able to communicate very quickly with KJ. We use it with all three programs because I felt like if a guy came up to JV or varsity, I want him to know.'**

**EAST CLARENDON HIGH BASEBALL COACH, ATHLETIC DIRECTOR CURTIS JOHNSON**

Describing what he thinks about the CoachComm system



# COACHCOMM

FROM PAGE A40

want him to know.

"It allows you to kinda be in their ear and run through what you're trying to do from a pitching standpoint. I really enjoy it because you don't miss signs. You have to repeat stuff every now and then but, for the most part, the technology has worked well for us."

As a former collegiate pitcher at Florence-Darlington and South Carolina, Johnson knows the art behind the position. Now that he has open communication with his catcher, Johnson is able to give more specific instructions with each pitch.

"I'm able to go fastball outer-half or fastball off the plate away; you have to get it off the plate here," Johnson said. "I'm able to add those little one-liners for (Floyd) to understand. He's great behind the plate for us. He's a leader, and he understands what I'm trying to do. I feel like he's a microcosm of me out there. He knows how I want to do it, and this just makes it that much easier."

Floyd loves having that extra level of detail from his head coach.

"He's not just telling me where to pitch, he'll tell me where to set up and everything else," he said. "It's a lot easier than reading a card or looking at my wrist and trying to find a pitch. It's just in my ear."

The Wolverine pitchers also have more confidence because Floyd is able to take full command of each at bat.

"It's helped a lot with the pitchers. It's more like me taking leadership with them and having them put it where I want it, so the more talking I do, it's a lot better," Floyd said. "With this, I know where to set up, and I can get them to throw it there with me talking to them and getting in there."

The technology itself is relatively simple. Floyd has a small device hooked onto the back of his chest protector on the top straps. He then connects an earpiece. Johnson then uses a walkie-talkie for one-way communication.

It was a pretty seamless transition for Floyd.

"I was more worried about it getting in the way, but it just rode in right with us," the senior catcher said. "It actually made me feel a lot better."

The Wolverines were early adopters, so they had a ton of practice with the

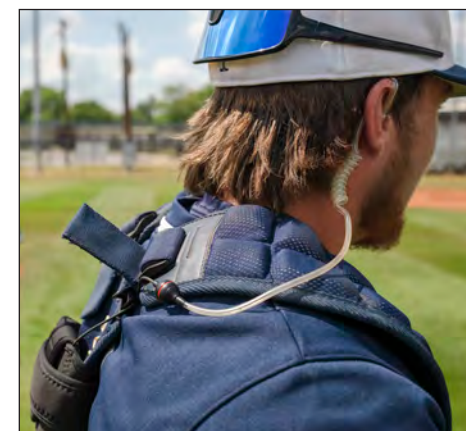


PHOTOS BY MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM

The CoachComm system has allowed East Clarendon head coach Curtis Johnson to give specific pitching instructions to his catcher, KJ Floyd, which speeds up the process of directing the pitching staff.



East Clarendon High School baseball coach and athletic director Curtis Johnson helps his catcher KJ Floyd with his CoachComm earpiece.



**'It's helped a lot with the pitchers. It's more like me taking leadership with them and having them put it where I want it, so the more talking I do, it's a lot better.'**

## EAST CLARENDON HIGH SCHOOL PITCHER KJ FLOYD

Describing what it is like to use the CoachComm earpiece

technology before games began.

"We were lucky. We got it early, so we used it during the preseason. We used it during bullpens some, and we used it in our preseason intersquad before our scrimmages," Johnson said. "It was something we used a good bit,

and KJ adapts to about anything, so he was good."

It hasn't always been perfect, of course. That earpiece has gotten unplugged more than once. Luckily, it's a pretty simple fix for one of the EC coaches to run out and get Floyd

back online.

"When we played in Columbia at White Knoll (for our preseason tournament), a lot of it happened," Floyd said of getting unplugged. "If it's too tight and I throw one good, it'll come off, but we just come back and fix it and move on."

This will be Floyd's one and only season with the technology, but he's glad that future catchers will be able to embrace the chance to communicate with their coaches from here on out.

"It makes the game go by a lot faster. You don't have to sit there worrying about if you're doing something wrong or not," Floyd said. "It makes the flow a lot easier, and it keeps the pitcher in a rhythm. I can sit there and get the pitch call, and we can roll."



## Sports

# Former Baron Sears feeling right at home with the A's

BY TIM LEIBLE  
tim@theitem.com

For most of his professional life, JP Sears was a bit of a nomad. After starring at Wilson Hall and The Citadel, Sears was drafted by the Seattle Mariners and quickly traded to the New York Yankees. He lived the life of a minor leaguer, slowly working his way up from level to level. Sears finally made it to the Yankees in 2022, but his time in pinstripes was short-lived, as he was traded to the Oak-

land A's at the trade deadline.

While the A's have been through their share of struggles in recent years, the move was a blessing. It allowed Sears to earn a consistent job as a Major League starter. Last season, he had a full season in the show, making 32 starts with a solid ERA of 4.54 on a team that limped to just 50 wins.

That life as a nomad may not be done for Sears, as the A's have been in a year-long battle with the City of Oakland as they prepare to move to Las Vegas. On April 5, it was announced that the A's would play in Sacramento next season as the organization works on stadium plans in Sin City. While it's been far from a typical Big League experience, Sears knows far too well that there's no point in getting too comfortable anywhere as a professional athlete.

"Big picture, moving to Sac or Vegas or whatever it is, it's felt like being in the minor leagues with the Yankees. You never know what'll happen; you just work to get better," Sears said. "The players on the team, we don't talk about it. It's so next year. We've been playing some pretty good baseball now, and the season is such a long season. If you're thinking about next year, much less a week or a month from now, then you're

way ahead of yourself. I think that's kinda helped me, and I guess the other guys, block that out. It's part of coming up through baseball, it's kinda what you're forced to do."

The eventual move to Vegas was met by harsh criticism from Oakland fans. They've boycotted games to show their disdain for ownership but still show a support for the team on the field. That dynamic makes the Coliseum an interesting park for Sears to call home.

"We're in a position where we're just blessed to be playing ball every day, and having any types of fan supporting us in any way is all you really want," Sears said. "It's never fun to hear the 'Sell the team' (chants) during every game because you're more worried about winning that game. We just kinda block it out and worry about what

we can focus on. That's all you can really do every day."

Sears and the A's have certainly been able to block out the noise. The A's are well on their way to surpassing last season's win total as they sit around .500.

Sears won three out of his first eight starts. He's already nearing his win total (5) from last season, as the A's struggled to back him up with runs a year ago.

"After you go through a year like we did last year, you come into it knowing that you've been through some of the worst and the worst is behind you. It makes it kind of easier to be hungry to show up every day and just keep getting

SEE SEARS, PAGE A43



Former Wilson Hall star and current Oakland Athletics pitcher JP Sears throws against the Texas Rangers on Wednesday, May 8, 2024, in Oakland, California.

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## SEARS FROM PAGE A42

better," said the 28-year-old southpaw. "We're still early in the season, so we're just trying to take it a series at a time, try to win the first game of a series and then try to win the next day. I know that's kinda the cliché baseball answer, but that's how you have to treat a long season."

"Even when you're playing good ball, just try to keep balancing off each other and kinda making it more of a snowball thing and, before you know it, you get some momentum and some confidence."

Sears has also gained some confidence from having a steady spot in the rotation. It's a lot easier to pitch when you're not worrying about one bad inning being the reason you're headed back to Triple-A.

"I have to use that to my advantage and not as a crutch," Sears said of that stability. "It's easy to get comfortable in that position, but it's still baseball, and baseball is hard. People say Year 2 is the toughest year because you have a full year where teams have seen you. The best part about it is that I've been able to work on some pitches."

The lefty added a sinker to his arsenal



ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Oakland Athletics pitcher JP Sears, a former Wilson Hall star, is greeted in the dugout after finishing a start against the Texas Rangers on April 11 in Arlington, Texas.**

this season. He felt the freedom to tinker with the pitch during training camp because of the relationships he's built in Oakland.

"I've been able to develop a sinker, which I feel like I wouldn't have been able to do if I had to make a team out of camp and really focus on my best pitches to get guys out every time I get a chance to go out there," he said.

Of course, Sears isn't the only lefty from Sumter making a name for himself in the Big Leagues. Like the rest of his hometown, he watched as former Sumter High standout Jordan Montgomery

and the Texas Rangers won the 2023 World Series and loved every second of it.

"That was awesome. I haven't talked to him a crazy amount this year about signing and all that, but Jordan is a good friend, and any time someone is able to win, you're always pulling for them," Sears said. "He really carried that team a lot last year at the end of the year and had some really good starts in the post-season. I was super happy for him. He's Mr. Consistent, and that's kinda what you want to be a starter. That's what I'm working to do as well."

Sears also stays in touch with his Sumter roots. He grew up as neighbors to the Kinney family and still keeps in touch with their youngest, Clark, who helped lead the Barons to 21 wins this season. His connection with the next generation of athletes continues to give him a spark to improve.

"Any time that you're able to hang out with people younger than you, it brings a light to me, and you feel refreshed in baseball knowing that there are kids that are good friends of yours that are also looking up to you," Sears said. "Clark and some of his friends are so smart, I feel like that generation is so much more advanced than we were at

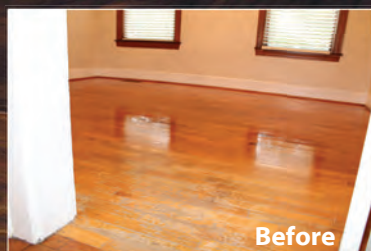
that age. Any time I can go back there, I definitely will. I spend a lot of time in Charleston, and I definitely want to come back to Wilson Hall and Sumter more because they have a lot of good things going on there, and there are so many great family friends there."

Now that he's in the middle of his third season in the Majors, it would be easy to take his position for granted. While life as a Big Leaguer has become his new normal, Sears is just focused on making the most of his opportunity.

"It's an interesting job. I'm often reminded, whenever I see a kid at the ballpark and they're shocked you're talking to them, that you have such a big impact on people's lives every day," Sears said. "It definitely is something that feels like a norm, but I don't ever look at it as a norm where I'm going to be comfortable where I am and just let the day go by. I look back at the end of the season and reflect more than I do weekly or monthly. Day to day, you just focus on what you need to do that day to get better, and you can spend some time after to reflect."

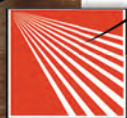
"Last year was such a fun year, and I feel like I learned so much, even though I was able to play in the Big Leagues in 2022. Doing it every day for a whole year, I don't take it for granted either."

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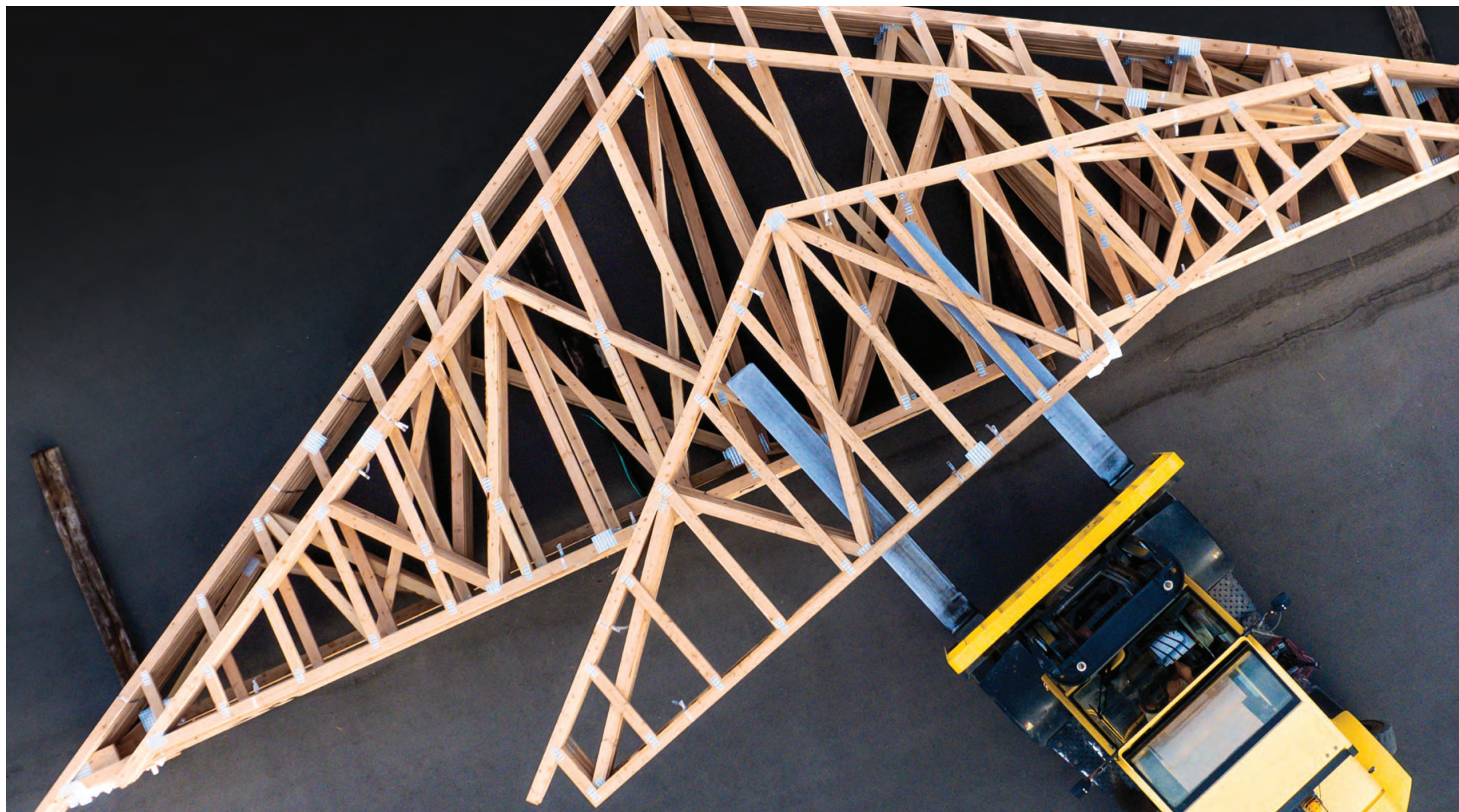
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## 82 years of history — a look at Iris Festivals past



**Sammy Way**  
REFLECTIONS

Sumter will celebrate its 82nd Iris Festival at Swan Lake Iris Gardens this Memorial Day weekend, with thousands expected to visit the gardens to enjoy good music, food, family friendly events and the blooming of the Japanese irises. Here we take a look back at Iris Festivals past.

H.C. Bland moved to Sumter in 1917 from Mayesville and bought a pond on the northern side of Liberty Street in 1930 to use for fishing and as a bird sanctuary, according to *The Sumter Item* archives. He created 10 islands in the pond using debris he found and ordered swans from New York, which eventually gave the lake its name. He planted Japanese iris bulbs in the wet, acidic soil of the pond after they failed to grow at his home, and the blooming irises attracted attention that led to the creation of the Iris Festival in 1940. See more photos from festivals past on A47.



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS

The Sumter Rotary Club entered its float in the first Iris Festival parade in May 1940, the first year the Iris Festival was held.

BELOW: Iris Festival parade participants make their way through downtown Sumter in 1940.



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The city's very first Iris Festival was advertised in May 1940.





SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS

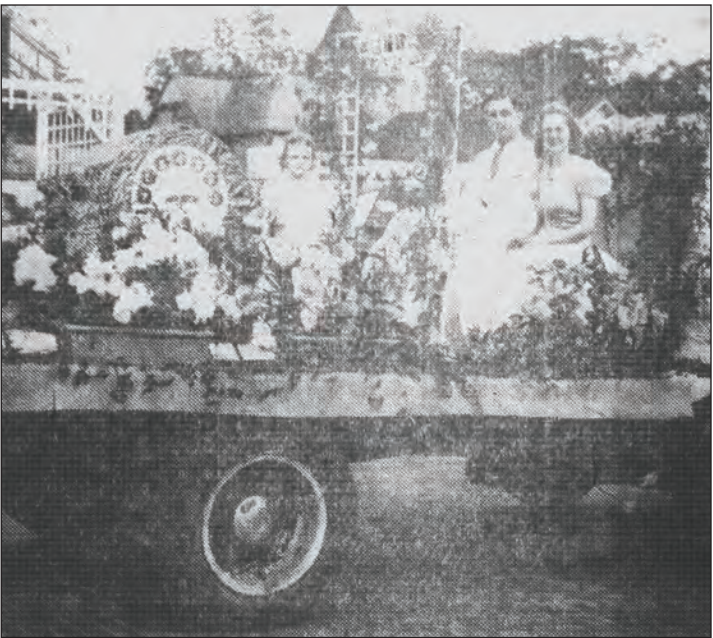
Swan Lake Iris Gardens started as a fishing pond in the 1930s and became an attraction in the City of Sumter as it grew into a beautiful lake surrounded by flowers and other plants. It remains the only garden in the world that has all eight species of swans.



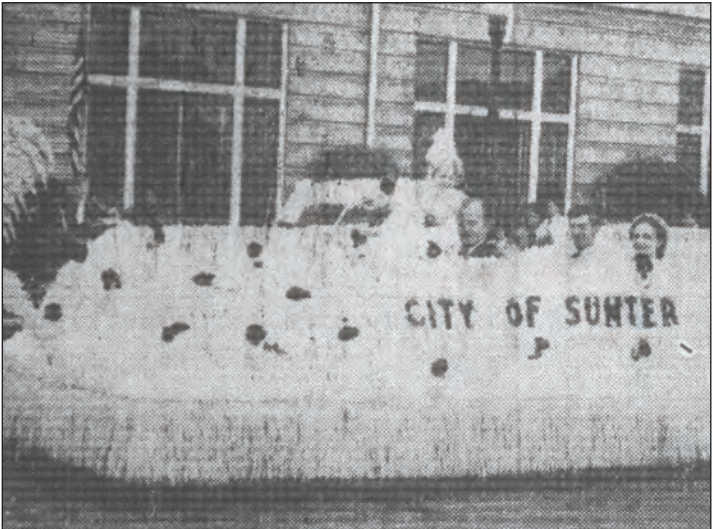
The Junior League float is seen in 1940.



A float rides by during the Iris Festival parade in 1948.



Sarah Harvin and Jim Harris, selected as the queen and king of the Iris Festival, are pictured on the float of the YWCA, which they represented.



The float entered in the Iris Festival parade by the City of Sumter is seen May 25, 1940.



# Savor the sweetness:

## Explore the delights of strawberry season at Sumter's own Dorr Farms

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysha@theitem.com

Coming out of the frigid winter months into the warmth of spring, there's one vibrant red fruit looking to make your acquaintance: the strawberry.

With its delectable sweetness and refreshing tang, strawberry season allows folks to indulge in versatile dishes that are sure to make friends, family and fans of the speckled fruit rejoice.

Strawberry season varies throughout the South, with the season beginning in February for Florida and late May or June for Tennessee, Arkansas, Virginia and parts of North Carolina. However, for South Carolina, prime berry season

begins in late April. The season lasts for about three weeks, depending on the number of warm days. Rain, snow and cool weather can slow the ripening process and push out the window of strawberry season.

But all seems to be well for Dorr Farms, at 5225 Dorr Acres Road in Gable. The family owned farm opened its strawberry patch in March. Since then, the patch, filled with bundles of the seed-speckled fruit, has greeted guests of all ages who visit on field trips, family outings or for some fun in the sun. Strawberries are picked by the gallon or half gallon from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or until the patch is picked over.

Strawberries will stop ripening once picked, so if you see any white or green edges to the berries, leave them be, as they will not have the sweetness you're looking for. According to Southern Liv-



PHOTO PROVIDED

Dorr Farms, at 5225 Dorr Acres Road, shares its No Bake Strawberry Lasagna recipe for those looking to indulge this strawberry season.

ing, for the best batch, look for strawberries that are deep red in color, have a shiny, smooth texture and vibrant green stems, medium firmness and a distinct strawberry scent.

Once you have your juicy treasure in hand, then comes the question: What to do with them?

If you're looking to dive in immediately, wash your berries, dry them off and enjoy. If you're looking to save them, don't wash them as soon as you get home, as water introduces moisture, which invites mold and may make the berries mushy quickly. Instead, transfer strawberries out of the container, sort out any spoiled or bruised berries, and put the rest into a glass storage container.

Though delicious on their own, when you're looking to turn your plain berries into a delicious treat, Dorr Farms has the perfect recipe for a No Bake Strawberry Lasagna that will surely make your taste buds berry happy.

### NO BAKE STRAWBERRY LASAGNA

#### INGREDIENTS

2 cups of strawberries, sliced  
2 cups of heavy cream

1 package (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened  
½ cup sugar  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
2 tablespoons milk  
1 package graham crackers  
¼ cup melted butter  
½ cup white chocolate chips

#### DIRECTIONS

In a mixing bowl, beat the heavy cream until stiff peaks form. Set aside.

In another mixing bowl, mix the softened cream cheese with sugar, vanilla extract and milk until smooth.

Fold the whipped cream into the cream cheese mixture gently until well combined.

Mix the melted butter with crushed graham crackers and press into the bottom of a serving dish to form the first layer.

Spread half of the cream cheese mixture over the graham cracker layer.

Arrange a layer of sliced strawberries on top, then sprinkle with half of the white chocolate chips.

Repeat the layers, finishing with a layer of cream cheese mixture and white chocolate chips.

Refrigerate for at least four hours, or until set, before serving.

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## Parks

# Sumter has 5 free spray parks to help stay cool in the heat

### STAFF REPORT

Summer is hot in the South, but Sumter offers five spray parks to take the kiddos to cool off.

These spray parks open Memorial Day weekend, and all are free:

- Crosswell Park, corner of Lafayette Drive and Yeadon Street;
- North HOPE Park, 904 N. Main St.;
- South Sumter Park, corner of South Sumter and Atlantic streets;
- Birnie HOPE Park, 210 S. Purdy St.; and
- Palmetto Park, off Theatre Drive, between the tennis center and ball fields.

Just place your hand on the hand print, and the water will flow. Each park offers playgrounds and green spaces.

For more information, call (803) 436-2640.



NICH PITTS / SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

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# The Sumter Item to host 2nd-annual The Bobbys in June

## Award-winning program celebrates best in Sumter-area high school sports

### STAFF REPORT

Sumter continues to produce thrilling matchups and student-athletes when it comes to high school sports, and *The Sumter Item* will continue celebrating them with the second-annual Espy Awards-style program, The Bobbys.

Inspired by ESPN's sports awards show and building on the reception of *Item* programs like Best of Sumter and Athlete of the Year, The Bobbys, named after Sumter native and Yankees legend Bobby Richardson, is a red carpet awards gala celebrating the best in Sumter-area sports. Beginning May 22, readers will vote for their favorite high school athletes from the 2023-24 school year, and winners will be recognized at Sumter Opera House on Thursday, June 20. Community partners will present The Bobbys awards and scholarships to



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

the individual award winners.

The event will be open to the public.

"The Bobbys connects the past, present and future of Sumter sports," Publisher Vince Johnson said. "The support of the local business community, having that connection and supporting these incredible young athletes, is a lot of fun and creates long-lasting memories."

Last year's inaugural program was recently named "Best Niche Ballot" in the 15th-Annual Second Street Awards, the

nation's leading promotions platform that works with more than 4,000 newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations.

Numerous sports and types of high school athletes will be included, with more than 15 categories in all. In addition to The Bobbys awards, *The Item* will also announce the winner of the Hines Furniture Athlete of the Year at the event.

With support from event partners, scholarships for student-athletes will also be given out this year.

While there are stars currently in professional sports for which Sumter is proud they call home, when it came to naming the awards program and gala, there was really only one option.

"I look at it as you using me to honor them, and I appreciate the honor of being asked to let my name do that," Richardson has told *The Item*. "This community has been so great to me."

Richardson won the World Series MVP in 1960, but his three World Series championships all came in other years, making him the only MVP from a losing

team.

Richardson will again be a featured guest this year. The keynote speaker will be another living local legend: Dexter Davis.

Davis was a starter for Clemson between 1988-90 and helped the Tigers reach a 10-2 record and finish in the top 12 each year. After his junior year, he was a fourth-round draft choice in 1991 and played for six years with the Phoenix Cardinals and Los Angeles/St. Louis Rams. He has taken college and high school coaching jobs, is a business owner and active in the community after returning to his hometown of Sumter to be a part of Liberty STEAM Charter School. In 2022, he was the recipient of the 2022 Brian Dawkins Lifetime Achievement Award.

For more information about partnering with *The Sumter Item* to help celebrate local high school sports or to become a presenting sponsor of an award, contact your sales representative or email [advertising@theitem.com](mailto:advertising@theitem.com).

To vote, go to [www.theitem.com/thebobbys2024](http://www.theitem.com/thebobbys2024).

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## Government

## Sumter County, city have rules regarding political signs

BY BRYN EDDY

bryn@theitem.com

As candidates work to keep their names on the ballots at both the local and state levels ahead of the primaries, locals may see an increase in political signage throughout the area.

Did you know that the City of Sumter and Sumter County have regulations regarding the placement of political signage? It is common for municipalities to regulate these for aesthetic, environmental and safety purposes. The main restriction to keep in mind is that signage is not allowed in public rights-of-way.

## SUMTER COUNTY

These political sign regulations, according to public documents, are put in place so that "Sumter County is protected against inordinate sign clutter, and not deteriorated or abandoned

signs that detract from the appearance of the community."

Here are the regulations:

— Signage must not exceed 32 square feet.

— Signage put up for a specific election or referendum may be put up no more than 90 days prior to that polling date and must be removed no later than 15 days after that date.

— No deteriorated signage.

And here are some dates to keep in mind:

— For the June 11 primary elections, sign removal is required on or before Wednesday, June 26.

— Candidates involved in a primary run-off must remove signs no later

than 15 days after the scheduled run-off election date.

— For the Nov. 5 general elections, sign placement is allowed on or after Wednesday, Aug. 7.

— Removal must be on or before Wednesday, Nov. 20.

It is prohibited to place signage on private property you don't own, and it is also prohibited to remove signage from private property you don't own.

## CITY OF SUMTER

The City of Sumter's regulations on political signage are similar but not identical to those listed in the county's code of ordinances.

Here are the regulations:

— Signs placed on a lot zoned agri-

cultural or industrial may not exceed 32 square feet.

— Signs placed on a lot zoned commercial may not exceed 16 square feet.

— Signs placed on a lot zoned residential or conservation preservation may not exceed 6 square feet.

— Signs may not be placed on any lot prior to 60 days before the designated date of election and must be removed no later than 15 days following the designated date of election.

Here are dates to keep in mind:

— For the June 11 primary elections, sign removal is required on or before Wednesday, June 26.

— Candidates involved in a primary election run-off must remove signs no later than 15 days after the scheduled run-off election date.

— For the Nov. 5 general elections, placement is allowed on or after Friday, Sept. 6, and must be removed on or before Wednesday, Nov. 20.



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# Students learn life skills through gardening, raising chickens at school

BY ADAM FLASH  
adam@theitem.com

In schools throughout Sumter School District, students are growing life skills by growing plants. In six schools in the district, student-run gardens exist, giving classes an opportunity to work with their hands and see visible, long-term results of sticking with a project, in this case, tending to a garden on a daily and weekly basis.

"It's a big family thing," said Danielle Last, third-grade teacher at Alice Drive Elementary School. "They're so proud of it. [The garden is] just so big and beautiful."

Last and her class are the primary caretakers of Alice Drive's garden, tending to their plants and chickens (which no other school has) every day during recess.

The other schools in the district to have gardens include Pocalla Springs Elementary, Lemira Elementary, R.E. Davis College Preparatory Academy, Alice Drive Middle and Sumter High School. Sumter High School is home to the Gamecock Gardens, a special education program that gives students with disabilities a chance to gain life skills by running their own garden business, caring for plants in the campus greenhouse and eventually selling or donating them to the community.

Another big emphasis of the school gardens is encouraging students to try new things, like fruits and vegetables they may have never tried, as well as show students how to be strong, independent people capable of not only taking care of themselves, but plants and animals as well.

"I try to give them the opportunity to grow these skills so that they can do this when they're older," Last said. "I just hope they keep with it ... to gain that pride and confidence that comes with being able to see everything grow and drive after persevering through all that hard work."



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Danielle Last's third-grade class tends to the Alice Drive Elementary School garden by doing such tasks as watering the plants, weeding the flower beds, feeding the chickens and collecting eggs.





CROSSWORD

- ACROSS
1. Getaway

4. Air pollution

8. Contact

12. Distinctive period

13. Tiny

14. Section

15. Frozen

16. Yoked beasts

17. Rosy

18. Trembled

20. Lubricate

22. Extent

25. Not legally binding

28. Infrequent

29. “\_\_\_\_\_ Which Way You Can”

32. Be wrong

33. Type of coffee

34. \_\_\_\_\_ whiz!

35. Football-kickoff aid

36. Film unit

37. Patched

38. Turmoil

40. Sufficient

44. Watchers

48. Pieces of trees

49. Baker

52. Struggle (for)

53. Sensitive

54. Understand text

55. House wing

56. Metes out

57. Profits

58. Ump’s cousin

- DOWN
1. Oahu souvenirs

2. Curved doorway

3. BLT dressing

4. Fire sign

5. Blend

6. Half of two

7. Soft drink: 2 wds.

8. Superman’s garb

9. Soprano’s solo

10. Telescope part

11. Huron or Tahoe

19. Uncanny

21. Coral ridge

23. Tenderfoot

24. Indy 500 participant

25. Dog’s doc

26. Metal-bearing rock

27. Deep anger

29. Mature

30. \_\_\_\_\_ Orleans

31. Yearning

33. Medicine

37. Porky’s pen

39. Passes along

40. Or \_\_\_\_\_ (threat)

41. Recess

42. Fairy-tale baddie

43. Operates

45. At all

46. Annoy

47. Personality

50. Sign of triumph

51. Erode

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
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56					57					58		

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SOLUTION

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SUDOKU

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			3		2		1	6
	6							
					4	9		
	1	6	2			5		
		4	6				2	
		9		5	3			

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

8	2	9	1	5	3	7	6	4
3	5	4	6	7	9	1	2	8
7	1	6	2	4	8	5	9	3
1	8	2	5	6	4	9	3	7
4	6	3	9	1	7	8	5	2
5	9	7	3	8	2	4	1	6
6	7	1	8	3	5	2	4	9
2	3	8	4	9	1	6	7	5
9	4	5	7	2	6	3	8	1



## State government

## S.C.'s top delinquent taxpayers paid \$12.3M in 2023

## BY THE S.C. DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

Hundreds of South Carolina's top delinquent taxpayers paid the state more than \$12.3 million in 2023 after their debts were listed online, an increase of almost \$4 million over the previous year's payments. During the past four years, delinquent taxpayers whose names were included on the South Carolina Department of Revenue's Top Delinquent Taxpayers lists have paid a total of more than \$37.9 million in money owed to the state as a direct result of the SCDOR's Top Delinquent Taxpayers program.

SCDOR launched lists, which include the state's top individual and business delinquent taxpayers, in 2020. SCDOR publicly lists the names to provide transparency, fairness and accountability. The lists can be found at [dor.sc.gov/delinquent-taxpayers](http://dor.sc.gov/delinquent-taxpayers).

Individual delinquent taxpayers on the lists currently owe a total of \$65.7 million in state taxes. Delinquent business taxpayers on the list owe a total of \$42.3 million. Each taxpayer on the Top Delinquent Taxpayers lists is in tax lien status, making these debts public.

"Our state's financial health depends on tax revenues," said SCDOR Director Hartley Powell. "When non-compliant taxpayers fail to pay their tax bills, everyone suffers. So holding delinquent taxpayers accountable is an important public service."

## Top 5 counties with the most individual tax debt

Charleston – \$6.7 million  
Horry – \$6.6 million  
Greenville – \$6.4 million  
Spartanburg – \$3.6 million  
Lexington – \$3.4 million

## Individual tax debt by region

Lowcountry – \$13.7 million  
Upstate – \$12.5 million  
Midlands – \$8.7 million  
Pee Dee – \$8.4 million

Individual tax debt on the list ranges up to \$2.97 million. The largest business tax debt on the list totals more than \$4.49 million. Eleven individual delinquent taxpayers owe more than \$1 million, while three businesses owe at least that amount.

## Payments

In 2023, those on the Top Delinquent Taxpayers Lists paid approximately \$12.3 million to SCDOR, including \$10.3 million in lien payments and almost \$2 million in payment plan payments. Delinquent business taxpayers paid \$8.9 million, while individual de-

linquent taxpayers paid \$3.4 million.

## Taxpayers are excluded from the lists if they:

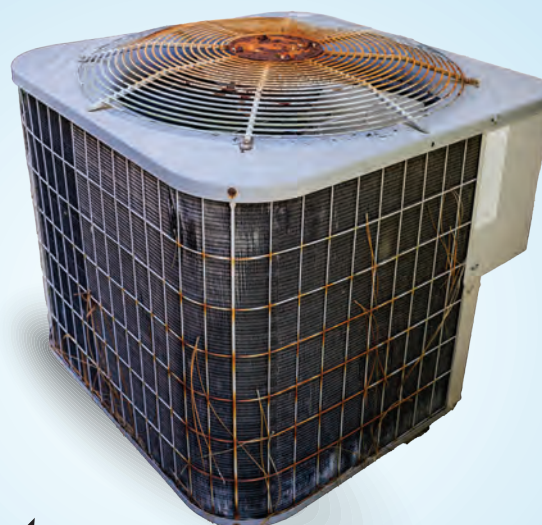
- Have filed for bankruptcy protection.
- Have a payment plan arrangement with SCDOR.
- Are in the GEAR or Setoff Debt programs.

Before names are published, SCDOR exhausts efforts to collect these debts and help these taxpayers comply.

The list is updated quarterly, so the current amount of tax, penalty and interest due may differ from the listed amount because of partial payments or accrual of additional penalty and interest. Learn more about the SCDOR's Top Delinquent Taxpayers Lists at [dor.sc.gov/delinquent-taxpayers](http://dor.sc.gov/delinquent-taxpayers).

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# Social Security Matters: When should we claim Social Security?

**BY RUSSELL GLOOR**

National Social Security advisor  
AMAC Foundation

**Dear Rusty:** I am almost 63 and my husband will be 61 soon, and we are looking to see when our best time would be to start our Social Security benefits. We would like to know if one of us qualifies for benefits from a previous marriage from 1984 to 1995. And we are wondering if I can start drawing at age 65, in two years, or if it is better that I wait until 67 because my spouse is 2 years younger than me. Also, if I were to continue working limited hours after 65, what would my earning limit be? *Signed: Almost Ready*

**Dear Almost Ready:** The first thing to understand is that full retirement age (FRA) for both of you is 67. If either of



**Russell Gloor**

you claim before that, your monthly benefit amount will be permanently reduced and, because you are working, you will be subject to Social Security's "earnings test."

If you claim your benefit at age 65 your monthly payment will be about 87% of what you would get if you claimed at age 67. If your husband claims at age 62, his benefit will be about 70% of his FRA amount. The only way to get 100% of the benefit you've each earned from a lifetime of working is to claim at your FRA. You can choose to claim at age 65 as long as you're comfortable with the benefit reduction which will occur, and as long as your

annual work earnings do not significantly exceed the earnings limit for that year. In any case, when each of you claims will not affect the other's retirement benefit amount.

Social Security's "earnings test" for those claiming before FRA sets a limit for how much can be earned before some (or all) benefits are taken away. The earnings limit for 2024 is \$22,320, but it changes yearly. If you claim early benefits and your work earnings exceed that year's limit, Social Security will take away \$1 in benefits for every \$2 you are over the limit. They take away by withholding future benefits long enough to recover what you owe for exceeding the limit. If you significantly exceed the annual earnings limit, you may be temporarily ineligible to receive SS benefits until you either earn less or reach your FRA (the earn-

ings test no longer applies after you reach your FRA). I cannot predict what the earnings limit will be two years from now, but it will be more than the 2024 limit and published at that time. FYI, in the year you turn 67 your pre-FRA earnings limit will be much higher, and when you reach your FRA the earnings test no longer applies.

Regarding your previous marriage, you cannot receive spousal benefits from an ex-spouse while you are currently married. But when to claim may also be influenced by whether either you or your current spouse will get a spousal benefit from the other. If the FRA (age 67) benefit amount for one of you is more than twice the other's FRA entitlement, the one with the lower FRA amount will get a "spousal boost" to their own amount when both

of you are collecting.

Spouse benefits reach maximum at one's FRA, but each person's personal SS retirement amount will continue to grow if not claimed at FRA. Waiting past FRA to claim allows the SS retirement benefit to grow by 8% per year, up to age 70. So, with an FRA of 67, claiming at age 70 will yield a payment 24% higher than the FRA amount, 76% more than the age 62 amount and about 37% more than the age 65 amount. But waiting beyond FRA is only smart if financially feasible and life expectancy is at least average (about 84 and 87 respectively for a man and woman your current ages). And, as a general rule, if one's spousal benefit at FRA (50% of their partner's FRA entitlement) is highest, then that spouse should claim at FRA to get their maximum benefit.



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