



## Yucatan celebrates 25 years in Sumter

A14

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# Behind the lens

## Longtime Sumter photographer Charlie Mathis shares his journey, how he gets the perfect shot


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ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Charlie Mathis has had a photography studio in Sumter since 1992 and says he was interested in taking photos from a young age, growing up in Pinewood. He shared with *The Sumter Item* how he gets great shots for his clients. *Read more on page A23.*

HAPPILY EVER AFTER STARTS *Here*

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The advertisement features a collage of wedding rings with various diamond settings. On the left, a bride in a white gown is shown kissing a groom. The text is arranged in a clean, modern layout with a blue ribbon graphic at the bottom right.

## Some information is too important to withhold

Storms soaking saturated ground. Football flying into fall. Elections engaging civic discourse.

These are all storylines Sumter and South Carolina are bound to experience annually or every few years, to varying degrees of intensity and excitement. In the first couple weeks of August, Sumter County and its surrounding areas heeded headlines about all three in the span of a single week.

No one wants inclement weather to threaten or damage their city, their neighborhood, their family, but the journalists at *The Sumter Item* know to put their best effort into covering a storm so readers have the best and most up-to-date information in order to make decisions to protect their family, pets and property.

Not everyone wants to engage in elections, but the journalists at *The Sumter Item* know it's their duty to present accurate, fair information about candidates so readers



**Kayla Green**

have the best sense of who is on their ballot in order to make decisions to support their family, friends and neighbors. OK, maybe a lot of people get excited about fall football season, especially at the local high school level. So do the journalists at *The Sumter Item*, and they work long weekend hours to bring readers comprehensive coverage of their favorite teams so they can support their friends, children

and hometown pride.

The week before this edition of *The Item Impact* published, coverage of all three of these topics was available for the public to read and watch without a newspaper subscription, similar to this paper you have in your hands or are reading digitally. Inclement weather coverage will always be free because knowledge of it keeps people safe. Election coverage will always be free because knowledge of it keeps grassroots democracy alive. Recent Media Day coverage was free on Facebook Live thanks to our small business event sponsors.

We rely on advertisers and subscribers to continue our mission. But we think some information is so important that everyone, regardless of their ability or propensity to subscribe, deserves to be in the know.

## How hot is hot in August?

**BY BRUCE MILLS**  
[bruce@theitem.com](mailto:bruce@theitem.com)

One may wonder how hot is hot in the Midlands for August. The month is actually the second hottest on the calendar for the Columbia area with an average daily high temperature of 88.5 degrees, according to the National Weather Service. The hottest month of the year for the region is July (of course!) with an average daily high of 90.2 degrees.

This August got off to a slow start with hot temperatures due to the rainy conditions associated with

Tropical Storm Debby. Through Aug. 8, Columbia's average daily high temperature was just 87.4 degrees (cool, right?).

Here is a listing of the hottest Augusts on file, dating back to 1887, for the Columbia area, according to the weather service.

Of note, three of the top-10 hottest Augusts in the 137-year period have occurred since 2007, which ranked No. 2 on the list with a scorching 97.2-degree average. The summer of

2016, just eight years ago, also made the list with an average daily high of 93.8.

### HOTTEST AUGUSTS FOR COLUMBIA, S.C.

Rank	Year	Avg. daily high
1	1900	97.6
2	2007	97.2
3	1954	95.7
4	1968	94.9
5	1983	94.8
6	2011	94.5
7	1999	94.3
8	1951	94.2
9	2016	93.8
10	1987	93.7

The average daily high temperature historically for the month is 88.5 degrees.

Source: National Weather Service, Columbia

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## Government

## 4 storylines to know from local government

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

deirdre@theitem.com

## FILING ENDS FOR CITY COUNCIL

City council filing came to an end Wednesday, July 31, with a majority of candidates running for Ward 4 and mayor.

After current Ward 4 representative Steve Corley announced he is not seeking reelection, the race to represent Sumter's Historic District has grown rapidly with five candidates vying for the position: Gene Weston, Jimmy Davis, Lucy Mahon, Lynn Kennedy and Scott Burkett.

Meanwhile, the two other wards up for election, Ward 2 and 6, have zero competition and are occupied by their current representatives, Ward 2 representative James Blessingame and Ward 6 representative Gifford Shaw.

The race for mayor has brought forward three candidates to challenge current mayor David Merchant, who is running for reelection: Foxy Campbell, Reginald "Reggie" Evans and Travon Adams.

The city council race is non-partisan.

## COUNTY COUNCIL MAY CHANGE RULES FOR MEETING CONDUCT

In a county council meeting July 23, the draft for a new ordinance passed in a 5-2 vote that would change the rules surrounding conduct during county council meetings.

The ordinance raised concerns with Councilman Gene Baten and Councilman Carlton Washington, who worried about potential censorship of residents during public comment. Chairman Jim McCain said council members will have the chance to change the document in the future.

Because the ordinance is labeled as title only — in other words, all the language in it is subject to change — it cannot be quoted or released to the public until it is in its final stages.

The draft passed its first reading, but it will need to pass two more readings to get to its next stage.

## 10-YEAR STUDY SHOWS SHAW AFB DISRUPTIONS TO BE MINIMAL

The Air Installation Compatible Use



Zones Program, or AICUZ for short, conducts a study every 10 years to ensure that Air Force bases and communities are living together harmoniously.

On July 23, it was time for findings from this study to be presented to the Sumter community regarding Shaw Air Force Base.

The study found that no noise nuisances were disrupting the community on Shaw's end, nor was the surrounding community posing any risks to the base.

Part of what the study examines is building height, large light sources and even making sure that a surplus of birds is not being attracted by the community. For the base itself, AICUZ mainly focuses on noise level, especially from fighter jets.

## PROGRAM WILL REDUCE MILITARY CHILDCARE COSTS, CHILDCARE CENTER COSTS; ANNOUNCEMENT HELD IN SUMTER

South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster made his way to Sumter-Shaw Farm in Dalzell on Aug. 1 for an announcement that would see childcare



costs for military personnel and childcare centers decrease statewide.

The program, Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood-PLUS, or MCCYN-PLUS for short, will be launched by South Carolina Department of Social Services in partnership with the Department of Defense, and it will offer fee assistance to South Carolina military families. According to a news release, the program will help "South Carolina military families in locating

Shaw Air Force Base held an open house regarding air installation compatible use zones, or AICUZ, for Sumter residents Tuesday, July 23.

PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

affordable, accessible child care within their communities" and offer "child care fee assistance to eligible military and DoD civilian families when child care is unavailable on an installation or when families do not live close to an installation."

S.C. is one of only 15 states to gain access to the program, and childcare centers that seek accreditation through ABC Quality will qualify for the reduced costs.

## Government

# Who will be on ballot for Sumter city council and mayor?

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

deirdre@theitem.com

One mayor's seat, three wards and 11 candidates. Sumter City Council filing ended at noon Wednesday, July 31, and the competition has surrounded the positions of Ward 4 representative and mayor.

Wards 2, 4, 6 and the mayor's seat are going to be on the ballot this November, and while Ward 2 occupied by James Blassingame and Ward 6 occupied by Gifford Shaw have only their current occupants running for the respective seats, four candidates will be running for mayor and five will be running for City Council Ward 4.

David Merchant, Sumter's current mayor, is running for reelection against Reggie Evans, Travon Adams and Foxy Campbell.

This will be Adams' first election, but the USC Columbia political science graduate and combat veteran spent time campaigning with Bernie Sanders during the 2020 presidential election.

This will be Evans' first time running for mayor but not his first time run-

ning to be on city council. In 2022, Evans, who has an MBA from Webster University and served in the Marine Reserves for 20 years, was a dual candidate for Sumter City Council Ward 1 and Sumter School District Board of Trustees Area 9.

Campbell is a real estate broker who ran for mayor in 2020 and was ranked three out of six in the election. She said her concerns include reducing crime, giving better access to health care and providing good education through further funding.

As for Merchant, he was elected in November of 2020. He was on city council representing Ward 6 from 2012 until he became mayor. Merchant and his



ADAMS



CAMPBELL



EVANS



MERCHANT



BURKETT



DAVIS



KENNEDY



MAHON

wife, Laurie, are the owners of Merchant Iron Works Inc.

After current Ward 4 representative Steve Corley announced he is not running for reelection, five new candidates are vying for his position: Lucy

Mahon, Jimmy Davis, Scott Burkett, Rebecca Lynn Kennedy and Gene Weston.

Mahon is a physical therapist who has worked in health care for more than 20 years and said she discovered her passion for politics after running for S.C. State Senate earlier this year.

Davis is the owner of Air Solutions Heating and Cooling in downtown Sumter and the 2023 Greater Sumter Chamber of Commerce's Philip L. Ed-

wards Business Person of the Year. It has been the Sumterite's goal to run for city council for about 10 years.

As a former event manager for the City of Sumter for about 17 years, Kennedy has a long track record of volunteering for the city. She was also the director for Sumter Green and the Iris Festival, and now she owns a butcher shop on Bultman Drive called Carnivore Butcher and Bottle.

Burkett was born and raised in Sumter's historical district, and he lives there currently. A Realtor who owns Stretch Zone Studios, Burkett founded the litter council that is known today as the Litter Advisory Board.

Weston was born and raised in Sumter, and his family owns Burgess Brogden Building Supply. He ran for the City Council Ward 4 position once before in 2000, the year former Mayor Joe McElveen was first elected before serving 20 years.

Filing began at noon July 14 and ended on the last day of July. During this period, those interested could file to run for mayor for a fee of \$400 or city council for a fee of \$240.

## Penny for Progress will also be on ballots with 30 countywide projects

### STAFF REPORT

The Penny for Progress initiative will appear on ballots this November. If it gets approval from a majority of voters in November, the Capital Penny Sales Tax would see a charge of 1% of the sales tax imposed that will fund capital projects, and the tax would apply to most items, except non-prepared food items (groceries), prescription drugs and medical supplies.

Below is the proposed list of what the money from the Penny Tax would go toward if approved by a majority of voters in November:

- \$13,000,000 toward emergency radios and pagers
- \$14,000,000 toward county fire trucks
- \$5,000,000 toward city fire trucks
- \$1,500,000 toward an EMS station on Stadium Road. This would be a "new 4,000 sq. ft. satellite facility to include a two-bay truck port," according to public documents.
- \$1,000,000 toward four new EMS ambulances
- \$2,000,000 toward industrial infrastructure. It's to "construct a 'Pad Ready' industrial site approximately 200,000 sq. ft. with options to expand for industrial recruitment," according to public documents.
- \$1,750,000 toward intersection safety improvements
- \$2,500,000 toward Bobby Richardson Park Improvements. It's to "transform the park into a state-of-the-art Baseball Complex to include a practice facility, increased parking capacity, and two new entrances for better accessibility," according to public documents.
- \$2,800,000 toward 15 new Patriot Park pickleball courts and added parking
- \$2,750,000 toward downtown building improvements and acquisitions, including Liberty Center upgrades
- \$21,000,000 toward county paving and resurfacing
- \$3,000,000 toward rebuilding the Stadium Road Fire Station
- \$1,000,000 toward a fire department training facility
- \$6,000,000 toward federal state road construction on U.S. 378. It's to reconnect "the communities and services north and south of the US-378 Bypass at Wesmark and Miller Roads to improve safety for drivers and pedestrians and enhance mobility for all travelers," according to public documents.
- \$10,000,000 toward a state road resurfacing match. "This project will be used to draw down additional funds from the State Department of Transportation to prioritize and expedite critical state road projects in Sumter County," according to public documents.
- \$3,250,000 toward improving the public services buildings
- \$1,500,000 toward industrial property acquisition
- \$2,600,000 toward Dillon Park improvements
- \$4,000,000 toward community park playground improvements. It would "[e]nhance public parks with infrastructure that adds safety and security, as well as modern playground equipment accessible for all children to include Swan Lake, Birnie Center, Crosswell, Catchall-Shaw, Shiloh, Rafting Creek, and others," according to public documents.
- \$1,000,000 toward a Central Carolina Technical College facility upgrade to the health center building
- \$1,500,000 toward Mayesville Main Street revitalization
- \$1,200,000 toward Pinewood Road paving
- \$9,500,000 toward a Dugan Street and downtown parking facility
- \$1,250,000 toward a Delaine Community Center. It would construct "a new community center for seniors and youth with approximately 4,000 sq. ft. to replace the current center located near the old Delaine School," according to public documents.
- \$3,000,000 toward the South Sumter Gym
- \$1,500,000 toward Harvin Street redesign and streetscape
- \$300,000 toward Pinewood sidewalks
- \$3,500,000 toward community sidewalks and activity paths
- \$1,000,000 toward airport facility upgrade
- \$2,500,000 toward community-wide acquisition of distressed structures

## Education

# Top recent storylines from Sumter School District

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

### 1. SCHOOL YEAR BEGAN AUG. 1

Before Tropical Storm Debby forced Sumter School District to transition to eLearning days in early August, the district did open the school year with the first day of school on Thursday, Aug. 1.

It marked the second year that the district has operated on the “modified year ‘round calendar,” which is a growing trend in the state.

School begins in early August, but there are multiple benefits, including ending the first semester before the Christmas break in December and extending breaks during the school year as opposed to going two to three months without a day off or teacher workday.

Even though school starts earlier on the calendar, the summer break is still the same length of time as before because school gets out at the end of May.

The Aug. 1 start date was the most popular in the state. A total of 25 of the 73 traditional public-school districts, or 34%, began then.

### 2. MATH INTERVENTIONIST WINS DISTRICT TEACHER OF YEAR

Cherryvale Elementary School math interventionist Terri Johnson took home the District Teacher of the Year award at the district’s annual Back to School Rally for teachers and staff on July 30.

A graduate of Crestwood High School in 2007, Johnson returned home to Sumter last year after spending the first 12 years of her professional career as a classroom teacher in Richland School District 2 in northeast Columbia.

As a K-2 interventionist, Johnson works with Tier 3 students, those who score at the lowest academic level in math. She instructs a small group of students at one time in either a “pull out” strategy in her own classroom or a “push in” model where she works within another teacher’s classroom setting.



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Terri Johnson, a math education interventionist at Cherryvale Elementary School, reacts to winning the District Teacher of the Year award during Sumter School District’s annual rally July 30.



For the first time, the district also distributed new awards in other categories at the rally. The district’s support staff employee of the year was Felicia Martin-Bell of Furman Middle

School. The district office/annex employee of the year was Kristin Hackett. The district’s assistant principal of the year was Leslie Dowling of Lemira Elementary School, and the district’s

principal of the year went to Michelle McBride of Pocalla Springs Elementary School.

### 3. 3 INCUMBENTS SEEKING REELECTION TO BOARD; 1 NOT

Four district Board of Trustees races are on the ballot for the November general election, and three incumbents are vying for reelection. They include board Vice Chairwoman Bonnie Disney (Area 9), Dan Palumbo (Area 1) and Brittany English (Area 2).

There will be at least one new board member come November, as current Area 7 Trustee Shery White is running for Sumter County Council District 5 as a Republican and has decided to not seek reelection to the school board. This information is current as of Aug. 14. Filing closes Aug. 15.

## Education and the brain

# On grace and development

For Coach Tommy Jones

January is cold for baseball, but at this preseason practice, the team sitting, backs against the left field fence in front of our home dugout, I was as warm and shamefaced as I could be. Coach Tommy Jones, as he did before every practice, told us a story about life — sometimes the story had practical implications, sometimes moral, often both.

It was about a young man who had borrowed a bucket of baseballs in early



**Brent Kaneft**

June, six months prior, and had not returned every single ball to the bucket. In my memory, he said something along the lines of, “I like this guy. He’s a good guy, I think. But he messed up. He didn’t think anyone would notice. But I noticed.”

My heartrate spiked; I was just waiting for him to call me out in front of everyone. I had done it. I was guilty. I used the bucket of balls for homerun derby on the softball field, when the Wilson Hall campus was quiet on the weekend. Some friends and I lost a few — and as surly and cocky freshmen, we assumed no one would care, that no one would notice anyway. We were wrong.

Coach Jones continued his lesson. He reminded all of us about doing the little things right, even when we think no one is looking. That our integrity is paramount in this life.

He never mentioned my name. “I’ll bet this guy won’t make that same mistake again” was the last thing he said about it.

And I exhaled.

To this day, that moment of grace stands as one of the most formative events of my life. Before then, I don’t know if I had ever really experienced grace — had really felt what it was like to be let off the hook despite deserving punishment. His grace changed me. We never spoke about it, though we discussed many things about life during



PHOTO PROVIDED

the years I played for him. We even won a state championship together during my senior year, and oddly enough, as I said at our athletics banquet, “I don’t remember Coach Jones and I ever really discussing baseball all that much, except for how the game’s fundamentals could be applied to living a good, responsible life.”

When Coach Jones died this summer, the first things I remembered about him was that, yes, he loved baseball and coaching the game — though he never took himself too seriously and always had fun — and that, yes, he enjoyed winning (and he won a lot), but mainly, I remembered that he cared deeply about the type of young men he was developing. He wanted them to be successful in life, and he used the game of baseball as a means to that end.

In my last article, I ended by saying I would begin to explore the “why” of education. For what ultimate purpose do we educate children? And that exploration begins with this educational axiom:

School is about child/adolescent development, not learning. Learning is important, of course, but as a means to development. Achievement (wins, SAT scores, GPAs, community service

hours, accolades of all shapes and sizes) is a byproduct of positive development.

This axiom is grounded in research from neuroscience, cognitive psychology and education, and it is the foundation of my educational philosophy. It is, for me, the right orientation, the correct focus. And no doubt Coach Jones planted the seeds of this philosophy many years ago on that cold January preseason practice when he had all the right in the world to call me out, which would mean social embarrassment, potentially alienating me from my fellow players until I could earn their respect again... but he offered grace instead. At times, I would need calling out, too; I would need discipline to help me develop as a young man, but in that moment, grace was the right tactic.

Goodhart’s Law states that “when a measure becomes the target, it ceases to be a good measure.” And coaches and teachers alike have fallen prey to this problem: Making winning records or GPAs the target of playing the game and learning distorts the purpose of athletics and schools. It’s why we have rampant recruiting violations in high school sports and why the self-reported percentage of high school students who admit to cheating is outrageous and un-

acceptable. Achievement isn’t the goal; developing into good human beings who take responsibility for themselves, their families and their community is.

If Coach Jones made winning his target, his priorities would have been skewed. His players may have developed to be good baseball players but not good people. Thank goodness he understood the purpose of the game. Thank goodness he set his ego aside and oriented toward a higher purpose. The only thing I regret is not telling him how much of a difference that made for me, that he offered grace when I so desperately needed it, a young man, floundering in a sea of adolescent turmoil. I wish I could repay him, but knowing him, he would not have me pay him back but pay his gift forward, to give grace to someone when they’re not at their best, when they need understanding and not judgment, and when they’ve taken their eye off the ball.

Our worst day at the plate does not define a career — that is the principle of grace in a nutshell, and that is what I will remember most from Coach Tommy Jones’ example.

*Brent Kaneft is headmaster of Wilson Hall.*

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## History



# Sumter's past leads to today's preservation

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

deirdre@theitem.com

Spanish colonial and Tudor revival, craftsman, Queen Anne, folk Victorian. Sumter's local historic district is full of character that dates back to the early 1900s and even earlier. It's called turn-of-the-century architecture, and a drive through Hampton Park acts as a time machine.

From a Queen Anne home's unique roof shapes to the slope that accompanies a Tudor revival home's entryway, each house represents an era that can never authentically be brought back.

Even Sumter's downtown boasts neoclassical revival buildings, such as the former Bank of Sumter constructed in 1912, and Richardsonian Romanesque style that accompanies the Sumter Opera House first built in 1892.

The visual history these buildings and homes share shows the longevity of a successful community, but it was because of a fed-up 1975 Sumter community that rules were actually put in



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Homes in Sumter's downtown historic district are seen on Wednesday, Aug. 14. Several architectural styles are represented in the area, and preserving the buildings became a focus of the community in the 1970s.

SEE HISTORY, PAGE A11

# HISTORY

FROM PAGE A10

place to preserve historical buildings in Sumter — this later led to the creation of Sumter's Design and Review Board.

The community itself created the Historical Preservation Advisory Committee in 1975 as a result of historic homes facing neglect and being torn down. *The Item* newspaper articles at the time advertised and reported on an all-day program where architects would come in and teach the community the importance of historic preservation and the architectural styles that the Hampton Park and downtown area boasts.

A headline from Oct. 28, 1975, reads, "Preservation IS Important."

It is because of efforts from Sumter's '70s community attempting to preserve their 1900s turn-of-the-century architecture that some historic buildings are so well preserved today.

"It has taken a long time, but over the last several decades, the Hampton Park neighborhood has come from kind of a tipping point to being a very valuable part of the city," Sumter City Planner Kyle Kelly said. "And the values of those homes and those investments that property owners have made, and those residents have made in those homes, you see something that has long-lasting value for the community and for its residents."

While rules for historical buildings include keeping materials used for repairs as true to the materials available at the time as possible, there is another interesting part of Sumter's design review guidelines, and that is the historic paint palette.

The historic paint palette includes 258 understated shades of paint that can be selected for a historical home's exterior. Two of those shades are for trim only: a bright pink swatch called So Charming and a blue swatch called Fragrant Bouquet.

The paint brand, Valspar, was the creator of the palette titled the National Trust for Historic Preservation palette. However, when the palette was



discontinued and the partnership ended, the City of Sumter had to paint match each swatch to retain its historical palette.

When it comes to paint, though, the historical palette is only one part of the equation. According to Kelly, visually the city requires the trim and accents of homes in the historic Hampton Park area to differ from the base color of the home. But perhaps even more important is keeping the original brick unpainted. Kelly said that bricks

need to breathe in all weather conditions, as the material is permeable.

Even buildings in the local historic district (the Hampton Park area) and Sumter's historic downtown that are not necessarily historical are subject to specific standards.

"It is [non-historical homes are] regulated by a set of design standards that's meant to ensure that new development is compatible with existing historic development even if it differs or if there's nothing historic about

PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

**Sumter's historic district was created in 1979 and includes several streets in the downtown area.**

that building. You're trying to take cues and match rhythm and be consistent without being 'matchy matchy,'" Kelly said.

Alongside the destruction of historic homes, Sumter's 70s community was unhappy with new development ranch-style homes and apartments that did not harmonize with the historical nature of the neighborhood. In 1979, Sumter's local historic district was created, which encompasses streets such as Church Street, West Calhoun Street and Broad Street. The Main Street area in Sumter's historical downtown includes a National Register Historic District which was denoted in 1975.

Kelly said although the standards may seem rigid, they are somewhat loose compared to other areas' historic districts.

Today, you can still visit Sumter's Opera House, gaze at the old bank or drive through the local historic district and see the proof the City of Sumter has held life for more than a century.

# Sumter's Genealogical Society pieces together history

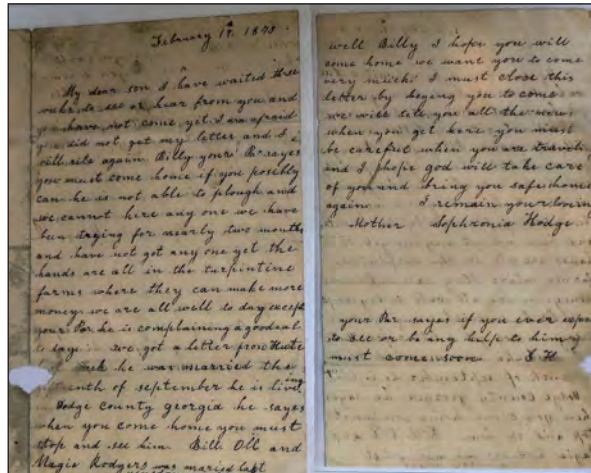
BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

deirdre@theitem.com

An old, dusty family Bible or a long-forgotten deed to a property; as much as Sumter's genealogical society contributes to its county, its county can contribute to it. Even the tiniest items can piece together someone's past.

"Many people go, 'Well, what do I do with all of this stuff?'" archivist/historian for Sumter Genealogical Society Amanda H. Sass said.

"Well, we're prepared to make a house for it, or at a minimum, if you have people in the house who want to hold onto it, at least make copies of it and have it available to the wider community because that one little piece of information that someone might have had sitting in their attic for years may be that key



An 1873 letter from mother Sophronia Hodge to her son William J. Hodge is housed in Sumter's Genealogical Society.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY AMANDA H. SASS

piece of information that somebody else is looking for to tie other records together."

A genealogical society is a rare addition to a town, and Sumter's is on the ground floor of the same building as Sumter Museum. Though the society rents space from the museum, there is a distinc-

tion between the two — while the museum deals generally with artifacts, the genealogical society has a collection of paper documents that can be searched through.

"Most museums are looking at the history of the area through clothing and artifacts and furniture and houses and

that kind of stuff, where the genealogical society, we're more focused on the people, the family, the interconnections between the different families," Sass said.

An especially important part of genealogical research revolves around African Americans. A single obituary from a funeral can help create a history for Sumter's African American community, as newspapers of the past, including *The Item*, did not include obituaries of Black residents.

One of Sass' favorite documents that the society has is a letter from the 1800s from a mother to her cousin requesting that her son is watched as he goes into town.

"Mamas have been worrying about this from the 1800s until now," Sass joked.

The society has written docu-

mentation from as early as the mid-1700s, and if you were born and raised in Sumter County or even surrounding counties, it is likely that you will find a piece of your history within the walls of the society.

"From the fact of just reading their [ancestor's] words to just holding in your hand something that they held in their hand at one time," Sass said about the connection that historical documents can give current society to their ancestors.

The society held its first meeting in 1974, meaning that this September the group will hold its 50th meeting.


Membership to gain access to documents is \$30 a year or \$20 for a day. The society is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

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## Religion

# Olympics was a time for all to come together, celebrate unity

Sports are a vital piece of the fabric of our country. It is not inconsequential that a 30-minute evening news cast contains headlines, and other important news, the weather and, without fail, sports. I realize that not everyone loves sports as much as I do (my lovely wife, for instance), but I have always looked at sports as a healthy outlet from the sometimes overwhelming events of life.

I am new to Sumter, but in my short time here, I have gained a great respect for the rich athletic traditions that exist here. Parks and stadiums celebrate local legends, most notably Freddie Solomon and Bobby Richardson (thankfully I have had the privilege already of meeting



**Rev. Stewart Rawson**

Bobby, and he is not only a sports legend, but he is also a treasure for this city). Current athletes like Ja Morant and Jordan Montgomery are at the top of their respective sports. At their best, athletic events can bring us together, unite us around a common goal and maybe, just maybe, bridge divides that exist in our culture.

On Sunday, I watched the closing ceremonies of the 2024 Summer Olympics from Paris, France. In an age of widespread terrorism, we all breathed a sigh of relief that the games came off without any tragedies. It is a sad reality of our modern lives together that this is a measure of success. The Olympics, as they do every other year, brought the world together. In a time of war in both



Ukraine and in Israel, we watched as athletes from warring nations came together and kept their battles to the court or the pitch. Most of the athletes stay together in a massive village built to house them for the duration of the games, and the chair of the International Olympic Committee commented in his closing remarks on how amazing it is that these violent differences can be set aside for a moment, for two weeks, but still for a period of peace and celebration of our common humanity. This, to me, is sports at its best!

The performances of the athletes were amazing! A'ja Wilson, who was

born and raised in Columbia and graduated from the University of South Carolina, was the MVP of the women's basketball competition, and she and her teammates brought home the gold! The U.S. women's soccer (the rest of the world calls it "football") team also brought home the gold, as did the U.S. men's basketball team; it was a proud day to be an American and to hear our national anthem played. At a time when our country is divided in so many different ways, it was an opportunity, once again if only for a moment, for us to come together and to put aside our differences and to celebrate our unity.

I will keep being thankful for the outlet that athletic events provide, and I will pray for unity and compassion amid our differences.

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

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## Business

# Yucatan is celebrating 25 years in Sumter

Consistently good food and drinks and friendly staff have been keys to success, owner says

BY BRUCE MILLS  
bruce@theitem.com

Yucatan Mexican Restaurant owner Hector Reyes called it “the opportunity of a lifetime” when he was able to buy the former San Jose Restaurant in Gateway Plaza in 1999 and make it his own.

Fast-forward to now, and Reyes says he has been able to live the “American Dream,” as Yucatan celebrated its 25th anniversary in Sumter on Aug. 1. Keys to success have included good food and drinks, friendly staff and a strong work ethic, he said.

Reyes said customers regularly say consistency and the personal touch are what make the restaurant so popular.

“We are consistent on our food and the drinks,” he said. “People tell us all the time that they come back because the food is consistently good. Customers also like the atmosphere and



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Yucatan owner Hector Reyes just celebrated the restaurant's 25th anniversary in Sumter. The restaurant is at 1316 Broad St. in Gateway Plaza.

BRUCE MILLS / THE SUMTER ITEM



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Yucatan Mexican restaurant owner Hector Reyes said he is thankful to be in Sumter. The restaurant has been chosen by *Sumter Item* readers as the Best Mexican Restaurant in many annual Best of Sumter contests.

## 25 YEARS

FROM PAGE A14

friendly staff.”

Yucatan is open for lunch and dinner seven days a week, and fan favorites include the fajitas; the Molcajete, which is a dish with chicken, shrimp and steak served with tortillas; a cheesesteak burrito; tacos; and the margaritas.

Dinner is the busiest time of the day because customers have more time than to relax with a beer or a margarita, Reyes said, as opposed to a standard one-hour lunch schedule.

A server for San Jose for two years, Reyes bought the restaurant in 1999 from its ownership, who had planned to close the establishment, and then he changed its name to Yucatan.

In his first five years as owner,

he said he did everything, to include serving and cleaning the tables, but then the restaurant became more established. Now, his role is more general oversight, but he still brings a strong work ethic every day.

“I make sure that every day I am pushing to be the best,” Reyes said. “I am on top of everything. I am checking the kitchen, and I tell the customers to let me know if something is wrong, so we can fix it. I really love my job, love working with people, and I am happy with what I am doing.”

The growth of Gateway Plaza at the intersection of Broad Street and Alice Drive through the years has also helped business, he

added, as customers often come in to eat after shopping.

The restaurant is also fortunate to be on the corner of the plaza, Reyes said, because there is plenty of parking in the back and easy access from a side entrance area.

Reyes, 58, moved to America from Mexico when he was 20, and he has been in the restaurant business for 30 years.

He said he is thankful to be in Sumter.

“I am so thankful to be in Sumter, and God put me here,”

Reyes said.

Yucatan has also many times been selected as the best Mexican restaurant in Sumter in *The Item*'s Best of Sumter contests.

### YUCATAN MEXICAN RESTAURANT

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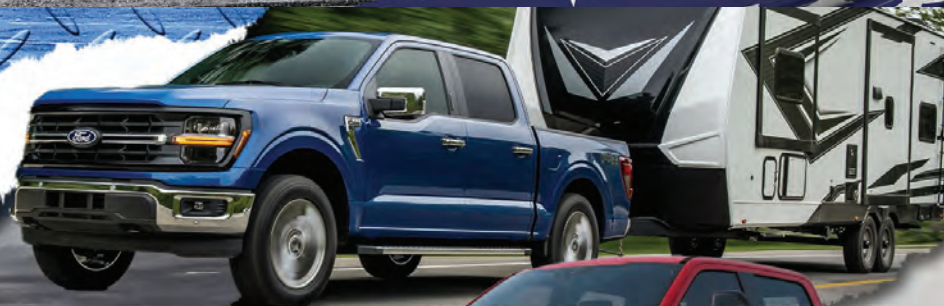


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## Military

# Veterans take pride in county, city Purple Heart designations

Both Sumter County, City of Sumter wrote proclamations in 2014

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

**L**eroy Thompson Jr. said it gives him a special feeling when he enters Sumter County and sees the signs that designate his home is a Purple Heart County.

The designation is associated with the Purple Heart medal, which is the oldest military medal in the nation and is awarded to members of the U.S. armed forces who have been wounded or killed in combat. A Purple Heart

*'It really makes us feel good as a chapter that we can see that the city and the county do care about veterans.'*

### LEROY THOMPSON

Member of Gen. George L. Mabry Jr. Chapter 817 of the Military Order of the Purple Heart

local chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, which is named Gen. George L. Mabry Jr. Chapter 817. He and chapter Commander Harry Thompson, another Purple Heart medal recipient from his service in

County is one that recognizes and honors those veterans who have been awarded the medal.

Thompson earned two Purple Heart medals while serving in the U.S. Marines in Vietnam. He is also a member of the



PHOTOS BY BRUCE MILLS / THE SUMTER ITEM

A Purple Heart City sign in the City of Sumter appears on Guignard Drive near the intersection with Liberty Street.



Harry Thompson, rear, and Leroy Thompson Jr. both earned their Purple Hearts in the U.S. Marines during Vietnam. Both men are members of the local chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart.



Leroy Thompson Jr. holds one of his two Purple Hearts earned during the Vietnam War.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Local Purple Heart veterans gather around Sumter Mayor David Merchant at Sumter Military Museum recently when he declared Aug. 7 as Purple Heart Day in the City of Sumter. The Purple Heart was first created on Aug. 7, 1782, by Gen. George Washington, the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army.

## PURPLE HEART

FROM PAGE A18

Vietnam, sat down recently and discussed how times have changed for the better for Vietnam War veterans.

The men explained that Vietnam was so controversial in the U.S. that veterans were not thought of highly when they returned home from service.

“We were considered to be drug addicts, and whatever the image was given out at the time is what we were considered,” Leroy Thompson said. “But that has changed, and thank God for those changes of the thought patterns of our country.”

Both men said they think civilians can more readily identify with veterans now because wars and conflicts can be followed daily on television as opposed to more than 50 years ago with Vietnam.

“I think the Afghan war and the Iraqi wars kind of opened Americans’



Harry Thompson serves as the commander of Gen. George L. Mabry Jr. Chapter 817 of the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

eyes to what we actually went through,” Thompson said. “People can visualize it more now and identify with veterans.”

### PURPLE HEART DESIGNATIONS

Sumter County has been a Purple

Heart County since Nov. 11, 2014, Veterans Day, since it’s always on Nov. 11, by a proclamation of Sumter County Council. Actually, the City of Sumter carries a similar declaration as a Purple Heart City, and Sumter City Council made its own proclamation on the designation on the same day, according to Sumter County Veterans Affairs Officer Valerie Brunson.

“The Purple Heart is a combat decoration that represents sacrifice, bravery and a commitment to defending the nation,” Brunson said. “Both designations as a county and city affirm local government and the Veterans Services Division acknowledge the service members’ contributions.”

Leroy Thompson said it is a good feeling to know that Sumter has the designations.

“It really makes us feel good as a chapter that we can see that the city and the county do care about veterans,” he said.

### THE LOCAL CHAPTER

The Gen. George L. Mabry Jr.

Chapter 817 of the Military Order of the Purple Heart has about 41 members, all of whom are Purple Heart veterans. The chapter represents Sumter, Clarendon and Lee counties, according to Leroy Thompson. There are 11 total chapters in South Carolina.

Thompson said the local chapter’s mission is to serve veterans and active-duty military and their families, with a focus on those in need through fundraisers.

There are plenty more Purple Heart veterans in Sumter County, and both men said the chapter is looking for younger Purple Heart veterans to become members. In its recruitment effort, the chapter will pay one half, or 50%, of a new member’s lifetime membership fee.

The chapter meets every third Thursday of the month at the Sumter Combat Veterans Building, 529 Wise Drive.

If a veteran is interested in membership, he or she can contact Commander Harry Thompson at (803) 983-3770.

*Football Media Day brings together coaches, players to talk about upcoming season*

The Sumter Item hosted its fifth-annual Football Media Day presented by Hines Furniture on Saturday, Aug. 10, at the Sumter Opera House. Sponsors included Simpson Hardware, Hill Plumbing and Air, Auto-Owners Insurance, Creech Roddey Watson Insurance, Kona Ice and Mary Ann's Deli.

Twelve teams participated in the event, discussing the biggest position battles, new classifications and regions and more. Each school brought a few of its brightest stars and leaders to share some insight on the upcoming season. The videos of each team are available on *The Item* Sports Facebook page if you missed the event.



NICH PITTS / THE SUMTER ITEM

**ABOVE:** Lakewood's Tyler Washington-Broomfield, right, speaks alongside Gator head coach Willie Offord at *The Sumter Item's* Football Media Day on Saturday, Aug. 10.



**TOP RIGHT:** East Clarendon's Darius McCray poses for a photo during *The Sumter Item's* Football Media Day.

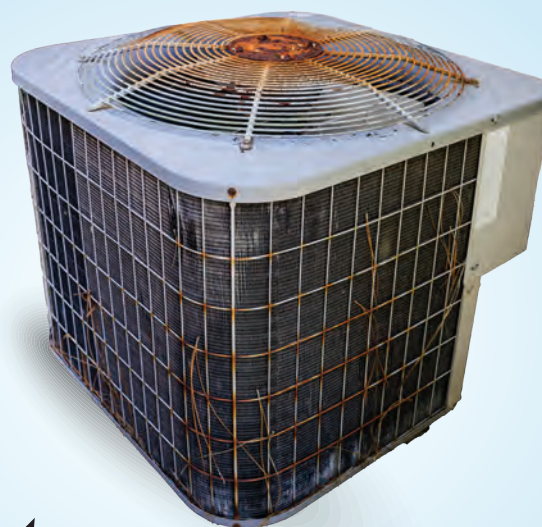


PHOTOS BY MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM

**BELOW:** Wilson Hall's Thomas Creech clutches a football during a photo session on the day of the event.

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Sumter's Jerius Williams, right, talks during *The Sumter Item's* Football Media Day, drawing a reaction from teammate Kam Fortune.



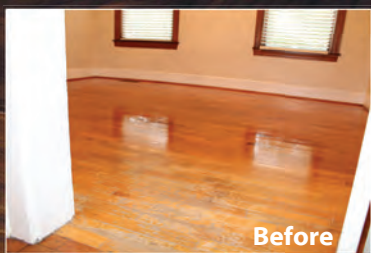
ABOVE: From left, Manning's Jontavious Canty, Jalynn Coard, Jeremy Blanding and JaRae Mitchell strike a pose during media day.



LEFT: Thomas Sumter's Jordan Tillman tosses a ball in the air.

PHOTOS BY MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM

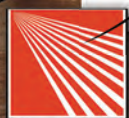
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### McLeod Health Clarendon

## Business

# Behind the lens

Longtime photographer Charlie Mathis gets candid about his journey, passion for capturing the moment

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysha@theitem.com

The click of a camera shutter — crisp, precise and fleeting — does more than capture a moment; it seals emotions, stories and memories into a single, timeless image.

For longtime photographer Charlie Mathis, the simple act continues to be the highlight of his 30-plus-year tenure.

Born and raised in the Pinewood suburbs, Mathis was first enamored with the click of a camera in 1964 as a sophomore in high school.

“I loved to see people with the big flash on their camera,” he reminisced.

He honed his skills, capturing photos of his high school days, getting a feel for the camera and his signature style of photography. Graduating in 1966, he turned his fascination into a career that spanned across military service, taking him to places as far as Vietnam. He would train under veteran photographer Jimmy Russell, learning all he could about capturing the moment and the camera used to do it.

Mathis’ camera brand of choice is Nikon. With its high quality, exceptional image clarity and reliable performance in various conditions, it makes it the perfect camera for Mathis to take around the world or across Sumter. His expertise with the camera brand makes him the go-to guy for many up-and-coming photog-



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Charlie Mathis, a longtime photographer in Sumter, works in his studio recently. Mathis said he tries to make clients feel relaxed to get better photos of them. Mathis has also served as the photographer for Morris College since 1985.

raphers. Along with questions of how and why about the camera itself, one question Mathis is often rendered speechless about is, “Why don’t my pictures come out as good as yours?” His only response is lighthearted laughter.

Mathis’ photography expertise is vast and varied. From weddings to school proms and military photos to passport headshots, he’s done it all. His studio, Charlie Mathis Studio, which opened in 1992 while he was on military reserve, has become a staple in the community. It’s a place where

*“I make sure everything is up to par, and I say, ‘OK, ready for your glamour shot?’ and make them feel relaxed because that’s how you do better pictures.”*

**CHARLIE MATHIS**

Photographer, owner of Charlie Mathis Studio

SEE **MATHIS**, PAGE A24



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Charlie Mathis sits in his studio in Sumter recently. He said he became fascinated with photography as a child, and his camera brand of choice is Nikon.

## MATHIS FROM PAGE A1

memories live — whether it's the glimmer of a blushing bride or the mischievous grin of a toddler — framed on his walls.

There are a few of his own close-ups scattered around the studio, from photo ops with the Leaning Tower of Pisa to his naturally charming face Photoshopped onto the body of a

### CHARLIE MATHIS STUDIO

**ADDRESS:** 122 S. Main St., Sumter, SC 29150

**PHONE:** (803) 773-4487

**WEBSITE:** [MathisPhotographyStudio.photorelect.com](http://MathisPhotographyStudio.photorelect.com)

Spanish bullfighter to capturing the beauty that is the Great Wall of China to priceless snippets from his many

travels with Morris College since coming on as its photographer in 1985.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Mathis' career is his commitment to teaching. Since 1993, he has mentored Morris College interns and high school students, sharing not only the technicalities of photography, but also the philosophy behind it all.

"You've got to make people feel comfortable. That's the main thing, you know," he explained. "I joke

every now and then when I'm back there doing their pictures. I make sure everything is up to par, and I say, 'OK, ready for your glamour shot?' and make them feel relaxed because that's how you do better pictures."

With years of experience behind the lens, Mathis doesn't look to slow down any time soon.

"I'll put it like this: I enjoy it. It's fun to me, it's really fun," Mathis said, beaming.



## Business

# All in the family

## Myson's Tires grows and changes, but family business retains values, hard work and Tire Man on Broad Street

BY KAYLA GREEN

kayla@theitem.com

Men often salute military memorials, and the full-scale Tuskegee Airmen's P-51 Mustang Red Tail at Sumter Veterans Park is no exclusion. Those men are usually not made of tire.

An original Tire Man welcomed motorists to Sumter for years in front of Myson's Tires on Broad Street and Carter Road. It was an idea born from the mind of Larry Tickle, who co-owned the automotive repair, tire and wheel center store with Keith Logan. A friend who could weld helped create the "15-foot-tall dude made of stacked tires with upraised arms and a chrome wheel rim for a face," according to the description on Roadside America.

While that Tire Man, assembled with "old, raggedy tires," according to the younger Tickle, has disappeared from the origi-

Myson's Tire Man salutes the Tuskegee Airmen's P-51 Mustang Red Tail at Sumter Veterans Park on Broad Street.

nal Broad Street location, co-owner Matthew Tickle is helping to pump new life into the business he was forced to work at when he was 13 that he now runs at 3890 Broad St.

Logan opened the first Myson's in 1969 on U.S. 521 South before moving to Guignard Drive in 1996. That store, which Logan had sole ownership of after taking over the business from his father in 1988, according to *The Sumter Item* archives, closed in May.

The Broad Street location opened as a partnership between Logan and Tickle's father. Tickle said he and his dad have helped build it to what it is today and that the agreement is for Logan to retire by the start of next year.

"My main goal is to let people know we're still here," Tickle said, "still we keep going. I have no plans on stopping."

People overlook tires, Tickle said, but "we're not flying cars yet."

His dad was a pilot for Bank Air and was looking for jobs when that career ended, when he met Logan and asked for an opportunity



PHOTOS BY MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Myson's Tires co-owner Matthew Tickle stands for a portrait.

to work at the beginnings of the Guignard store. He strived to do something better than any other worker, and his motivation and commitment to his work led Logan to partner with Larry Tickle to reopen a Broad Street location.

"I was 13 at the time, still in school, and I worked there throughout the school and in summertime. (My dad) called me one summer and told me to get up and that Grandma was coming to get me to come work there," Tickle said.

While Tickle's teenage sentiment about working janitorial services at a tire store while his friends hung out and enjoyed summer break mirrored what many young teenagers would feel, he said he looks back now with appreciation. He did whatever Dad told him to, sweeping, cleaning, learning. Maybe begrudgingly at the time, 39-year-old Tickle credits those formative years for the development of his work ethic and business values.

Eventually, his friends even started working at Myson's, and "they learned a lot, too."

Now, Tickle has exchanged brooms

for payroll, waiting to be told what to do to handling the family business' accounting, customer relations and anything else needed from an owner/operator.

He brings knowledge he learned from seven years he spent in Columbia working at Love Chevrolet. While Myson's mainly services and sells tires, alignment and brakes, Tickle gained experience in an array of vehicle services.

"There was a time when I realized how hard I was working and putting it toward something that wasn't really necessarily going to be mine. A lot of people do that, and that's what a lot of people are able to do, but I had an opportunity like this with a busi-

ness that could be mine down the road," Tickle said. "I was about 26, 27 when I made up my mind to go back and put my effort into Myson's Tires and better that company."

His dad has told him had he not returned home to rejoin the family business, he probably would have "sold everything or shut down."

Tickle turned 30 and "really started digging in and getting serious." He



## MYSON'S FROM PAGE A25

learned what he needed to become a co-owner of a store that today has eight employees outside of his family.

“School isn’t for everybody. It isn’t for me. I can sit there and read books, and in my mind it just drips off, but I’m hands-on. I learn very quickly and efficiently when I’m doing it,” he said. “If I ever did



need to get another job, I have a lot of experience in a lot of things.”

At the heart of Myson’s

Tires is a family business that wants to continue to be part of the community. It took well over a year to resurrect Tire Man in front of Myson’s current Broad Street store. Tickel didn’t want to use left-over tires.



PHOTOS BY MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM

SEE **MYSON'S**, PAGE A27

Eric Scott moves a tire to be installed on a vehicle at Myson’s Tires.

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Dylan Gibson, far left, works at Myson's Tires. Lynn Driggers, left, works on a truck, and below, Timothy Wood and Julie Bedser work behind the counter at Myson's.

PHOTOS BY MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM



## MYSON'S FROM PAGEA26

Now, Tire Man V2.0, as Tickel calls him, can be seen not with both arms extended out, but with his right arm in the formation of a salute. Across the street, the aircraft flown by the first Black Americans allowed to do so for the U.S. Armed Forces sits suspended in midair, a monument to honor the group of African American pilots, navigators, bombardiers, supply maintenance, support staff and instructors, four of whom were from Sumter County, who fought in World War II and played a pivotal role in desegregating the U.S. military, as written in *The Sumter Item*.

With Tire Man reborn and refurbished, another step in the local tire shop's story continues. Two men built and grew Myson's. Two men passed their business down to their sons. When Tickel thinks about what his dad might have had to do had he not returned to Sumter, he also thinks of his son, whom Tickel and his wife welcomed early this year.

Maybe motorists will one day see Tire Man V2.0 holding his non-saluting hand with Tire Boy.

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Law enforcement

# Finding compassion in crisis: Meet Sumter Police Department's Senior Victim Advocate Amanda Wiley



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Amanda Wiley found her calling as a victim advocate, working for Sumter Police Department. She is driven by a commitment to help others.

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE  
alaysha@theitem.com

In nature, the journey of a butterfly — from a humble caterpillar inching along the ground to a cocooned chrysalis to the emergence of a vibrant winged creature — mirrors the transformation that comes with growth and change.

Amanda Wiley's journey to senior victim advocate with Sumter Police Department is a story of such metamorphosis. Like her favorite animal, the butterfly, Wiley's evolution was driven by compassion and her unwavering commitment to helping others.

Born and raised in Columbia, Wiley "married Sumter" through her husband and extended family. From a young age, she valued hard work, shown through her long tenures at various jobs throughout her teenage years and early adulthood. It would be years down the road when she found her true calling.

After more than a decade working at Blue Cross Blue Shield in Camden — she still treasures the friendships and memories she made during her tenure — Wiley felt a pull to return to school and finish her undergraduate degree started years earlier at Winthrop Uni-

*"Learning about it from the inside helps me be able to articulate it to other people so that it makes sense because it's not 'CSI,' it's not 'Law & Order,' it's life, and we're here."*

**AMANDA WILEY**

Senior victim advocate for Sumter Police Department

versity. On her 30th birthday, she enrolled in USC Sumter to complete her degree in interdisciplinary studies, with a concentration in psychology and sociology. It was pivotal moment in her life, one that would set the stage for her future as a victim advocate, unbeknownst to her.

"I [went] to a funeral of a family member, and I was reminded that my family was a lot of teachers and preachers and people who made an

SEE WILEY, PAGE A29

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**BEST of SUMTER 2024**

## WILEY FROM PAGE A28

impact on their community at this time. I was working at Blue Cross Blue Shield, and I loved it; I loved it, I really did," she expressed. "But I felt like I could do more. I wanted to do more."

Her passion for understanding human behavior and her innate empathy led her to pursue a master's degree in professional counseling. It was during this time her sister-in-law reached out to their cousin and former Sumter County Sheriff's Office Victim Advocate Barbara Jean Wiley asking if a victim advocate job would be a good fit for Wiley to gain experience in her field of study, to which the fellow Wiley agreed.

Wiley remembered the day as if it were yesterday: her walking into the old Sumter Police Department on Harvin Street, right up to the front desk, to ask for an application. "City or county?" she recalled the officer questioned. Unaware of how Sumter operated compared to the quaint town of Camden, she laughed, thinking of how young Wiley of that time only knew where the library and Walmart were located in the "big" city of Sumter she stuttered out an "I don't know." She would know soon enough.

Wiley's natural compassion and skills acquired through her education made her a perfect fit for the police department's victim advocate position, despite initially knowing little about the role. During the past 13 years, Wiley became an integral part of the police department, providing support and guidance to victims during the most difficult time of their lives. Her lack of formal criminal justice background served as an advantage, she said, allowing her to approach her work with a fresh perspective and a deep sense of empa-



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

**Amanda Wiley is also dedicated to her family and her church as its minister of music. She said music and her faith help her to balance the emotional demands of her job.**

thy. Her role as a victim advocate is crucial, not only in helping navigate the complexities of the criminal justice system but also providing emotional support and resources during a time of crisis. She is often called upon "like an officer" would be, department officials say, responding to situations where her presence can make a significant difference in someone's life. She temporarily dons the uniform as a reserve officer, responding to calls alongside her sis-

ters and brothers in blue.

"I always remember how I would need someone to be the way I try to be with me if I was on the other side because I would have no clue," she said. "Learning about it from the inside helps me be able to articulate it to other people so that it makes sense because it's not 'CSI,' it's not 'Law & Order,' it's life, and we're here."

"Regardless of where we are in the process, I really do stand by people won't forget what you said, what you

did. They will remember how you made them feel. You need to be better after you leave me, not made to feel worse."

Trauma, Wiley knows, is deeply personal and unique to each individual. She considered it a privilege to be allowed into someone's life during such a vulnerable time.

"[They] don't know me, so for [them] to allow me to stand beside [them], to just be present with [them] in this moment is huge, and I don't take that for granted," she said.

Being in the moment is a skill Wiley has spent years improving, both professionally and personally. Outside of work, she is just as dedicated to her family and community. She is heavily involved in her church, serving as the minister of music, and enjoys the bright lights at Sumter Little Theatre where she has graced roles as Morticia in "The Addams Family Musical" and stunned audiences with her vocals in "Mood 14," the theater's cabaret show. She also actively serves in several organizations that support victims of crime and promote community safety, including the South Carolina Law Enforcement Victim Advocates as Pee Dee regional assistant director and Sumter County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council.

Her love of music, her faith and her community provide a much-needed balance to the emotional demands of her job, allowing her to pour into others while also replenishing her own spirit.

"At the end of the day, if God forbid something else happens, I don't want you to hesitate to make that phone call," Wiley said. "In the word, it says, one person plants, one person waters [and] God gets the increase. I'm just doing my part, I'm really just doing my part."

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## Former SHS Gamecock Boone ready for bounce-back season at Fla. after knee injury



UAA COMMUNICATIONS PHOTO

Justus Boone, a former Sumter High School standout, tore his ACL before the start of his junior season last fall but is ready to get back on the gridiron this year with the Florida Gators.

**BY TIM LEIBLE**  
[tim@theitem.com](mailto:tim@theitem.com)

**L**ife-changing moments often come with a fresh perspective.

That's the positive approach Justus Boone is taking after spending last season on the sideline with the Florida Gators.

The former Sumter High defensive end tore his ACL just before the start of his junior season last fall, missing out on a year of competition. Instead of sulking, Boone found a different way to impact the Gators.

"It's definitely humbling and life changing," Boone said of his injury. "It definitely allows you to see a whole lot of stuff from a whole different perspective. It allows you to watch guys and

watch how they practice, watch their habits, watch stuff they do. You can honestly tell if they're giving everything they've got, if they're in the right headspace, stuff like that."

Boone has always been a vocal leader, but last year was different. He wasn't able to get his hands dirty and lead by example.

"That's definitely probably one of my hardest challenges that I had to deal with," Boone said on the lost dimension of his leadership. "I'm a pretty verbal guy. I definitely speak my mind in situations. I definitely feel, as a leader, I'm obligated to speak on any situation that's not right or speak on any situation that is right and acknowledge when someone does right. It's my job to acknowledge when they do right and acknowledge when they do wrong.

SEE **BOONE**, PAGE A31



Former Sumter High star and current Florida defensive lineman Justus Boone takes part in practice on March 26, 2024.

MALLORY PEAK /  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
ATHLETICS

## BOONE FROM PAGE A30

“I definitely had to be way more vocal because I wasn’t able to be physical and actually show them the intensity and show them the energy that I’m bringing. It just makes me a better leader. It helps me to be able to speak properly and (learn) how to approach people to get to their minds in the right way and not make them feel as if I’m just fussing at them, by leading them in a positive way.”

While the leadership growth was great, Boone was excited to be back where he belongs this summer: on the field. Early on, he didn’t love the idea of being eased back into the swing of things.

“I’ve been fighting every day with them to just let me do a little something. I don’t care if it hurts,” Boone said of the process. “Since the summer started, I’ve been just working. I’m trying my best to get back out there.”

Now, Boone’s knee is feeling good, and he’s excited about prepping for the season.

“I’m just keeping the mindset of no limit. I have no limit. There’s nothing that I can’t do. There’s nothing that prohibits me from doing nothing,” he said. “I’m healed. I worked hard during my rehab and my therapy to get my knee and everything back right. I worked hard in the offseason to get my body, my body composition numbers and body weight how I want to. Really just believing in my work and believing in my coaches and my staff, my trainers. They really pushed me during my therapy, and it made me a better player, made me a better person.”

Throughout the recovery process, Boone was focused on getting his knee stronger than it was before with the intention of harassing quarterbacks all season long.

“I pride myself on being a pass-rusher, of course, so the thing I’m working on is making sure I get my explosion back, making sure that I’m able to make quick change of direction, make quick change of speed,” he said. “I’ve honestly been focusing on my speed rushes. I’m most definitely a power guy. I do like to bull rush and just try to take advantage of a person, but I’ve been working on my finesse game.”

“Just getting the tools ready in the bag. That’s been my biggest focus,



TIM CASEY / UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA ATHLETICS

Former Sumter High star Justus Boone, left, takes part in drills during Florida’s spring practice on March 7.

just getting back everything I used to have and being better than what I used to be before I left off the field the first time.”

When Boone suits up against Miami for the Florida season opener on Aug. 31, he’ll be ready to show the football world what it missed out on last year.

“I don’t really care if you don’t remember me; you’re going to see me. You’re going to remember me then,” Boone said of his mindset. “I’m really just about that action. I can’t even say that I’m worried about any team, honestly. We’ve been focusing on taking it one day at a time, one play at a time, one session at a time.”

One team missing from Florida’s schedule this season was South Carolina. Last season, the Gators traveled to Columbia, which was certainly a sight for Boone, even from the sideline. While he was disappointed to miss out on a matchup with former

teammate O’Donnell Fortune, the former Sumter High star likes the schedule ahead of him. SEC play includes league newcomer Texas this season, just adding to the level of competition in the sports’ premier conference.

“I’m not gonna lie, I definitely wanted to play against South Carolina in South Carolina, for sure. That is definitely one of my dreams, but it’s all good, man,” Boone said. “That opportunity may come again down the line, but I wouldn’t say it’s heart-breaking. I like our schedule. As a competitor, you look for games and opportunities like this right here. No bashing on South Carolina at all; they’re a great team, but it doesn’t necessarily hurt my feelings.”

Boone doesn’t like to set specific goals for himself. His focus is on team success. If the Gators are winning and he’s doing his part, the stats will come.

“We just have a tunnel vision on

what we’re doing,” Boone said. “Of course, we want to be successful this season. Me personally, I want to go undefeated. But it’s important for us to not look ahead. We need to be focused on being 1% better every day, getting better every day, getting better every week, every practice, every walk through. That’s just, honestly, my main focus.”

That eye for success is highlighted by more chances for playoff glory this season. The College Football Playoff expands to 12 teams this year, and Boone intends on leading Florida into one of those spots.

“With the 12-team competition this year, there’s five teams out of the SEC that can be picked into the playoffs, and we’re going to be one of those. That’s our goal,” he said. “We’re going to be a competitor, we’re going to be a part of the fight, and we’re going to take it all the way to the deep water.”

# Former Sumter County standouts embrace star turn in NCAA College Football 25

BY TIM LEIBLE  
tim@theitem.com



The video game avatar of former Sumter High and current South Carolina defensive back O'Donnell Fortune (3) intercepts a pass in NCAA College Football 25.

COURTESY OF EA SPORTS' NCAA COLLEGE FOOTBALL 25

While most young athletes dream of one day breaking into professional sports, their eye toward the future doesn't always encapsulate everything that stardom entails.

When you make it to the NFL, you also gain a digital avatar in Madden. In baseball, you'll see the likes of former Gamecock Jordan Montgomery and former Baron JP Sears in MLB The Show. You can ball out as former Crestwood star Ja Morant in NBA 2K. For years, that was the only outlet for athletes to get a chance to pick up the sticks and play as themselves.

That all changed this fall. EA Sports released NCAA College Football 25 in July, ending a decade-long drought of college football action on video game consoles. But this year's rendition is unlike any other. In years past, college stars were technically not in the game, merely created characters wearing their numbers. With the rise of Name, Image

and Likeness deals, NCAA College Football 25 uses far more than the correct numbers. College football's greatest stars are in the game with both their names across their backs and

their likenesses recreated.

"I play it every day, every night. I'm trying to get up off of it so I can get myself sleep, so I can make sure I'm ready for the morning," former Sum-

ter High star and current Florida defensive lineman Justus Boone said. "But, man, it's cool. Honestly, I'm not a big video gamer, so it's like not necessarily a dream of mine. Of course, I wanted to be in Madden once I got to the league, but I never really played NCAA growing up, so I didn't really know much about it.

"Being a part of this recreation and being a part of the updated version is cool. It's definitely a sight to see. Matter of fact, I just bought my card yesterday for Ultimate Team. I'm loving it."

While the Sumter standouts in the game are all excited to have the chance to play as themselves, it hasn't

SEE **GAME**, PAGE A33

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# GAME FROM PAGE A32

all been perfect.

“It’s weird. They kinda messed my drip up a little bit, I’m not gonna lie. I ain’t gonna say too much about it,” former Sumter High standout and current South Carolina cornerback O’Donnell Fortune said coyly. “But it’s awesome, man. It’s a great opportunity just to see your face, yourself on the game. I always dreamed about that.”

Every player in the game got a free copy, but it wasn’t exactly free to play. NCAA College Football 25 is only on next-generation consoles, which means shelling out for a PlayStation 5 for anyone who didn’t already have access to one.

“I had to go get a P5. I didn’t have a PlayStation. I was going to wait until GTA 6 came out before I got it,” former Crestwood standout and current South Carolina tight end Josh Simon said. “I don’t really play the game like that anymore. I beat all the games I like to play; there’s nothing left to do. When it came out, everyone was sending me clips. ‘Oh Josh, they got you



COURTESY OF EA SPORTS' NCAA COLLEGE FOOTBALL 25

The video game version of former Crestwood standout and current South Carolina tight end Josh Simon catches a pass in NCAA College Football 25.

SEE GAME, PAGE A34

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## GAME FROM PAGE A33

good on the game.' I was like, 'Man, I gotta see it for myself.' So I went out, got the free copy of the game, got the P5, and it's cool. A lot of people can't say they're in a video game."

While it's cool to play as yourself, maybe the most shocking thing was the reaction to hearing about swarms of people, strangers and friends alike, sending videos of your video game avatar making plays.

"People send me clips all the time with them like using me in coverage or they had changed the defense around and put me on the line, let me get a sack," Boone said. "As a matter of fact, last night, me and my homeboys were playing on my ultimate team. He was using my user, and he got a pick with me. So it's just fun, man. It's definitely a sight to see. It's exciting. And I'm blessed and grateful."

Former Sumter High linebacker and current Vandy standout Miles Capers had family getting him on board.

"My dad tells me about it. I'll have all these plays he's making with me," he said.

For Simon, those messages are almost nostalgic at times. That being said, this isn't the only game he's planning to be in.

"Social media is wild. They'll send you all types of clips, you'll get messages from people that you ain't talked to in a long time, and it's just love for me, man, to know that I have that kind of support," Simon said. "But I ain't too big on it, I'm not way in the clouds on it. It's a big thing. I'm in a game, and that's cool and all, but I'm trying to get in the game for real. I'm trying to get to the league."

NCAA College Football 25 is a bonding experience for these area stars. Several found a way to import the Sumter



The video game avatar of former Sumter High and current Florida defensive lineman Justus Boone gets a sack in NCAA College Football 25.

High roster into the game so they can team up. Capers and Boone have even gotten a few games in together. Boone

has also played plenty with former Sumter High teammate Vincent Davis, who was a part of the crew uploaded in

LEFT: The video game representation of former Sumter High standout and current Vanderbilt defensive lineman Miles Capers, left, hits a swim move against South Carolina in NCAA College Football 25.

COURTESY OF EA SPORTS' NCAA COLLEGE FOOTBALL 25



with Sumter High's roster.

"There's a way to get Sumter High's team on the game, so we created Sumter High's team in NCAA, so we've got OD (Fortune) on there, we've got Tylee (Craft) on there, Davin (Jackson), Marcus (Lane), my brother Kirkland, Miles Capers, we've got everyone on there," Boone said. "It's lit."

There are currently seven local stars in the game. Former Lakewood star Brandon Cisse is at North Carolina State, former Crestwood standout Seneca Moore is at Liberty, and Kameron Pearson suits up for Texas State. While a few local standouts on college rosters don't have digital avatars yet, that could change with updates. Hopefully more are right around the corner, as the next crop of high school seniors makes the jump to college.

"We set a standard in Sumter," Capers said. "We need some more coming out soon so we can have more people in the game."

Fortune added, "It's cool. We're slowly gaining knowledge. It's cool seeing us all do that, and we've got younger guys that are gonna do the same. It's just cool seeing that."

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# Next Level Athletics offering youth flag football, volleyball and cross country this fall

BY TIM LEIBLE  
tim@theitem.com

Rip Ripley, who coaches volleyball, boys basketball and track at Wilson Hall, is passionate about the development of youth sports in Sumter.

That's why he founded Next Level Athletics, an AAU organization designed to serve the greater Sumter area across a wide variety of sports. They recently finished a great summer of track and basketball, and Ripley's group is gearing up for an exciting fall. The organization will offer flag football, cross country and volleyball opportunities for anyone looking to break into the sport at an entry or even more advanced level.

"There are great programs for kids who want to get super serious about a sport and really dedicated. What we're trying to do is to expose these kids to the sport, and the exposure level of it doesn't need to be five days a week for three hours a day. It needs to be learning the game," Ripley said. "Our vision is to grow these sports when the kids are in elementary school, so when they get to middle



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Next Level Athletics founder Rip Ripley snags a photo with members of the Sumter Spikers.

school and play for their school teams, they're a little more prepared and ready to play."

While Ripley coaches at Wilson Hall, he's always quick to stress that Next Level is not a Wilson Hall organization. He wants to build athletics across all of Sumter so he can enrich the community he's become a part of since joining the Barons.

"I know being someone who coaches at Wilson Hall, people

will say, 'Is that the Wilson Hall team?' No. We have participation with Wilson Hall, sure, but we want to raise everybody in the community," Ripley said. "Our family, the Ripleys, we live here, we're becoming Sumterites. We're raising our kids here, and we want to be able to provide opportunities for all the kids in this area. My personality is that if I see there's a need for something, I want to jump in and help."

## FLAG FOOTBALL

Flag football is a growing sport at Next Level that Ripley would love to see continue to expand. NLA is focused on having a great family environment. With that in mind, Ripley built a schedule that makes it easier for parents to get involved with the league. They practice just once a week and play games on Saturdays. Ripley wants to focus on teaching the fundamentals of the sport, and the league has an opportunity to get more competitive as kids continue to age up into different divisions.

"It was a hit last year; we had a huge jump in participation numbers last year. I think the way that we structure the sea-



The Sumter Spikers practice in the Wilson Hall gym.

son really resonated with the parents," Ripley said. "Our goal with that is going back kinda old school, playing those games on a Saturday morning like a lot of us did growing up.

"And really trying to emphasize one practice per week. This is not a high-level travel ball situation; we want to introduce kids to the sport at a young age, give them a safe opportunity to play, learn the game but not be

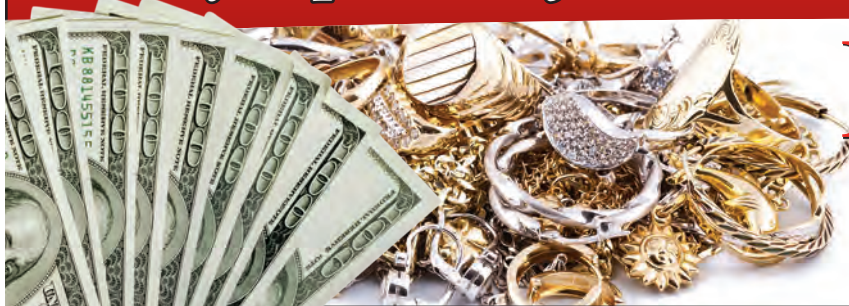
overbearing at the same time."

While the structure is more laid back, Ripley stressed the league comes to play on Saturday mornings. The league is split into three divisions based on grades in school, K-1, 2-3 and 4-5.

"We're competing at the same time," he said. "When the

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## NEXT LEVEL FROM PAGE A35

kids get out there on Saturday, they get after it. They want to win, but it's really about exposing them to the sport at a young age."

The signups for football technically close as this publishes, but games won't start for a couple of weeks. Practices begin on Saturday, Aug. 17, and games begin on Sept. 7. If you're interested in hopping into the league, reach out to Ripley at [coachripley@gmail.com](mailto:coachripley@gmail.com) or contact Next Level Athletics SC on social media, where they have pages on Facebook, X and Instagram.

### VOLLEYBALL

While the flag football teams compete once a week, the volleyball offerings at Next Level are more practice-based. The Sumter Spikers are in two age groups, 3-7 and 7-12. Both groups will practice every Wednesday at Wilson Hall starting on Aug. 21. Those sessions will run through Sept. 25 and are entirely instructional.

Ripley credits other local programs, like Heath Griffin's Sumter Volleyball Club, as opportunities for club play, but NLA opportunities are more focused about teaching the basics for newcomers, especially at the youngest age group.

"Volleyball is tough at a young age," Ripley said. "What we've seen in three years with Little Spikers (is massive improvement). I had a camp over the summer, and we had some girls in the third and fourth grade who have been exposed to volleyball for a few years now with Little Spikers, and they're already playing at a higher level than girls were three or four years ago. It's getting exposure to a sport where you're not like, 'Hey, let's go pick up 10 guys and play volleyball.' It's not quite that easy like you can for other sports."

Ripley gets volunteers from several places to help with instruction. He naturally uses his own volleyball players at Wilson Hall, but that's not all. Griffin also coaches at USC Sumter and brings the Fire Ants in to lend a hand.

"It's a great thing to have college athletes giving back and supporting the kids," Ripley said.

With the younger groups, they use a lighter ball to help teach the fundamentals without the stress of a full-sized volleyball. As athletes move into the older age group, they do more game-formatted action.

"It's a great opportunity for those kids in the super young age group to get some athletic activities in their bodies," Ripley said.

### CROSS COUNTRY

Ripley offers opportunities for athletes interested in running sports year 'round with their after-school program. That program is already in place at Wilson Hall, Alice Drive Elementary School and Liberty STEAM Charter School, along with a community program that meets twice weekly. The format is simple; any school that's interested just needs to reach out to Ripley, and he'll provide their eight-week curriculum, which includes character-building elements along with workouts. That group would then meet at their own school and train together. In the fall, things are a little more streamlined, simply because the track program includes field events.

"I have a lot of parents that have reached out and asked how to get an after-school program in their kids' school," Ripley said. "Just talk to the administrators at the school and then we look for a contact person at each school, it can be a



Next Level Athletics has a running program that runs at three schools, Wilson Hall, Alice Drive Middle and Liberty STEAM Charter School, along with a community program. Ripley is always looking for additional schools where he can expand the program.



Next Level Athletics has three age groups for flag football based on grade in school with K-1, 2-3 and 4-5.

parent, it can be a faculty member, and we actually give a stipend to that person to help get it going at that school. Then we provide everything for you.

"In the fall, it's just having a space to run and then coordinate with us. We were in three schools last year and we already have a couple

that are excited about getting involved, hopefully this year."

The program formally starts in September to give schools a chance to find their footing as the year kicks off. On Nov. 2, Next Level will host a meet to celebrate the end of the eight-week program. After that,

interested participants can potentially compete in the USATF State and Region Meets, which run on Nov. 9 and 16.

For more information about any of the fall offerings, you can follow Next Level SC on social media or head to <https://nextlevelathleticssc.com>.

## Health

# A mother's love: Sumter mom / grandmother strives to raise awareness about maternal mortality due to preeclampsia

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysha@theitem.com

A mother's love is a force of nature, unwavering and eternal. It's a bond that wraps you in a warm embrace, even in the darkest moments. This is a story of such love — a love that perseveres through loss and transforms grief into hope.

Lashon June said her daughter was nothing short of special.

"Shaquilla — that was the beauty queen, that was our queen," Lashon said with a smile. "She kept you laughing, she kept you on your toes."

Shaquilla June, born Aug. 13, 1991, was a Sumter High School graduate who went on to attend Central Carolina Technical College to earn a degree in medical assistance. Before long, Shaquilla would celebrate that she was expecting a baby boy, and her mother can still feel her excitement.

"She loved kids, and she was looking forward to being here with her baby."

Everything seemed fine until Shaquilla reached her third trimester. A blood test showed the 29-year-old developed gestational diabetes, one of the signs of high blood pressure. Lashon June said this was unheard of for Shaquilla.

"My baby was always healthy. There were no medical issues; all this stuff came about after the pregnancy."

Shaquilla's doctor started her on insulin and referred her to a clinic for regular monitoring on top of her OBGYN appointments, Lashon said. Shaquilla began to swell, so much she could barely walk, and the whites of her eyes had begun to turn a different color.



PHOTOS PROVIDED  
Shaquilla June passed away three days after giving birth to her son, Johnathan. Lashon June, her mother, seeks to raise awareness to help prevent maternal mortality brought on by preeclampsia.

"That's not normal, it's not normal," Lashon said.

In May 2021, the clinic told Shaquilla she needed to go to the hospital immediately, as she was at risk of developing preeclampsia, a hazardous condition of high blood pressure that can threaten the life of both mother and baby. It is also one of the leading causes of maternal deaths worldwide, with Black women being three

to four times more likely to die from preeclampsia, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We didn't know [anything] about preeclampsia, nothing," Lashon said. It wasn't until she was handed her daughter's discharge papers that she found out what was wrong.

Thinking she would receive regular monitoring, instead, Shaquilla was induced — three



Johnathan Lockhart is the son of the late Shaquilla June and grandson of Lashon June. Johnathan, 3, has only seen his mother in photos.

weeks earlier than her initial due date. On May 13, 2021, Shaquilla gave birth to her son, Johnathan. Two days later, Shaquilla, who Lashon said was not feeling quite back to herself, was released from the hospital on May 15.

The following day, Lashon rushed her daughter back to the hospital because of fluid buildup and her not feeling well. Though Shaquilla walked in on her own, hospital staff knew something was amiss and rushed her for treatment. When Lashon saw her again, her daughter was in pain and crying.

Shaquilla was unable to speak coherently. With one final look at Lashon and her baby, Shaquilla passed away surrounded by family on May 16. Lashon said the cause of death was an enlarged heart and other complications.

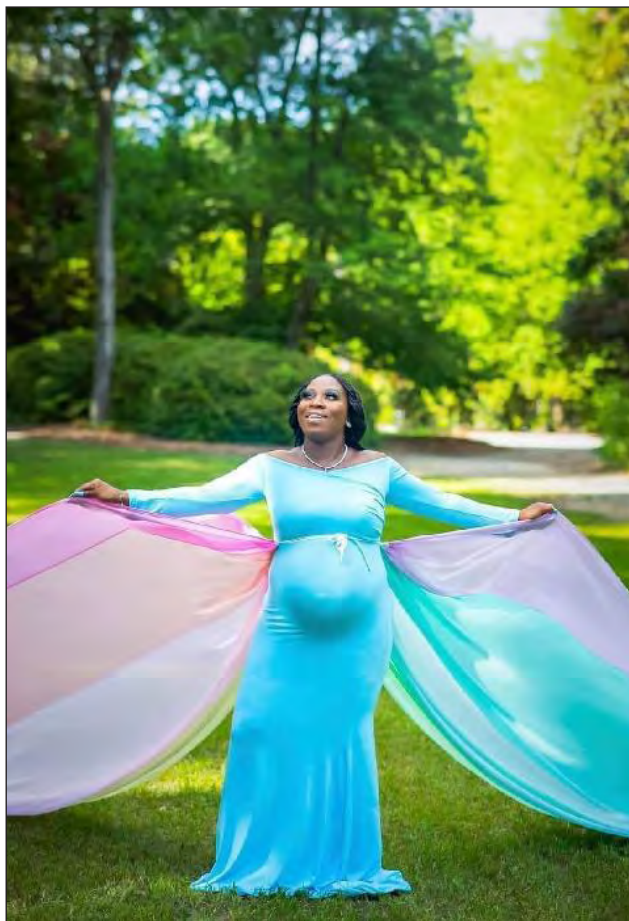
Johnathan, now age 3, has only seen his mother through

pictures.

Lashon retired after 28 years as a corrections officer on May 6, 2021, to spend more time with her family amid Shaquilla's health issue — a surprise she was waiting to tell her family about until after Shaquilla gave birth in June.

"But I got the surprise," she said, her voice thick with emotion. "I thought I could tell them any time, I got until June or July to surprise them. Not knowing she was going to leave from here ... I know God has his appointed time for each and every one of us. But a lot of times, you can go too soon."

The road through grief is not easy. It's filled with ups and downs, and you never know what each day will bring. For Lashon, it's been about taking it one step at a time — and this next step will be about raising



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Shaquilla June passed away three days after giving birth to her son, Johnathan.

## PREECLAMPSIA FROM PAGE A37

awareness in hopes of saving the life of another mother.

The Shaquilla Sherrele June Foundation was founded to raise awareness of maternal mortality and the warning signs associated with preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, high blood pressure and other side effects during pregnancy and after delivery. Donations to the foundation will be used to further community education and provide children of mothers who have passed because of health complications with scholarships and resources for education.

Lashon and her team of supporters hosted the inaugural Preeclampsia Awareness Gala on Aug. 10, bringing doctors and organizations to educate families, parents and mothers, especially, on the warning signs of preeclampsia.

"If this didn't happen to my daughter, I probably could look at a pregnant girl all day long and wouldn't think nothing about maternal warning signs, preeclampsia, none of that. But now, because I went through it with my daughter,

I can almost look at a person and say, 'You need to get checked out,'" Lashon said.

Deep down, Lashon thinks Shaquilla's death could have been prevented. And while she misses her daughter daily, she found peace in knowing the light of her daughter shines brightly within her "miracle baby" Johnathan.

"I'm still grieving my daughter, and it's rough. And then every day I see Johnathan, I thank God. He's an angel; God blessed us to have him," Lashon shared.

As the family moves forward with efforts to spread awareness and provide hope to families and children who have been left behind, the process won't be easy but will be well worth it for Lashon if it prevents another mother from leaving too soon.

"Everybody needs to be educated on these maternal warning signs. That's how you prevent this from happening," Lashon expressed. "Hopefully, we're going to save somebody's life."

Anyone interested in donating can do so to \$LashonJune on Cashapp.

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## Safety

# Stay prepared for storms throughout hurricane season

### STAFF REPORT

Hurricane season has already gotten off to a busy start, and with more than three months left until it officially ends on Nov. 30 and a busy rest of the season forecasted, U.S. agencies and forecasters warn to be prepared in case a storm heads this way.

Tropical Storm Debby dropped about 8 inches of rain on Sumter over several days, according to the National Weather Service Columbia Office, and while the storm's effects weren't as bad as feared, it's prudent to gather supplies and make a plan for the next one.

"Hurricanes are not just a coastal problem," said Robert Samaan, FEMA Region 4 administrator, in a news release about hurricane season. "Heavy rain, wind, floodwaters and even tornadoes happen far inland from where a hurricane or tropical storm makes landfall. That's why it's so important for everyone to know what threats they face and how best to prepare."

Every family should create a basic emergency supplies kit that contains enough supplies to last for three days.

South Carolina Emergency Management Division has a printable list of suggested supplies at <https://tinyurl.com/4fuztd9u>, including what types of food to stock up on and what to have on hand for a basic first-aid kit.

The agency suggests to include at a minimum:

- Include at a minimum:
  - Water, two gallons of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation
  - Food, at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
  - Battery-powered or hand-crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert and extra batteries
  - Flashlight and extra batteries
  - First-aid kit
  - Whistle to signal for help
  - Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
  - Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities

- Manual can opener for food (if kit contains canned food)

- Local maps
- Cellphone with chargers
- Prescription medications and glasses
- Infant formula and diapers
- Pet food and extra water for your pet
- Important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records in a waterproof, portable container
- Family emergency contact information
- Cash or traveler's checks and change

SCEMD also suggests to "maintain a disaster 'GO KIT' for each pet in a quickly accessible site: cage/carrier (large enough to stand and turn around in), leash, harness, bowls, three days of water and food, medications, health records/care instructions, microchip numbers, litter box/litter and clean-up supplies."

SCEMD also has an interactive website showing the type of damage that can occur based on the category of hurricane that hits at <https://hurricane.sc/prepare>. The page also includes tips about how to deal with power outages and safety steps to take, including:

- If you see a downed power line, do not touch it. Do not touch tree limbs or other objects touching a power line.
- Do not attempt to tie generators into the house circuit without prior professional installation. This can be dangerous to you, your neighbors and to linemen. Plug appliances directly into the generator. Make sure the generator is in a well-ventilated space to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If you smell gas, leave your home immediately and call 9-1-1.

While Sumter County isn't in an official evacuation zone, if you want to leave the area and need a shelter, you can text SHELTER to 43362 to find nearby emergency shelters.



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## Many Sumter landmarks have vanished over time



**Sammy Way**  
REFLECTIONS

**R**elections remembers many of Sumter's landmarks that have been razed or altered to make room for new structures that may have required additional space. Webster defines a landmark as any prominent feature of the landscape, such as a tree or building, serving to identify a particular locality. This report will identify several of our community's landmarks that have since disappeared; perhaps many of our readers will remember them.



**ABOVE:** McLellan 5-10 and 25 Cent Store, corner of Main and Liberty streets



**Spe-Bo's on Broad Street**



**LEFT:** Dixie Life Building at the intersection of Main and Liberty streets

**BELOW:** Savage-Glover School

SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS



**Boyle Hardware at corner of East Liberty and Harvin streets**







Sumter Dairies Inc. on North Main Street



John D. Lee House on North Main Street



Sumter Dry Goods at corner of Main and Liberty, 1967



Masonic Temple circa 1893, once located on West Liberty Street



YMCA once located at intersection of West Liberty and Sumter streets



Cole's Restaurant at intersection of Broad and Bultman



Washington School at intersection of West Liberty and Washington streets

## Entertainment

## 'Longlegs' captures your attention from beginning to end

Every so often, I examine a chronological list of films slated for release during the current or upcoming year. One of the growing concerns I found myself experiencing was a complete lack of creative and interesting horror films for cinema. Questions echoed within my mind as I wondered if this would become the first year when no intriguing horror films were released?



A REVIEW BY  
ISAIAH RIDLEY

A teaser poster displaying a woman's fearful expression with her hand on a holster that held her gun, a simple font in red showcasing the title "Longlegs" and the cast of the film itself awakened my curiosity. After watch-

ing teaser trailers, reading the film synopsis and recognizing the story told of a murder mystery, I knew it was impossible to resist. "Longlegs" execution incorporates elements from a collection of favorite films of mine into its story without losing the atmosphere of disturbing, horrific and blood-curdling imagery fueled by haunting dialogue and acting. Upon watching the film, immediately I noticed the influences of "Silence of the Lambs," "Seven," "Prisoners" and "Zodiac," all of which shaped the story into a compelling murder mystery and horrifying spectacle.

"Longlegs" brings the tragic, haunting tale of FBI agent Lee Hark-



PHOTO BY RICHARD SHOTWELL / INVISION / AP

Nicolas Cage arrives at the premiere of "Longlegs" at the Egyptian Theatre on July 8 in Los Angeles, California.

er, assigned to a specific case based on her brilliant intuition with solving the complicated puzzles of murder cases. A string of familiar murders resembles twisted artistry of a serial killer known as Longlegs. Like the Zodiac killer, he leaves taunting letters, pictures, cryptic riddles and ciphers detailing his atrocious deeds. As Harker draws closer to the facts, she realizes there is a personal connection between her and Longlegs. The film stars Maika Monroe, Alicia Witt, Blair Underwood and Nicolas Cage. Allow me to state that the detail of this review is intentionally vague without venturing into the realm of revealing spoilers.

After I read the production notes of "Longlegs," it quickly became an anticipated film of 2024, raising my expectations to a reasonably promi-

nent level. Memorable elements throughout the viewing transitioned me into a world of intense suspense, experiencing a cold, claustrophobic feeling, preparing myself for the unexpected with each passing scene. One of my favorite dynamics of a horror film is intentionally leaving what we are supposed to fear to our imagination. Unbelievably, usually what we do not see is far more frightening than anything our mind conjures. Sometimes what we do not hear fits that exact mold, too.

"Longlegs" successfully captures those concepts by having your complete attention from beginning to end. The acting is immaculate to the point of being completely believable, realistic and raw. Had I not seen Cage as part of the cast, I would not have known or recognized him during the viewing. The advertising campaign keeping his involvement secretive was brilliant, as it was obvious the goal was to create legitimate fear and shock. His performance is the definition of absolute, pure terror. I cannot express enough how much he kept me in a state of consistent fear despite the limited amount of time he is on screen.

The only way I can accurately describe the performance of Cage would have to involve a person believing if they were to stare into the reaches of everlasting darkness, the darkness itself would blink in return. Longlegs, dare I say, is the most terrifying serial killer I have ever watched on screen. Absolutely bone chilling to the core

of your body and soul.

Another highlight performance is Monroe as Agent Harker. Her on-screen characterization paints the perspective for the audience that there is an unfortunate disturbing quality within her character. Deep down, it is apparent there is a nagging suspicion that mentally and emotionally she is awkward, timid and isolated. She encompasses all those traits with magnificent ease, becoming completely believable. The direction of this suspenseful presentation offers a realistic and cold investigation into the mind of an unpredictable monster.

Even when Longlegs is not in the picture, your eyes are forever searching for him, as his presence never wavers. I have to say this film is one of the scariest experiences I have ever had. There are no words to describe how disturbing, unsettling and raw the overall atmosphere how the story intentionally places the audience into an uncomfortable state. A bold prediction: "Longlegs" is going to be my favorite horror film of 2024. I do not see any other cinematic presentation coming close in the future.

And if Cage does not win an Academy Award for his performance, I will be sincerely disappointed. "Longlegs" is the perfect horror film of 2024, an absolute must-see that receives a 10/10 and two thumbs up.

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



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## Social Security Matters

# 40 'quarters of credit' are required to be eligible for benefits

**DEAR RUSTY:** For a 30-year period, I was making a living as an independent contractor and freelancer. I was



**Russell Gloor**

working on behalf of myself. Thus, I was only paying state and federal taxes when applied. Due to changes in the employment landscape, I wish to

apply for benefits at age 64, as receiving said SS benefits would serve as supplemental income to what I would be receiving from outside sources.

I recently discovered through the SSA that I do not have enough "points" to apply for Social Security benefits. What would be the method to obtain those required points in order to receive benefits? Signed: Needing Points

**DEAR NEEDING:** Social Security is an earned benefit, and eligibility is attained by contributing to SS through FICA payroll taxes, or Self-Employment (SECA) tax on your net earnings from self-employment, over your lifetime. You must have at least 40 "quarters of credit" to be eligible for Social Security benefits — essentially you must work one quarter of each year earning at least a specified amount during that quarter to earn one credit, and you can earn a maximum of 4 credits for each year you work. The amount of earnings per credit varies each year, but for 2024, work earnings of \$1,730 give you one credit (annual work earnings of \$6,920 earn 4 credits). Usually, you must contribute to Social Security for about 10 years to be eligible for benefits. You must have

earned at least 40 quarter credits to collect Social Security retirement benefits. If you have less than 40 you are not eligible for SS retirement benefits. For self-employed individuals, SECA SS tax is paid when you file your federal income tax return — you pay into Social Security when filing your annual Self-Employment income tax return (the self-employed must pay both the employee and the employer portion of Social Security tax). If you did not file an income tax return for each year over your lifetime you were self-employed, you didn't earn any SS credits for that year. You pay SECA tax on your NET earnings from self-employment (after all business expenses are deducted).

If you are just a few credits short of the 40 necessary to be eligible for benefits, you can still earn those extra credits needed by working and paying SS FICA or SECA taxes on your work earnings. For each \$1,730 earned this year, you will earn one SS credit, up to a maximum of 4 per year. But you must contribute to Social Security from those earnings — if you work as a company employee you will have FICA taxes withheld from your earnings, and if you are still self-employed you would need to pay SECA taxes on net earnings over \$6,920 when you file your self-employment income tax return. You would need to do that for as long as it takes for you to attain the minimum 40 quarter credits needed to be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits. (FYI: you cannot "buy" the extra points needed; you need to earn them by working and contributing to Social Security from your earnings).

One final point: whenever SS benefits are claimed before one's full retirement age (FRA) Social Security's "earnings test" applies. The earnings test limits how much you can earn from working before some of your SS benefits are taken away. The earnings test no longer applies after you reach your FRA and, if

you turned 64 this year, your FRA is 67. Self-employed individuals are also subject to an hourly limit of 15 to 45 working hours per month in their first year of early retirement.

### ABOUT AMAC

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens, [www.amac.us](http://www.amac.us), is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation ([www.AmacFoundation.org](http://www.AmacFoundation.org)) is the association's nonprofit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's seniors. Together, we act and speak on the association members' behalf, pro-

tecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at [www.amac.us/join-amac](http://www.amac.us/join-amac).

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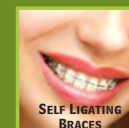
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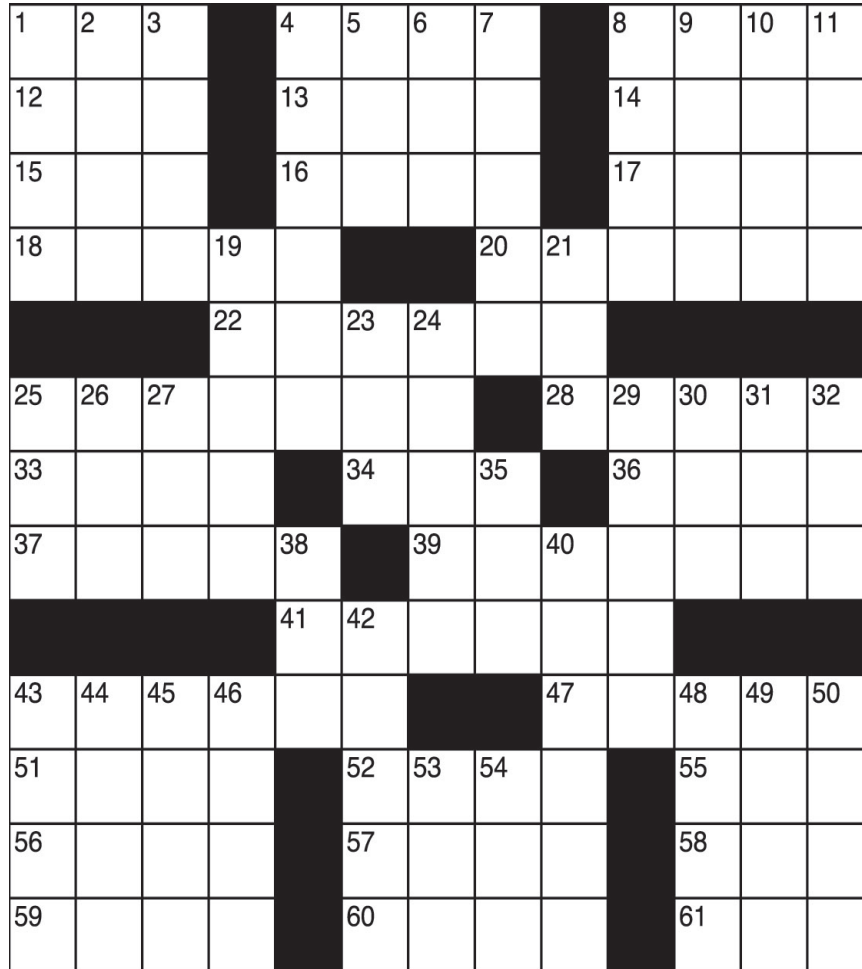
## CROSSWORD

### ACROSS

1. Burro
4. Baking direction
8. Bill
12. Reporter's query
13. Soothing plant
14. Wheel rod
15. Long time
16. Dog's hounder
17. Former
18. Belief
20. Nova or lox
22. Deleted
25. Absurd
28. Seat
33. Bee or Clara
34. Old witch
36. Walk in the surf
37. \_\_\_\_\_ rehearsal
39. Wanted
41. Quake
43. Tropical fruit
47. Dull
51. Cake decorator
52. Wild attempt
55. Floral wreath
56. Duration
57. Skier's stick
58. Irritate
59. Inquires
60. Convinced
61. Foot part

### DOWN

1. Amazed
2. Go away!
3. Ditty
4. African trip
5. Unwell
6. Enemy
7. Mock
8. Debutante's debut
9. Test
10. Singing voice
11. Sharp-edged
19. Thaws
21. Magazine fillers
23. Fireplace dust
24. Sun shield
25. Rage
26. "\_\_\_\_\_ Miss Brooks"
27. Buck
29. Spin
30. Paddle's cousin
31. Emotional poem
32. Escorted
35. Opal or ruby
38. Pig enclosure
40. Wept
42. Grates
43. Pocket bread
44. Experts
45. Bonus
46. Limbs
48. Came to ground
49. Notorious emper-  
or
50. Embankment
53. Besides
54. The total amount



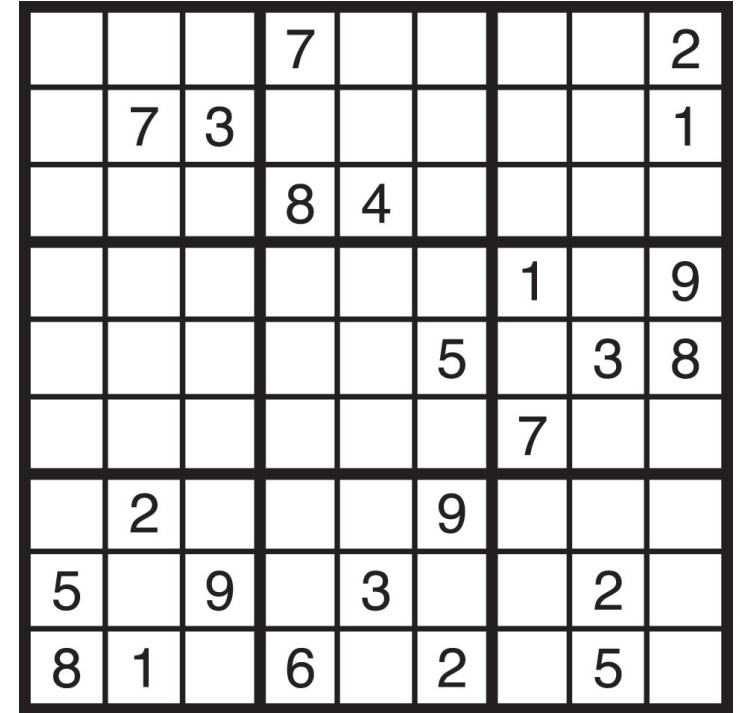
45. Bonus
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49. Notorious emper-  
or
50. Embankment
53. Besides
54. The total amount

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**SOLUTION**



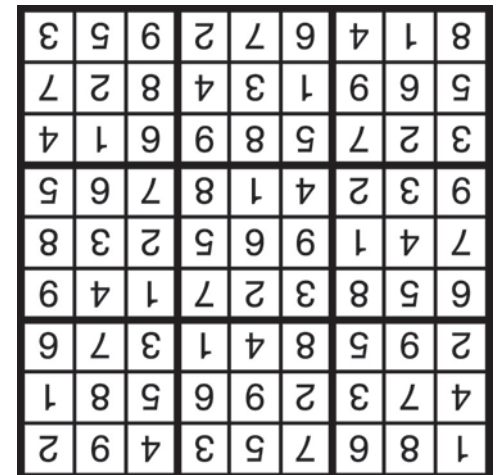
## SUDOKU



### HOW TO PLAY:

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

**SOLUTION**



## Things to do



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Learn what it was like to live in the South Carolina backcountry in the 1800s through volunteers at the Carolina Backcountry Homestead on Saturday, Aug. 17, at 122 N. Washington St.

# Learn what it was like to live in S.C. in the 1800s, hop on your motorcycle to raise money for Special Olympics and buy tickets for Journey from the Heart

### SUMTER COUNTY

The **Third Saturday Backcountry Series** continues on Aug. 17 at Sumter Museum from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Learn what it was like to live in the South Carolina backcountry in the 1800s through volunteers at the Carolina Backcountry Homestead. See a blacksmith's forge, smokehouse, loomhouse, outhouse and more at 122 N. Washington St.

Iron Legacy Motorcycle Club is hosting the annual **Palmetto Dream Ride to benefit The Dream Ride Experience for Special Olympics** on Sunday, Aug. 18, covering 117 miles from Sumter to Great Falls. The event leaves from 1143 Broad St., with the group riding to Great Falls and back to Sumter at the Tobacconist Cigar Lounge, 1320 Broad St. Registration the day of the event will be from 7 to 9:30 a.m. A safety

briefing will be held at 9:25, and then the trip will begin. There is no preregistration, only registration in person. Cars, trucks, bikes, trikes, spiders, slingshots, sport bikes and cruisers are all welcome to join. On the trip, two-wheeled motorcycles will be in front, followed by three-wheeled then four-wheeled vehicles. Registration for car and bike riders is \$20 and \$10 for passengers. Prizes, raffles and music will also be enjoyed at the event.

**Gamecock City Farmers Market** is open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays outside Central Carolina Technical College's Advanced Manufacturing Technology Training Center, 853 Broad St.

**Sumter Farmers Market** is up and running from noon to 5 p.m. Fridays

SEE **EVENTS**, PAGE A46

# Kimbrell's

## HOME FURNISHINGS

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# \$10 Down Sale

Fresh Finds.....

We found them at Kimbrell's Furniture  
We know you're going to love them!  
Sale runs July 14th - August 31st

Sofa Chaise ("Chofa")

\$45 a month

We love both colors and you can mix and match!



We found this beauty in Clay Also available in Indigo, pictured on chair and ottoman, right. Also available in a sleigh!

Special purchase!

\$1499

We found this 26 CU Ft Side x Side w/ ice & water dispenser



Chair & Ottoman also Sumer Sale priced

Queen Bed

\$40 a month

Other pieces also Summer Sale priced



We found this affordable bedroom set with clean lines

Bookcase Etagere

\$199



Available in Full or King

Modern Farmhouse Dining

\$60 a month

We found this 78" X-base table w/ self storing 18" leaf



Pick your Color! Cherry, Black or White

Your Choice!

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Double reclining Sofa or Loveseat We found these that sit super-comfy



We found stylish new lamps!

You get 2 for \$79

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49 S Main St. Sumter, SC 29150

803-775-2331

Kimbrell's on Broad

1070 Broad St. Sumter, SC 29150

803-848-4100

NOW OPEN SUNDAYS

## EVENTS FROM PAGE A45

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.

Find handmade crafts, fresh bread, specialty coffee, locally grown fruits and vegetables, pasture-raised means and more at the indoor **American Legion Farmers Market**. The market operates year 'round on Fridays from noon to 5 p.m. and Saturdays 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 2 S. Artillery Drive, Sumter. Email [farmersmarket@sumterpost15.com](mailto:farmersmarket@sumterpost15.com) or call (803) 983-3249 for more information.

**Journey from the Heart** returns to the Sumter Opera House stage at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 7. Ryan Christopher, former lead singer of Resurrection - A Journey Tribute, is back with his new project, "Journey from the Heart!" This duo honors the melodies of two rock legends, Journey and Heart. Ryan brings classic hits to life such as "Don't Stop Believin'," "Any Way You Want It" and many more, as Shareen

Ann revives hits such as "Barracuda," "Alone" and "Crazy On You!" Purchase tickets at <https://www.sumteroperahouse.com/journey-from-the-heart>.

**The Palmetto Optimist Club's Burger Cookoff** event returns to downtown Sumter's Rotary Plaza on Sept. 14 from 2 to 7 p.m. for the third year to help raise money for families battling childhood cancer, and the club is looking for people to sign up to compete or become a sponsor. Teams interested in participating can email [PalmettoOptimistClub@gmail.com](mailto:PalmettoOptimistClub@gmail.com) for details. Teams will compete in two categories, People's Choice and Judges' Choice. Everything will help support Children's Cancer Partners of the Carolinas, with the money raised going to children in Sumter and Clarendon battling cancer. Visit [www.palmettooptimistclub.com/s-projects-basic](http://www.palmettooptimistclub.com/s-projects-basic) for more about the event and to sign up to participate.

Women in Sumter are invited to join Dr. Geraldine Mack on Saturday, Sept. 14, for a **Teatime Table Talk Tea Party** to build relationships and learn from each other. Check-in time is 10:30 to 11 a.m., and the event starts at 11 a.m. at Mack's Manor, 3 Lewis Circle, Sumter,



going until 3 p.m. You're encouraged to wear comfortable tea party

attire for the outdoors, including a fascinator, big hat or unique, decorated hat and comfortable flat shoes. The event is free, but seating is limited, so reserve your spot at <https://tinyurl.com/3mhwt2sz>.

Food truck lovers, your ideal weekend arrives Friday, Oct. 4, through Sunday, Oct. 6, when the **Foodees Food and Culture Festival** sets up at the American Legion Fairgrounds. A flyer for the event promises that it's "the Southeast's number one touring food truck festival," so don't miss it. There will be more than 60 food trucks and dozens of artisans and crafters for these three days of community fun. Admission is free. Hours will be: Friday, 1 to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

### CLARENDON COUNTY

**The 21st-Annual Golf Classic Benefit Tournament for St. Matthias Montessori Pre-school** will be held at The Players

Course at Wyboo, 1560 Players Course Drive, Manning, on Saturday, Aug. 24, with registration at 8:30 a.m. and the tournament beginning at 9 a.m. Players Course members get discounted rates. For more information and to register, visit [www.stmatthiasanglican.org/events](http://www.stmatthiasanglican.org/events).

### LEE COUNTY

Hop **aboard the whisper-quiet, open-air tour vehicle and explore the park along the historic Loop Road in Lee State Park** on Saturday, Aug. 24. Guided tram tour guests will visit historic points of interest while keeping an eye out and ears open for park wildlife like white-tailed deer, many species of birds and turtles out and about on the park. Each tour runs from 10 a.m. to noon and costs \$10 per person. Wear clothing appropriate for the weather and also for riding on a 15mph open-air tram, water and bug repellent. Binoculars, camera, sunglasses and a hat are optional. Registration deadline is one day before the program. Limited seating is available. Book your seats at <https://tinyurl.com/4ybd57s5>, then fill out the form at <https://forms.office.com/r/86pLRh204z>. Meet at the Environmental Education Center.



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## Employment

# Career readiness partnership helps S.C. jobseekers stand out

### BY SC DEW

COLUMBIA — The S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW) is pleased to announce expanded offerings for jobseekers and employers through its partnership with WIN Learning, a leading provider of career readiness solutions. Jobseekers now have an opportunity to earn a new Professional Skills Credential by passing two assessments, Essential Soft Skills and Digital Literacy. The Professional Skills is a new combination of the two assessments producing one Professional Skills Credential that demonstrates to employers the communication, problem-solving and digital skills needed to succeed in today's workplace.

The Essential Soft Skills Assessment measures the attitudinal and behavioral skills that are most needed in the workplace, such as communicating effectively, conveying professionalism, promoting teamwork and collabora-

tion, and thinking critically and solving problems. The Digital Literacy Assessment measures learners' ability to find, evaluate, use, create and communicate information using digital technologies. When jobseekers pass both assessments, they earn a custom credential signed by S.C. Gov. Henry McMaster that they can share online with their professional network and add to their resume or portfolio. The Professional Skills Credential is available to anyone in South Carolina who is interested in earning it, and there are no prerequisites or fees currently to take the assessments.

"Employers recognize soft skills are critical ingredients for their workforce, and applicants who possess those skills are in high demand. The Professional Skills Credential demonstrates a jobseeker's strengths and preparedness for employment," said DEW Executive Director William Floyd. "South Carolina is the first

state to offer this WIN Learning tool, which will help the state's employers and jobseekers."

DEW continues to offer the WIN Work Ready Credential that is earned by successfully passing the foundational academic skills assessments in math, reading and data analysis. More than 20 years of prevailing career readiness skills research defines the standards for these core skills as mathematical reasoning skills; reading, understanding and interpreting workplace text; and interpreting data presented in charts, graphs and similar workplace information.

Through the DEW and WIN Learning partnership, South Carolina businesses can also utilize a third resource, the WIN Job Analysis, a thorough and unbiased job analysis model that is designed to help employers source the right candidates, set appropriate selection standards and hire and advance the most suitable individ-

ual for the job. This process helps businesses identify the right skills for roles in their organization to enhance recruitment, training and performance. Interested employers are eligible to receive a minimum of one job analysis and up to a maximum of five job analyses to assess different positions within their company. DEW is offering free WIN Job Analyses on a first-come, first-served basis until funding is exhausted.

WIN assessments are aligned with the U.S. Department of Labor's O\*NET Job Zones Framework (Levels 1-5), the nation's largest database of occupational profiles, and the WIN credentials are endorsed by the National Work Readiness Council.

To learn more about the new Professional Skills Credential or information on all the available WIN assessments, visit <https://scworks.org/employer/education-and-training/south-carolina-career-readiness-program>.



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