



Former Sumter High DB Gregg becomes Gamecock assistant coach **A30**

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Wings & Strings returns to iconic pizza restaurant


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ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

A packed house is seen at Pizza Lane as Sumterites gather to enjoy the revival of Wings and Strings on Sept. 4. The music night happens every Wednesday at 7 p.m. To read more about the weekly performances, see page A28.

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Vince Johnson

Why are our winters generally so mild? Meteorologist explains

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

Well, August is behind us, and fall is here in Sumter and the Midlands.

August was certainly not the "beast" with heat that it often is here with an average daily high temperature of 89.7 degrees for the 31 days on the calendar, according to the National Weather Service.

Now come cooler days as a general rule for the greater Columbia area.

Ever wonder what are the coldest months of the year for Columbia and the Midlands?

Based on a rolling 30-year average since 1991, it is January with an average daily high temperature of a "balmy" 57.2 degrees, according to the weather service. The next coldest months on the calendar are December (59.2 degrees), February (61.2 degrees) and November (66.8).

For last winter, January again was the coldest month

COLDEST MONTHS HISTORICALLY FOR COLUMBIA

MONTH	Avg. daily high
1. January	57.2
2. December	59.2
3. February	61.2
4. November	66.8

Source: National Weather Service, Columbia

with an average daily high of 58.0 degrees, National Weather Service Meteorologist Chris Landolfi said.

For the last five years, January 2022 was the coldest month, registering an average daily high of 55.3 degrees.

Landolfi also explained why winter temperatures often stay so mild in our region.

First is our lower latitude in the deep South, and the sun angle is higher in the sky than in states to our north. Next, our proximity to the coast tends to

moderate our temperatures because the ocean stays relatively warm throughout the winter compared to areas on land, he said.

Another significant factor, according to Landolfi, is the fact that the coldest air generally stays on the western side of the Appalachian Mountains.

"So, you can get some pretty good, cold-air outbreaks into the central U.S. and even into parts of the deep South, but sometimes we stay almost a little more insulated where we are," he said. "Some of that cold air kind of gets blocked by the Appalachians. Obviously, we can get cold-air outbreaks, but it is a little bit more rare for us here in central South Carolina than maybe it is a little further west even on the same latitude line."

Examples of colder states with similar latitudes, but on the western side of the Appalachians, include Tennessee, northern Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi, Landolfi added.

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Education

eSTEAM Sumter to bring fun, education Oct. 5

BY KAYLA GREEN
kayla@theitem.com

Fall may be synonymous with football and pumpkin spice everything, but in Sumter it means eSTEAM is right around the corner.

Heading into the festival's fifth year, though seventh overall, the kid-centered, hands-on event will again take over downtown Sumter on the first Saturday in October to offer myriad opportunities for children of all ages to have fun while learning about different career pathways available near or right at home.

eSTEAM Sumter will be held Saturday, Oct. 5, along South Main Street, with the main performance stages at the Central Carolina Tech-

nical College parking lot and about 80 booths set up along the street, parking lot and spaces in the vicinity. There will be 14 food trucks offering tastes and drinks to attendees, according to Erika Williams, manager of communications and strategic initiatives for TheLINK and Sumter Economic Development, which organizes and runs the festival.

A four-block parade will start at Canal Street and end at the stage in the CCTC parking lot as a celebratory walk to spotlight enthusiasts in science, technology, engineering, arts and math. There will also be an opening ceremony, art contest and tons of hands-on activities for students from kindergarten through 12th grade to learn while having fun.

Williams said about 6,500 people



A child participates in the 2023 eSTEAM Festival.

SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

came last year, and she expects that number or larger to turn out this year.

An hour has been added back to the festival, welcoming parents, students and families of all ages to explore the booths, activities, food, music and more from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. There will be local choirs and dance groups, bands, singers and more. The parade marshals are second- and third-graders from Sumter

County and Lee County school districts.

"They should be leading the way," Williams said. "This is for them. ..."

"We're looking at the numbers and all that, but I'm more so making sure there are smiles on the faces and that the kids are having a good time."

Pets are not allowed at the festival. It is free to attend, but Williams said it is highly encouraged to register at the official entrances and get a wristband.



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Government

4 recent government storylines to know

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

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ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER ARE HERE TO STAY IN SUMTER

At a July 23 Sumter County Council meeting, a new ordinance that would remove Robert's Rules of Order as the primary document that dictates meeting conduct at county council meetings passed first reading. In Robert's Rules of Order's place, the body was going to develop a new rule change document that was suggested by the South Carolina Association of Counties.

The document, a draft when it was being voted on, initially held controversial sections that would see public comment limited to 30 minutes in total when the council currently has no restrictions on how long public comment lasts as long as each resident only uses the allotted three minutes to speak. Councilman Gene Baten, Carlton Washington and, later, Councilwoman Vivian McGhaney all spoke out against this section of the document, and it was removed by the time second reading was set to take place.

However, the document never made it to second reading; instead council unanimously agreed to defer it, go through it and edit sections in as many workshops as it took until everyone was in agreement on its contents.

At the council's first official workshop for the document on Sept. 5, they decided to not go forward with the new rule document and instead keep Robert's Rules of Order. In total, it took more than six weeks of deliberation and debate before the final decision was reached.

SUMTER COUNTY COUNCIL TAKES FIRST STEPS TOWARD REPAIRING PRIVATE ROADS, NEEDS MORE ROAD DATA

Sumter County Council took some of its first steps toward fixing issues with private roads at a public works meeting Tuesday, Sept. 10, ultimately unanimously deciding to send the issue to the county administrator for



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Shakemia Road in Sumter County was flooded earlier this year. Sumter County Council in early September sent the issue of fixing private roads to the county administrator for more data on local roads.

further road data after discussing how fixing private roads may look.

For now, council wants to know which private roads are most used and in need of repairs, data that members are hoping to receive from the county administrator. Currently, council is unsure of what money will be used for the repairs.

Councilman Carlton Washington, an outspoken advocate for repairing private roads, said the process will be slow.

A concern that residents have brought up in county council's public comment portion is an inability for emergency vehicles to enter their driveways because of areas of road that have deteriorated, leaving large gaps and allowing vehicles to become stuck. This is a situation that was brought up at the meeting, and it will be considered in relation to what roads will be repaired first.

What the council does know is that at least five individual households

must live on a private road for it to be eligible for repair, and every owner on a road being considered for repair must agree to the repairs.

SUMTER PLANNING COMMISSION DISCUSSES NEW HOTEL AND APARTMENT BUILDING

Sumter Planning Commission approved two new large constructions at a planning commission meeting Wednesday, Aug. 28.

Another Hilton has been approved to come to Sumter at 2581/2587 Broad St. The development would be multi-building, as the property contains two lots. The two individual hotel buildings would contain a maximum of 159 rooms combined.

A 37-unit apartment building has been approved to be built at 265 N. Bultman St. The L-shaped apartment building with a stormwater retention pond was approved by everyone except commission member Kim Harvin, who was concerned about trees being cut

down in the area. There are 22 trees that qualify as significant — meaning that they are about 10-16 inches in diameter — that will be cut down and replaced with new trees that will be a minimum of 2 inches upon planting.

COUNTY COUNCIL CHAIRMAN McCAIN PUBLICLY APOLOGIZES AFTER VERBAL CONFRONTATION

Sumter County Council Chairman Jim McCain publicly apologized to Alexandra Baten, the daughter of McCain's fellow council member, Eugene Baten, after backlash from the senior Baten at the beginning of a council meeting Sept. 10.

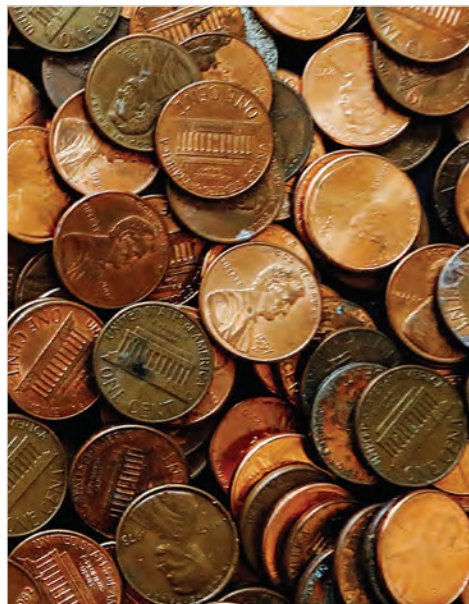
"At the July 23, 2024, meeting of Sumter County Council during public comments, Dr. Alexandra Baten made some unkind and inaccurate remarks about me, which I thought crossed the line of decorum and professionalism. As such, I sought to speak with her after the meeting which is not an uncommon practice for council members and staff," McCain wrote. "To the extent to which my manner may have been taken as contentious, I am regretful and I have apologized to Dr. Baten. Anyone that knows me knows that it is not my nature to be confrontational. I look forward to moving past this so we can all work toward improving Sumter County for all her citizens," McCain wrote in an official statement Aug. 28 regarding the situation, and he later publicly read the statement at a Sept. 10 county council meeting.

The confrontation was regarding the new rule document ordinance that was first mentioned July 23. During the public comment portion of the meeting, Alexandra Baten said that the current rules that the council follows — Robert's Rules of Order — had been in place since her father, Eugene Baten, had been chairman and ended by saying that "...all these people [council members] were here before you, and it just seems like all this chaos came when you came along."

After the meeting, McCain went up to Alexandra Baten to refute her opinion, an action that led to his apology.

Penny for Progress

A closer look into the penny tax with Chairman Bynum and how it will impact the future of Sumter if passed



BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
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With the capital penny sales tax up for a vote in the upcoming election, decisions surrounding funding for various infrastructure and quality-of-life projects hang in the balance.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of what's at play, Ed Bynum, chairman of Penny for Progress 2024, delved into the goals behind the tax, how money will be allocated if it passes and what this could mean for the future of Sumter.

Item: How do you see the Penny for Progress items benefiting Sumter's overall economic growth and community development?

Bynum: "Public safety, quality of life, infrastructure and economic de-

SEE LIST OF 30 PROPOSED PROJECTS ON PAGE A8

velopment are the four consistent pillars of priority we have identified and have primarily tried to focus on projects needs in those categories. Obviously, going back to the success of the 2008 and 2014 penny campaigns, we saw significant improvements in all areas of the county: fire and rescue, public safety, park and recreational enhancements, critical infrastructure improvements with connectivity and safety at mind.

With the 2024 campaign, we have heard for more than 10 years now that there are other needs, and this year's

campaign and list tries to reach some of those needs. Again, roads are of importance, as is public safety, EMS, fire and supporting apparatus. We have improvements to park and recreation facilities and community center enhancements in rural districts. Again, the penny does not fix everything, but it touches a part of nearly all of our 104,000 residents. We have all seen Sumter grow and improve since the first penny passed in '08. We as a community must come together for this passage, as it is a keyhole to our future."

I: Why is it important for these specific items to be funded through the penny tax, and how does this decision impact

SEE PENNY, PAGE A7

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PENNY FROM PAGE A6

Sumter's economic strategy?

B: "Many of the items on the list, and there are 30 total projects, meet a need or requirement threshold. While the list is not all encompassing to fix every ailment in our community, it is critical because many of the funds will be used to match additional state and federal dollars to accomplish the tasks ahead. We have seen the value in previous "penny" allocations as it directly influenced economic development and job creation projects, like BD's expansion, Continental Tire's location, eVac's decision to build here and many others. It is a reflection of the community's interest in moving ahead. When outsiders see us investing in ourselves, they are more inclined to consider Sumter as a viable location for their investments."

I: Could you outline the process for how the penny tax money is allocated for community improvements, and what role does Sumter EDGE play in that process?

B: "Should our citizens favorably elect to proceed with the 2024 referendum called the 'Penny for Progress,'



In September 2019, Sumter County completed a repaved exercise track, three football fields and new playground equipment at Dillon Park as part of a past Penny for Progress initiative. In 2008, the Sumter County Capital Sales Tax Referendum allowed the county to levy a temporary sales tax that was implemented in spring 2009, which funded 16 capital projects within the community. In 2014, voters again approved a penny sales tax referendum in what was known as the "Penny for Progress Continuation," which funded 28 additional projects.

SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

I: If you know, how were the current Penny for Progress items chosen, and how do they align with Sumter's broader goals for future development?

B: "There was a commission of six citizens appointed by city and county councils. It is my understanding Mayesville and Pinewood rotate, so this year one of the six was from Mayesville. They worked closely with city and county councils along with administrators and departments to identify needs of the community. County council approved the list of projects."

the one cent will begin being collected by the South Carolina Department of Revenue in spring 2025 and continue for eight years. The county will take out a bond to begin tackling the projects that can be addressed immediately and begin to seek additional funding matches from state and federal sources. The state will send the proceeds on a quarterly basis and, as funds come in, the county will apply the payments to the bond. The projects by state law

cannot be changed, and all projects stated must be completed. The county of Sumter will administer the projects in coordination with the City of Sumter and all the other pertinent agencies and organizations. The Sumter EDGE's role in the campaign is to be the conduit and coordinator for the education and awareness portion of the campaign. No public dollars are being spent from either the city or county to market and promote this referendum."

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In a little over a month, Sumter County voters will make a decision that will affect the future of our community.

A third iteration of the Capital (Penny) Sales Tax Referendum is on the Nov. 5th ballot and to secure our future and plan for smart growth, you should vote YES.

Early voting is Oct. 21 to Nov. 2, 2024, and Election Day is Nov. 5, 2024.

In looking at projects from the 2008 and 2014 referendums, we've seen over \$160 million invested in our community. And we addressed key areas: public safety, quality of life, infrastructure and economic development. Four areas that affect everyone in Sumter County.

To see what the future holds, we need to look at the past.

All over Sumter County, roads were paved. Rural dirt roads. We built a new gym and renovated the old gym. We built a new Judicial Center. Our Police and Fire Departments have new headquarters to better serve our community alongside a new E-911 center in our Public Safety Complex. We have nourished our economic development efforts and have seen new industries take root, bringing jobs.

Our work has not gone unnoticed, as we've gotten millions in matching state and federal funds to expand the scope of these projects.

A question we keep hearing is this: What's in it for me? What direct benefit does this bring to my neighborhood?

The answer to that is simple.

Our efforts are designed to improve life for all the residents of Sumter County, South Carolina. We are investing in ourselves by building new sidewalks to better connect students to their schools. We are investing in ourselves by tearing down dilapidated properties. We are investing in ourselves by improving our parks, busy intersections, and neighborhoods.

We are investing in ourselves because we believe in quality of life issues. We want our community to be healthy and have plenty of recreational opportunities. We want our first responders to know we have their backs and will make sure they're properly equipped to do their jobs as they serve our community. We want to continue improving our roads and infrastructure.

According to the S.C. Department of Revenue, about a third of the funds collected by Penny 1 and 2 come from people who don't live in Sumter County. In looking at the project list for Penny 3, that means about \$40 million of the total costs will be paid for by people from other counties and states.

The bottom line is this: We believe in Sumter County and voting yes for the Capital (Penny) Sales Tax Referendum is the prudent thing to do.

For more information log on to PennyForProgress.com

Paid for By SumterEDGE.

30 countywide projects proposed for Penny for Progress initiative

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:

1. \$13,000,000 toward emergency radios and pagers
2. \$14,000,000 toward county fire trucks
3. \$5,000,000 toward city fire trucks
4. \$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.
5. \$1,000,000 toward four new EMS ambulances
6. \$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.
7. \$1,750,000 toward intersection safety improvements
8. \$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.
9. \$2,800,000 toward 15 new Patriot Park pickleball courts and added parking
10. \$2,750,000 toward downtown building improvements and acquisitions, including Liberty Center upgrades
11. \$21,000,000 toward county paving and resurfacing
12. \$3,000,000 toward rebuilding the Stadium Road Fire Station
13. \$1,000,000 toward a fire department training facility
14. \$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.

15. \$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.

16. \$3,250,000 toward improving the public services buildings

17. \$1,500,000 toward industrial property acquisition

18. \$2,600,000 toward Dillon Park improvements

19. \$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.

20. \$1,000,000 toward a Central Carolina Technical College facility upgrade to the health center building

21. \$1,500,000 toward Mayesville Main Street revitalization

22. \$1,200,000 toward Pinewood Road paving

23. \$9,500,000 toward a Dugan Street and downtown parking facility

24. \$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.

25. \$3,000,000 toward the South Sumter Gym

26. \$1,500,000 toward Harvin Street redesign and streetscape

27. \$300,000 toward Pinewood sidewalks

28. \$3,500,000 toward community sidewalks and activity paths

29. \$1,000,000 toward airport facility upgrade

30. \$2,500,000 toward community-wide acquisition of distressed structures

Education

Top recent storylines from Sumter School District

BY BRUCE MILLS

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NEW STATE CELLPHONE BAN GOES TO LOCAL LEVEL

On Sept. 3, the state Board of Education finalized a new model policy that bans South Carolina public school students from using their cellphones or other personal devices during the school day.

Local school districts, including Sumter, have about four months to adopt the policy, and the ban requirement will go into effect statewide in January.

District leaders will also have some decisions of their own to make. The state board's policy bans students from accessing their personal devices from their arrival to school until afternoon dismissal, but it leaves districts with flexibility in how they would like to enforce the ban and discipline students who may break it.

At the local level, the state Board of Education's new model policy will initially go to Sumter School District's Board of Trustees' Policy Committee and then on to the full board for passage later this fall.

District spokeswoman Shelly Galloway anticipates clear communication with students, families and staff.

"We anticipate a one-month planning process, a two-month intentional multimedia communication and education rollout for students, staff and families," Galloway said. "Also, we will establish a firm go-live date for when students return from winter break in January."

CANTY OUT AS BOARD CHAIR; DISNEY IN

To the surprise of many, the Rev. Ralph Canty resigned as Sumter School District's Board of Trustees chairman at the Aug. 26 meeting. Canty cited visionary issues with Superintendent William Wright Jr. and a majority of the school board for his resignation.

"Two-years plus into Dr. Wright's

administration, and as chair I don't know what that vision is, and I don't know that a board member can articulate that vision," Canty said. "I don't know what strategy he has for improving our schools."

With two years remaining in his term, Canty said he will complete his four-year term, which runs through November 2026.

Essentially, at the time of his resignation, Canty had less than three months left in the chair's seat because the full board will have a reorganizational meeting in its initial meeting after the Nov. 5 general election.

Board vice chairwoman Bonnie Disney will fulfill the duties of board chair for the final months of Canty's term.



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Wilder Elementary School celebrated the opening of its new Little Free Library outside the school, as well as a 1,000-book donation to stock the library, on Aug. 30.

WILDER WINS LIBRARY INITIATIVE, 1,000-BOOK DONATION

Wilder Elementary School, 975 S. Main St., recently unveiled its "Dog Man" Little Free Library. The school was one of 50 nationwide to receive the grant as part of the "Power Up with Reading" Scholastic and Little Free Library initiative. As part of its winnings, Wilder received a 1,000-book donation as well, with most coming from best-selling "Dog Man" author and illustrator Dav Pilkey. The "Dog Man" book series is described as graphic novels like a comic book, funny, playful and wholesome.

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The brain and learning

On wind and roots

“He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how” — Frederick Nietzsche

During the early 1990s, an experiment was taking place in New Mexico called Biosphere 2.

It was (and still is) a closed ecological system — air, food, community, everything had to be generated in this biodome. Though now it’s used to study the impact of climate change, Biosphere 2 was initially used to experiment with the possibility that we could build self-sustaining ecosystems in outer space.



Brent Kaneft

The project failed for many reasons, but one of the failures captured my attention. The eight-person team that committed to this project observed that the trees in Biosphere 2 grew quickly but were dying before they reached maturity. They didn’t fully understand why until they discovered that the problem was wind. In Biosphere 2, there was no wind, which meant the root structures never grew, never had to grow, and because the roots never grew, when the trees got too big, they just toppled over. They had no foundation, nothing to help them find balance. In a closed ecosystem, where everything is perfectly measured out and conditions are stable, trees don’t thrive. They require the stress the wind provides.

Stress is a gift, then, not a curse. Good stress, or “eustress,” helps students grow deep roots. But parents and schools alike, out of an abundance of caution and care, forget this essential aspect of adolescent development.

Jesus often talks about trees in the Bible as a metaphor for the heart. In Matthew 7:18, for example, he says, “A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.” And later, to amplify his point, “The

good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil” (Matt. 12:35, ESV). What Jesus is referring to are the roots of a person, their heart and soul, which, if oriented toward the higher good, toward “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable” (Phil. 4:8), will be a “moveable feast” for our young people — will stay with them wherever they go, through the Elysian fields and through the valley of the shadow of death.

Independent, charter and public schools have fallen prey to a misalignment in this regard. We have amplified phrases like “college prep, college and career ready, etc.” in our mission statements, and though well intentioned suggest to students that the “good” fruit is the goal, not the process of developing deep and strong roots. The “good” fruit — wins, SAT scores, GPAs, community service hours, accolades of all shapes and sizes — is easily measurable and so becomes the target for our educational ecosystem. Of course, as I said in my last article, “when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure” (Goodhart’s Law), and so many students compromise their honor and integrity (by cheating or accumulating obligatory community ser-

vice hours) to achieve short-term, finite goals: college and career readiness. This misalignment doesn’t mean that college and career readiness are bad goals; they’re just not primary.

The primary reason for education is the development of the soul. By “soul” I mean a person’s being, their heart, what is shaped in a person by struggle and eustress, the development of “why” a person exists on this earth, which, when understood, helps them bear any conditions that come their way. Root development is key, then, in schools.

But why?

Because we don’t know exactly what the future will be: Could it be ecological devastation? A crumbling democracy? An incurable disease for themselves, their spouse, their children? An economy that is completely driven by artificial intelligence? Who knows?

The future is uncertain, and many schools make the mistake of suggesting certainty in the face of the unknown. They’ll tell you the future is in technology or finance or engineering and we have to get ahead of that now, so your child can be a successful economic unit. Consider our obsession with getting ahead — college credit before college! Save money and time! But when we put the cart before the horse, often our little fledgling trees topple over at the first signs of trouble. Good character, integrity, deep roots: These attributes are the only guarantee of a successful life.

If, for example, we identify that high GPAs and SAT scores are the way to get into a good college, which they are, and if college acceptance is our ultimate

goal, then potentially, students will change their ethical behavior and their integrity to meet that goal. Similar to how the algorithms on our social media apps change our decisions about what we post (i.e., the posts that get the most views and likes). These finite goals, college and career readiness, are motivated by economics, not ethics. And they are fragile, which leads to a fear of stress, a fear of failure and a fear of each other (because my peers, in this system, are my competition, not my neighbor). And that leads to weak, rootless trees.

In “The American Scholar,” Ralph Waldo Emerson argues that “[t]he state of society today is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters — a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.” He wrote that early in the 19th century: How much have we learned since then? Are we a culture rooted in wisdom or are we cut off? “The tradesman [or businessman],” he claims, “scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and [his] soul is subject to dollars.” We don’t want to graduate students who are prepared for the economy and sorely underprepared for finding meaning in their lives. We cannot graduate students who have no better use for information than to manipulate it for profit. Again from Jesus, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Last month, I argued that the purpose of school is development, but let me add icing to the cake: The purpose of school is soul development. Last week, our Director of Curriculum and Instruction & Head of Upper School, Stacey Reaves, who has been a mainstay in Sumter’s educational ecosystem, challenged our seniors to answer the question: “Who is it you plan to be with your one wild and precious life?” It was a slight variation to the famous line written by the poet Mary Oliver: “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” Her question is about a student’s roots, and Mary Oliver’s is about the fruit of those roots.

And this is the correct order.

Next month, I will focus on the role of stress (the wind in my analogy) in this pursuit of soul development.

Brent Kaneft is headmaster of Wilson Hall.

Business

Ford dealership has been in McLaughlin family for 63 years

Honesty, good customer service have been keys to longevity, owner says

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

In his early years working for his father, Bill McLaughlin said he received some of the best advice of his life from his dad, Fred McLaughlin.

“He told me, ‘You always be honest with your customers and always be honest with your employees,’” he said.

That has worked out well for the younger McLaughlin, who has worked

47 years at McLaughlin Ford on North Main Street, including close to 30 years as the general manager. His dad bought the local Ford dealership 63 years

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ago in 1961 from Horne Motor Co. when it was on Sumter Street. It moved to North Main five years later in 1966.

The dealership is known for having long-time employees and repeat customers, he said, and McLaughlin attributes his father’s words of wisdom to the business’ longevity.

Much has changed in the automobile industry through the decades.

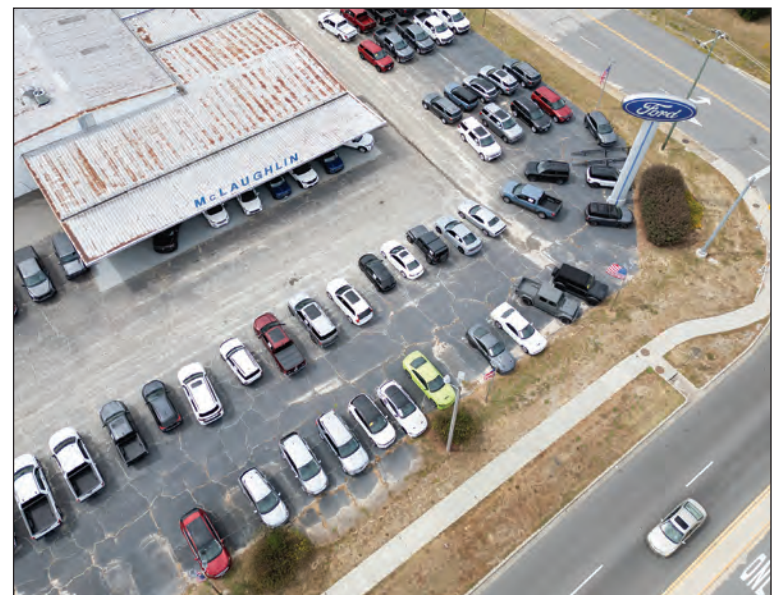
“Ford has gone from the Model T in 1922 to the ‘Model E’ for the Mach-E electric Mustang and the F-150 Lightning Truck, which is also totally electric,” McLaughlin said. “It’s odd to look under the hood and not find an engine in it.”

SEE **McLAUGHLIN**, PAGE A12



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Bill McLaughlin has worked at his family business, McLaughlin Ford, for almost 50 years and said although technology and the industry have changed, he attributes the business’ success to keeping a good reputation and providing good customer service.



McLAUGHLIN

FROM PAGE A11

The dealership also keeps up with the latest technology and equipment for the service and sales departments to include iPads and tablets, he added.

The company also brought on board a mobile service vehicle at the beginning of this year to do light maintenance work at a customer's house or workplace so he or she does not have to come into the service shop and wait.

Despite technology and other changes, keeping a good reputation and providing good customer service are still keys to success, McLaughlin said.

As far as car and truck sales, the signature Ford F-150 has been the best-selling vehicle in the U.S. for more than 40 consecutive years, he added. The sporty Mustang is also popular. Other big sellers include the Ford Explorer and the new Bronco, McLaughlin said.

Collecting old cars is a hobby for the long-time business owner, and he has eight in the former body shop on site. They include a 1930 Model A Ford, which came after the Model T, a 1934 Ford model, a 1955 Crown Victoria and a 1965 Mustang, the original year for the sports car.

His career in the industry has not been without scary moments, to include the COVID-19 pandemic, gas shortages, periods with high interest rates and even Hurricane Hugo, which caused lots of damage throughout Sumter.

"It blew out all the windows in the front, and it peeled the roof back on the building," he said. "Cars had a lot of damage from materials blowing around from a gas station that was located across the street."

Still, it has been a good career, and McLaughlin said he is thankful for the customer base.

"We thank Sumter and the surrounding area for their business and appreciate the opportunity to serve everyone," he added.



Bill McLaughlin credits his father Fred McLaughlin's advice for being in business for more than 60 years with repeat customers.



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Bill McLaughlin has a collection of classic Ford models at the former body shop at the dealership in Sumter.

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Sumter woman honors late aunt with ability-inclusive tennis program at center

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

deirdre@theitem.com

Growing up, Palmetto Tennis Center staff professional Julia Sorrells' Aunt Ann was like a sister to her. Ann lived with Julia after the death of both of Julia's grandparents — Ann's parents — from the time she was born up until Julia was 11 years old.

Ann was Julia's "built-in best friend," and Julia remembers dragging Ann out of bed in the mornings to play with her. Ann may have had Down Syndrome, but Julia never saw a difference between her aunt and anyone else who she loved — something that has stuck with Julia her whole life.

THRIVE is an ability-inclusive tennis team that allows those with cognitive or physical restrictions alike to learn the sport. The Palmetto Tennis Center is also creating a Special Olympics team.

"I look back, and she's [Ann is] probably the biggest foundation of my faith, which is just so cool to think about because, to her, she had so many life challenges, but she was the happiest human that I knew, and so that was just a really cool thing to wake up to every day," Julia Sorrells said.

Ann died three years ago at the age of 57, a tremendous life span for one with Down Syndrome, but Sorrells has created something unique to Sumter with her aunt and best friend in mind.

"She lived a great life, and we hated to see her go, but more than anything we all just felt this like huge hole in ourselves because we lost our connection to that community [the special needs community] of Sumter," Sorrells said.

After grieving her aunt, Sorrells found a way to reconnect with the community of those with different abilities by leading Acction Club with her parents post-COVID-19. The club is for adults with special needs who



Ann Sorrells died three years ago, but her legacy continues to live on through her niece, Julia Sorrells. Julia has created an ability-inclusive tennis group for all ages at Palmetto Tennis Center with Ann's spirit in mind.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

want to have a helping hand in the community.

"Through that [Acction Club], I was like, I need a way to have this be in every facet of my life. I need to be around these people. I need to expose them to the things that I love in life," Sorrells said.

Sorrells had only been working for Palmetto Tennis Center for a few months before she presented a new idea to them: a tennis program that

would cater to those with conditions that may hinder them from playing tennis by the name of THRIVE.

Sorrells said the acronym THRIVE stands for "tennis teaches me to be Trustworthy, Hardworking, Resilient, Inclusive, Valuable and Empathetic, and overall, tennis teaches me to thrive."

SEE THRIVE, PAGE A15





PHOTOS PROVIDED

THRIVE members pose with their tennis rackets at Palmetto Tennis Center. Find the group on Facebook to learn about upcoming meetings.

THRIVE FROM PAGE A14

Immediately, Palmetto Tennis Center was on board, and Sorrells put her heart and soul into the project, learning how to include those of all abilities.

“We open the doors to anyone and everyone whether it’s a physical disability, a cognitive disability, whatever it looks like, we want you guys here,” Sorrells said. “And so if you were to be just a bird overhead on court while we were going through it, it is such a broad group of people, which I think is the beauty of it.”

So far, THRIVE has been a hit. The group meets once a month and is free to attend. The center only asks that those interested call ahead at (803) 774-3969 so it can get a head count and have the correct racket size available. Attendees may also go to the tennis center in person to register.

“One of the biggest reasons why I wanted to pitch this to begin this was just because I know that Ann had a lot of big things happen in her life because of her exposure to sport and her



interest in special Olympics and the competitive spirit that she had and a lot of things that she did,” Sorrells said.

Because of THRIVE, Ann’s legacy gets to live on and touch the lives of others who may not have gotten this opportunity otherwise. Just as much

as Sorrells teaches THRIVE members, the THRIVE members have taught her.

“I would say the most fun part to me is seeing their excitement when they accomplish something,” Sorrells said. “They get very excited over what we think are such small things but to

them are these really big accomplishments because they are, and teaching, I may show up with a plan, and I’ll be the first to say I will change that 100 times before it’s over just because, for one, they progressed a lot quicker than I expected. They’re very talented.”

THRIVE is by no means done growing, though. Palmetto Tennis Center is already trying to start a Special Olympics team — a process that will be a learning experience for everyone at the center but one that they are excited about nonetheless.

Around her neck, Julia still wears a symbol of Ann, a necklace with her writing and a drawing of a heart, a symbol that will soon come to represent THRIVE when they create their official emblem.

“I know that she doesn’t necessarily mean anything to anyone involved, but she’s the whole reason that I’m doing what I’m doing,” Sorrells said. Palmetto Tennis Center updates its official Facebook page regularly with information regarding upcoming meetings. To stay in the loop on all things THRIVE related, visit their page or call them at (803) 774-3969.

New Salvation Army officers excited about ministry opportunities

James and Rebecca Sullivan arrived in Sumter in June

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

New Salvation Army of Sumter leaders Captains James and Rebecca Sullivan said they think their own struggles play a part in helping others walk with God.

As husband and wife, the Sullivans hold a dual role as co-pastors and co-administrators over the Sumter operation and are excited and energetic about the ministry opportunities that they took on in June with the new duty appointment here.

Like many in Christian ministry, the Sullivans have not been without trials. Before becoming active in ministry, James came through a Salvation Army rehabilitation program for drug addicts



James and Rebecca Sullivan are the new captains of the Salvation Army of Sumter. They took on the responsibilities as co-pastors and co-administrators of the Sumter operation in June.

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SEE SULLIVANS, PAGE A17

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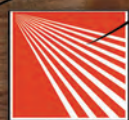


Before



After

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SULLIVANS

FROM PAGE A16

based in Atlanta.

“It was a struggle,” Sullivan said. “I got addicted to crack cocaine and crystal meth. I went through a Christian-based program with 150 men and was there for a few months.

“Me and God had a one-on-one conversation, and He pulled my ‘man card’ and told me I needed to ‘man up’ if I wanted it back. After three or four months into the program, I left and came home and got involved with a Salvation Army church pretty much every day. I have been clean now for about 18, going on 19 years.”

He grew his manhood through Jesus Christ and said he is now a much better man for it.

The Sullivans have both been ordained officers with The Salvation

Army for 10 years now and have had several duty appointments to date.

They came to Sumter from their last appointment in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Local organizational programs include the church at 16 Kendrick St. that offers a Sunday worship service, a food pantry, other social services and a Boys and Girls Club. The club is essentially an after-

school tutoring program and recreational time for children ages 6-12 that is offered Monday through Friday.

The club program is maxed out currently with 25 children from 10 local public schools, according to Rebecca Sullivan.

“We offer a snack for the children, and the program includes homework time, art and a daily Bible devotional time,” she said.

A summer children’s program is also offered Monday through Friday when school is out of session, she added.

THE SALVATION ARMY OF SUMTER

Address: 16 Kendrick St., Sumter SC 29150

Phone: (803) 775-9336

Web: southernusa.salvationarmy.org/sumter

‘Our struggles play a part in helping others. We have to struggle in order for us to help others.’

REBECCA SULLIVAN

Sumter Salvation Army captain

The Salvation Army of Sumter serves Sumter, Clarendon and Lee counties, and the kettle program in November and December before Christmas brings in the most revenue to provide services throughout the year, Rebecca Sullivan said.

The Sullivans’ goal with the operation is to benefit the whole community, they said, and they are open to working with similar agencies and not duplicate services.

The church is actually the favorite part of the ministry for the couple. James does most of the preaching on Sundays, he said.

“I love work, and it is what the Lord has called us to do,” he said.

“We are always transparent. When you are struggling with things, you want people to know because you want people to pray for you. You want people to come beside you to know, ‘Hey, I need prayer. There are some things that I am having to deal with.’

“And I think that brings unity and strength. I think that is the ministry that Christ is talking about.”

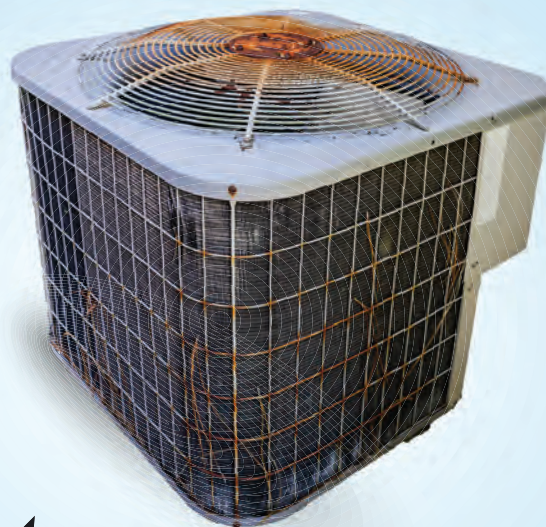
Rebecca Sullivan said sharing the gospel of Christ, who came to save sinners, meet human needs and provide eternal life, keeps her energetic about the ministry.

“We believe that He has called us for such a time as this,” she said. “If it had not been for all the struggles that we have been through, and I don’t mean just James, I mean as a couple, I don’t know where we would be in order for us to walk with Him and help others. Our struggles play a part in helping others. We have to struggle in order for us to help others.

“We are not perfect, and I think it helps others to see that in order to walk with them. So, the timing is just right for us to be here and walk with others.”

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Arts & entertainment

From the **ranch** to the *opera house*

Kara Grover's journey as an opera singer, theater services coordinator at Sumter Opera House

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysha@theitem.com

When you first meet Kara Grover, her warm presence and passion for the arts capture your attention.

As she sits nearly crisscross applesauce on the Sumter Opera House's green room couch, it's hard to imagine that this internationally acclaimed coloratura soprano, dedicated theater services coordinator and mother hails from the rural town of Rifle, Colorado — a place worlds away from the elegance of classical music.

"I didn't have exposure to that really

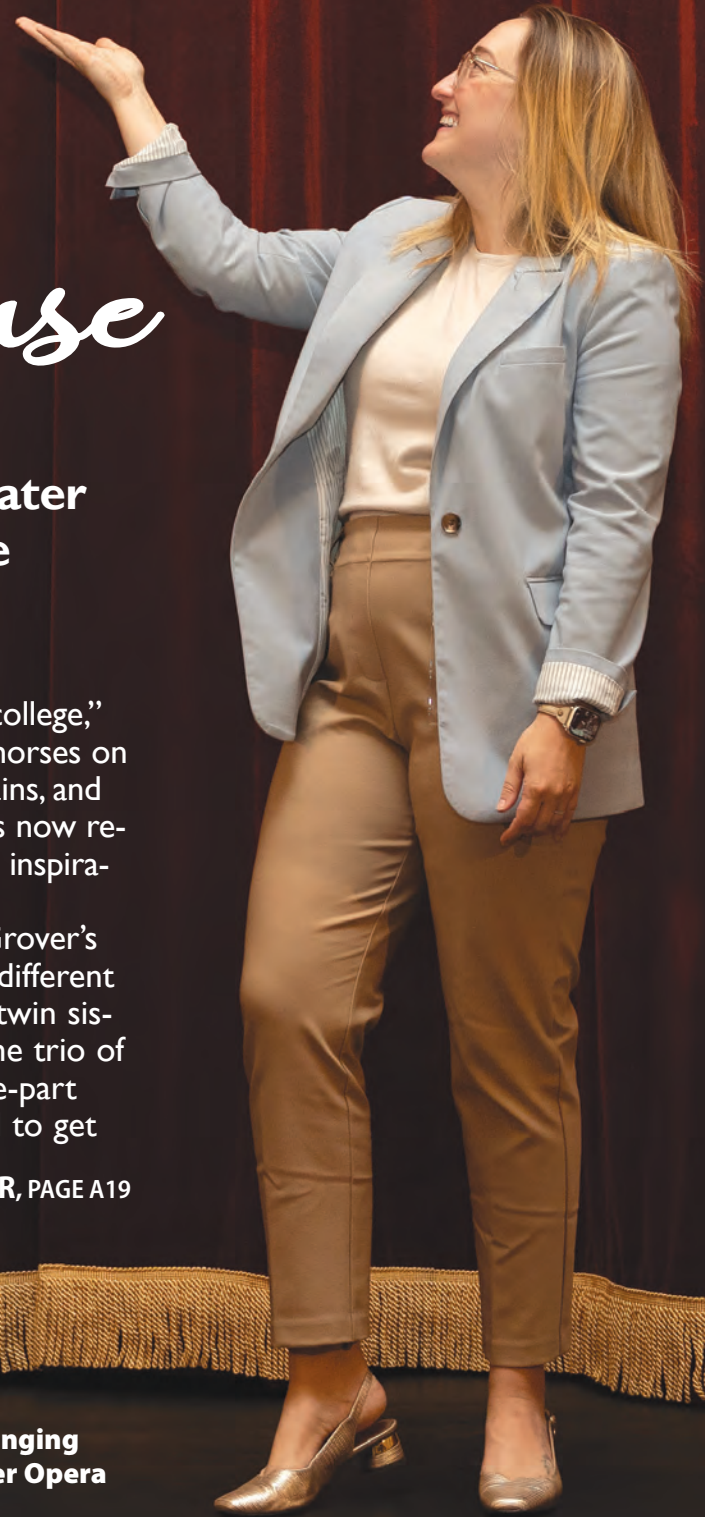
until high school, but mostly college," Grover said. "I grew up with horses on my dad's ranch in the mountains, and my mom was a nurse ... she's now retired, but she surely was a big inspiration for me musically."

Being a self-taught singer, Grover's mother would play music of different genres for her and Grover's twin sister, and at birthday parties, the trio of Grover girls would sing three-part harmony. But Grover wanted to get

SEE **GROVER**, PAGE A19

Kara Grover grew up on a ranch and didn't consider auditioning for opera singing until she was in college. Now she's the theater services coordinator at Sumter Opera House.

ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM



GROVER FROM PAGE A18

serious about singing.

In high school, she made the switch from first-chair flutist to amateur actress in her school's production of "Grease." Nailing the role of Marty Maraschino, she sung a capella and received rave reviews for her performance — including from her choir teacher, Daryl Gingrich. He encouraged Grover to audition for Colorado All State Choir. Her junior year, Grover was the only student out of the entire county to be accepted.

After she conquered all her high school musical productions, Grover's path took an unexpected turn when a friend suggested she audition for the opera program at the University of Northern Colorado.

"I love it here. But ironically, they say, 'Oh, an opera singer at the opera house,' but we don't do any opera."

KARA GROVER

Sumter Opera House
theater services
coordinator

ern Colorado.

"I don't know what I'm doing, but sure, why not?" she explained. "I didn't really have direction; I just know I liked singing. So, I thought I'll give it a try."

But Grover knew her love for singing could only take her so far. As the daughter of a rancher and a nurse, she was raised with a deep respect for hard work. Her sights were set on having ample time to devote to perfecting her singing. It would pay off, as she earned her bachelor's degree in opera from UNC.

Her time in college was transformative, being where she saw her first opera, "Little Women," and where she featured in the opera "Hansel and Gretel." From there, her love for the art form grew, and she soon found herself in Germany, participating in a summer program that allowed her to sing with an



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Kara Grover, theater services coordinator, wants to share the genre she loves with Sumter. She encouraged the community to try listening to classical music. See what's coming up this fall at the opera house on page A40.



opera company. Falling in love with the chorus work and the culture, Grover made the jump from the ranch to the opera stage. With no money and no concrete plan, the decision was not easy, but it was a leap of faith she was willing to take. She faced a series of challenges, from

navigating the complexities to obtain a work visa to being told repeatedly she was "too young" to secure a job in the competitive opera industry. But Grover remained resilient. Alongside a group of like-minded colleagues in 2011, she founded Opera et Cetera.

"Our goal was to have a company that hired young singers to bridge the gap between college and professional singing. To build their repertoire, build their technique, give them exposure, have them sing for an audience," she explained. "This was the goal for us, as young singers, to create our own opportunities to sing."

The company quickly gained traction, performing at prestigious venues across Germany and even embarking on a tour in America.

It was in Germany that Grover met her husband, an Air Force officer; the couple were connected through his grandmother and Grover's stepmother. He would later receive a permanent change of station back to the States. While in Florida, Grover restarted her career to have that competitive edge when it comes to the workforce and earned her master's at Florida State University. She graduated in 2021, when COVID-19 hit a plateau, and went into arts administration. She performed at a few gigs, moving around to Las Vegas and then New Mexico before finally settling in Sumter.

Grover worried what she would do in this new city, but as fate would have it, Sumter had a place for her. She applied for a position at the Sumter Opera House as the theater services coordinator — a job that connected her back to the world of opera, though in a different capacity.

"I love it here," Grover said, beaming. "But ironically, they say, 'Oh, an opera singer at the opera house,' but we don't do any opera." At least, not yet.

In her role, Grover has already begun to leave her mark. In March, the debut of the Opera House's Acoustic Cafe series was a sold-out event titled "Celebrating Women Composers" that featured a series of heartfelt performances by Grover and her dear friend Lois Henry, a highly sought-after pianist and composer.

"I'm going to force people to like classical music, whether people want to or not," Grover joked. But beneath her humor lies a sincere passion for sharing the art form she loves. "People just need to be willing to try something new ... I'm not asking [to make it your new favorite genre], I'm just saying, give it a try."

Things to do

There's no shortage of events to enjoy in Sumter this fall

Summer is coming to a close, and with it is the final concert for the **Fourth Fridays summer series** on Friday, Sept. 27, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Too Much Sylvia is on the schedule to perform. There will be ample food and drinks available for sale. Food truck vendors include Lisa Ann's Kitchen, Rollin in Da Dough, Bessie's Bites & Sweet Delights and SO Cool Italian Icee. Sertoma will also have plenty of cold brews for sale, and Palmetto Optimist Club will be back with free books for kids as well as popcorn for sale. If you're looking for more good eats, downtown restaurants will be open for dine in and take out. No coolers allowed. The music will be at Sumter County Courthouse, 141 N. Main St.

Cruise In to Breakfast on Saturday, Sept. 28, from 8 to 11 a.m. at Sumter Cut Rate Drug Store and Coffee. According to the restaurant, the fountain is going to open back up on Saturdays and starts with a cruise in and traditional breakfast favorites. The employee lot on the

side of the building will be for classic cars, or you can park on Main Street in front of the store. In October, the restaurant is holding 13th Annual Sumter Original Brewery Caffeine & Gasoline by Charlie Fossett Realtor in Sumter on Oct. 26 at 4 p.m. Don't miss the fall events at Sumter's classic soda fountain.

Love to play golf with your other half? You're in luck with the **Couples 9 & Dine** at Carolina Lakes Golf Course on Saturday, Sept. 28, at 4 p.m. on Shaw Air Force Base. Enjoy a round of nine holes on the golf course with a special in-round game for a fun twist, followed by a meal and drinks. Come out to meet new couples and maybe a new golf partner. The event is \$60 per couple. If you miss it, don't worry — it'll come back around next month on Oct. 26 at 4 p.m. Get your tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/5eu6v42j>.

Porches of Sumter, hosted by Greater Sumter Chamber of Commerce and

presented by FTC and Tandem Health, returns Thursday, Oct. 3, blending mouthwatering local cuisine, live music and a vibrant community vibe, all happening in the heart of Sumter's historic district. Stroll through the heart of Sumter, enjoying delicious samples from local chefs, caterers and culinary artisans who will feature savory bites and sweet treats — a menu that has something for everyone. Porches of Sumter will be held from 6 to 8:30 p.m. on West Calhoun Street. To purchase tickets, visit sumterchamber.com/porchesofsumter2024.



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

A guest builds a tower at the eSTEAM Festival in 2023. This year's event will return on Saturday, Oct. 5, in downtown Sumter.

Kids and their families can have a blast learning about local careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts and math through the annual **eSTEAM Festival** in downtown Sumter on Saturday, Oct. 5. The free family fun all starts with a parade at 10 a.m., followed by mobile STEM exhibits, new exhibitors, stage shows and more near the Hyatt downtown.

Food truck lovers, get ready for 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 craft-

ers 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.

Meet farm animals and choose your fall pumpkins at the 15th-annual **McCaskill Farm Fall Family Farm Day** on Saturday, Oct. 5, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visit a working farm and this year enjoy new activities at the event. There will be a corn pool, pumpkin patch, hayrides, hay maze, games, barrel train, horseback rides, bluegrass music, farm animals, inflatables, working sawmill and gristmill, woodworking and blacksmith demonstrations, sugar cane mill, Labrador retriever demonstrations, ag simulator and more. Tickets can be bought for activities. Each ticket is \$1 or 50 tickets for \$40. Hayrides (3), horseback rides (5) and barrel train (3) will be taking tickets, but there is more to do and see for free. Pumpkins and concessions are all a separate fee. No pets, coolers or picnics. The farm recommends bringing a chair and cash. Admission is \$8 per person, and children under 2 are free.

Find your lederhosen, braid your hair and then get your beer and pretzels at Sumter's annual **Oktoberfest** on Main on Oct. 12 at Sumter Original Brewery, 2 S. Main St. in downtown Sumter. According to the event website, this is Sumter's largest street party of the year, and it's the biggest fundraiser for Sumter United Ministries, so come out for a great local cause. Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$20 at the door, and kids get in for free. The event starts at 5 p.m. with German music playing on Main Street until 8:30 p.m. DJ Howie D's Entertainment DJs will continue the party in La Piazza. Get your tickets now at <https://tinyurl.com/yyrwt34a>.

The 20th anniversary of the **Fall Feast** presented by FTC is this year on Thursday, Oct. 24, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. All proceeds go to Sumter Green each year, which beautifies areas across Sumter. Adults only are invited, 18 and up, and there will be live music by HeyBo and special guest Tom Mullikin of the SC7 Expedition. Tickets are \$40 in advance or \$50 at the door. Buy yours at www.sumteroperahouse.com/the-fall-feast. Enjoy some great food from local chefs for a great cause.

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Religion

Pay attention to those in your life who are struggling

September is National Suicide Prevention Month. As a pastor who has served in the church for many years, I can't think of a family that has not been touched by suicide. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has a website (samhsa.gov) dedicated to providing helpful information and resources. Their website reminds us that setting aside September allows us the opportunity to remember the lives lost to suicide, to acknowledge the millions who have wrestled with suicide and to raise awareness about suicide and

the resources that are available to help.

My senior year in college, one of my closest friends died by suicide. It was in December, a few weeks before



Pastor Stewart Rawson

many who have dealt with a suicide, I have replayed our conversation for the last 30 years, wondering what I missed, thinking about what I should have seen. This is a natural response to such a tragic loss. One of my family

members has said before of suicide, "It is a permanent solution to a temporary problem." exams, and the small college I attended was in shock. I was one of the last people to talk to David; we met up at a fraternity party the night before. David and I were in the basement, and we talked for quite a while about life, relationships and disappointments. Like

members has said before of suicide, "It is a permanent solution to a temporary problem."

One of the most painful stigmas surrounding suicide is the unfortunate perception some have that somehow those who have died by suicide are cut off from the love of God. For many years, this was the teaching of the Catholic church, but the Catholic church has changed this teaching. The Bible I read says nothing can separate us from the love of God and that our God is a gracious and loving God. I refuse to believe a merciful God would turn his back on someone who was in pain and hurting in a way most of us cannot imagine. There is an incredible scene in a movie about Martin Luther. A young parishioner in Luther's church hung himself and at that time would have been prohibited from being buried in the churchyard. The young Martin Luther in his full black preaching robe digs a grave in the

churchyard in the pouring rain, even against the protests of his superior, for the young man.

One of the most helpful resources I came across from the literature describing Suicide Prevention Month is that if you are feeling suicidal or if you are dealing with overwhelming emotions, you can call 988 and a counselor will talk to you; the motto of the service is "no judgment, just help." You can also send a text to 988 and receive help. We can all commit ourselves to vigilance, paying attention to those in our lives who are struggling and not hesitating to reach out to offer a listening ear or a word of encouragement.

We are in this together, and we can all do our part to create a kinder, more loving world.

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



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2-year-old Sumter nonprofit tackles community needs

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

deirdre@theitem.com

Services of Hope has been in Sumter for about two years, but its impact has grown fast.

From an in-house food pantry to homeowning courses to a meal share plan for elders, the nonprofit helps its community in a variety of ways.

Founded by Sumter native Daniel Prescott, who created the first Services of Hope out of Dallas, Texas, Services of Hope has returned to its creator's hometown to give back to the community.

With a focus on financial literacy, feeding the hungry and generally helping those who need it in Sumter, SOH has begun a surprising number of programs and partnerships in spite of being relatively new to Sumter and having a small staff.

Right now, SOH has two employees at its Sumter office: Brandon Stukes and intern from Morris College Washington James. The two men work alongside about 10 volunteers to aid



the community, and CEO Prescott commutes between Dallas and Sumter to keep an eye on things.

One of the organization's newest programs is a meal share program for elders 65 and older. The first 50 seniors who sign up get a free box of local, seasonal produce that can be picked up from the South Sumter Farmer's

Market, but if a senior cannot make it to the farmer's market or send someone else to pick up the produce, SOH will sometimes deliver. SOH is at the farmer's market every Friday, but individuals can only pick up boxes bi-weekly. In the future, SOH is hoping to extend its free produce beyond seniors.

Nonprofit Services of Hope gives away free boxes of fresh, local produce to 50 seniors every Friday at the South Sumter Farmers Market.

PHOTO PROVIDED

According to Stukes and James, SOH has had rapid growth. Even though at first residents were skeptical of the organization that came from a far-away city, Stukes said their work has paid off.

"From people seeing us not only talk but actually doing the work, we've been able to grow pretty fast," Stukes said.

SOH has not reached its peak yet. Every day for its employees is filled with meetings and planning for their next service, alongside keeping what they currently provide running smoothly.

"I would say [in the] next two to five years, we really plan on expanding into a bigger operation [and] actually be able to touch more than just Sumter; we wanna be able to touch the whole South Carolina," Stukes said.

SOH is always in need of new volunteers and donations both physical and monetary. To donate, learn how to volunteer or get in contact with SOH, visit its website at www.servicesofhope.org/soh-sumter.

JIMMY DAVIS

FOR CITY COUNCIL WARD 4

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Shaw Air Force Base



U.S. Air Force Capt. Taylor "FEMA" Hiester, F-16 Viper Demonstration Team commander and pilot, performs an aileron roll, left and middle photos, during Airshow Atlantic in Greenwood, Canada, on Aug. 24. The demonstration profile can include up to 18 maneuvers, with the pilot experiencing up to nine times the force of gravity, or nine Gs, and traveling just under the speed of sound at 700 miles per hour. In the right photo, he performs a high-G turn during the show. During the high-G turn, the pilot applies full aft stick and turns the aircraft around in less than 3,000 feet, being pressed into the seat at nine times the force of gravity.

Military celebrates 50 years of the F-16 with shows by Shaw team

2024 signifies the 50th anniversary of the F-16 airframe, and the Shaw Air Force Base F-16 Viper Demonstration Team plans to perform at around 25 shows this year, both nationally and internationally. In 2024, the team released a 50th anniversary paint scheme, paying homage to the YF-16 prototype that first flew at Edwards Air Force Base in 1974.

BELOW: U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Carter Pals, F-16 Viper Demonstration Team dedicated crew chief, performs a show launch during Airshow Atlantic at Greenwood, Canada.



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTOS BY SENIOR AIRMAN MEGHAN HUTTON
U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Elias Sanchez, F-16 Viper Demonstration Team dedicated crew chief, performs a show launch during Airshow Atlantic in Greenwood, Canada, on Aug. 24. The team travels across the U.S. and internationally to perform at air shows, enhancing community relations and positively influencing Air Force recruiting and retention.



ABOVE: U.S. Air Force Capt. Mitchell "Shadow" King, F-16 Viper Demonstration Team safety officer and support pilot, lands during Airshow Atlantic.

BELOW: U.S. Air Force Capt. Taylor "FEMA" Hiester, F-16 Viper Demonstration Team commander and pilot, points to the YF-16 heritage aircraft with attendees during the show.



North Main Street of the 1950s remembered



Sammy Way
REFLECTIONS

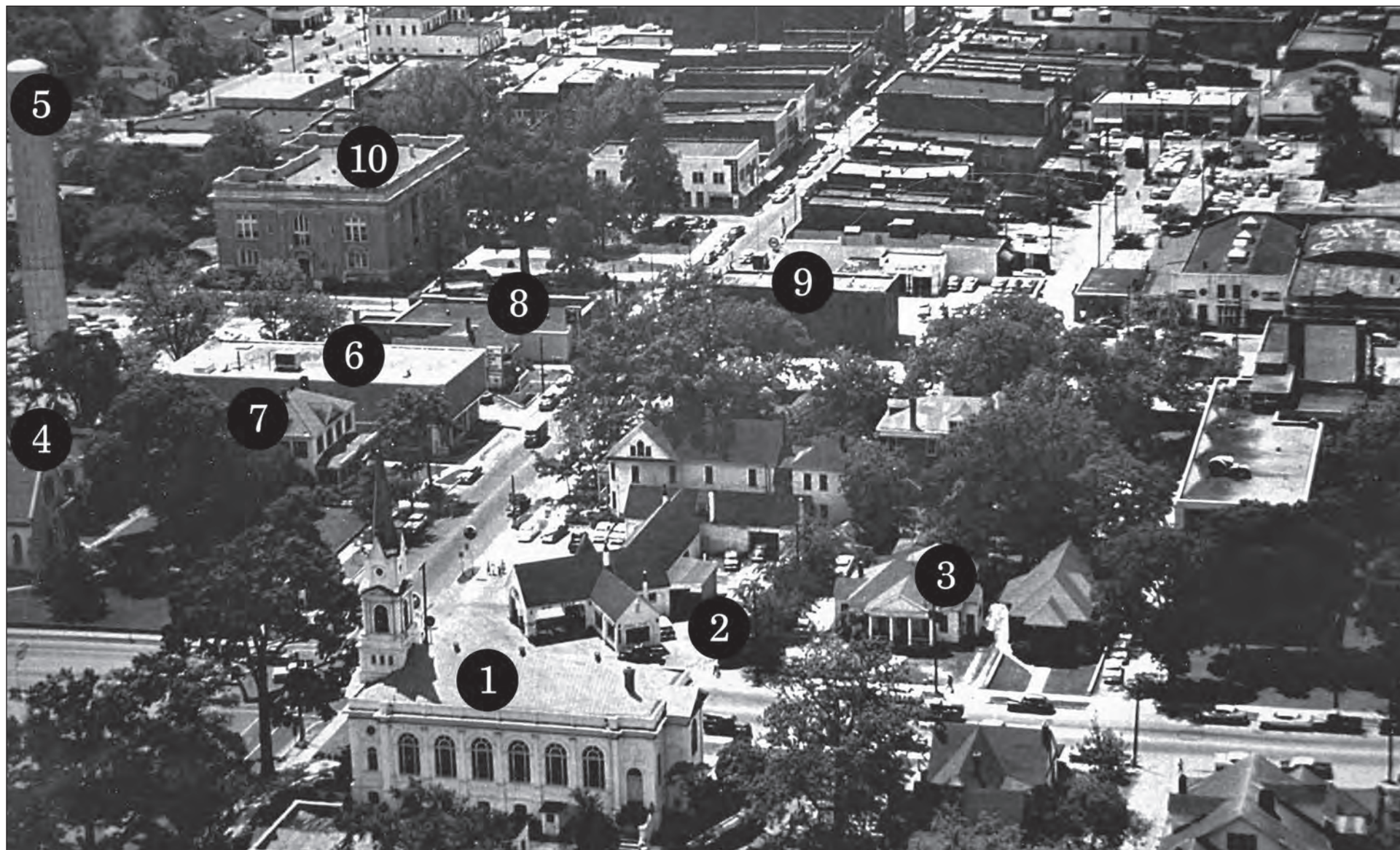
Relections remembers buildings located on North Main Street in the late 1950s. This segment of downtown has undergone myriad changes through the years. The author has num-

bered key points on the map and trusts that many long-term residents will remember those designated sites that have vanished as our city has developed. The data and photos used to prepare this piece

were obtained from *The Sumter Item* archives.

1. First Presbyterian Church
2. B H Gulf Station #2
3. The Golden Age Club House is presently located on Hampton Avenue
4. Church of the Holy Comforter

5. Old water stand pipe
6. Former National Bank of South Carolina
7. Former home of Miss Ninna Richardson, former judge of probate
8. Mayflower Restaurant
9. Hurst Furniture Company
10. Courthouse



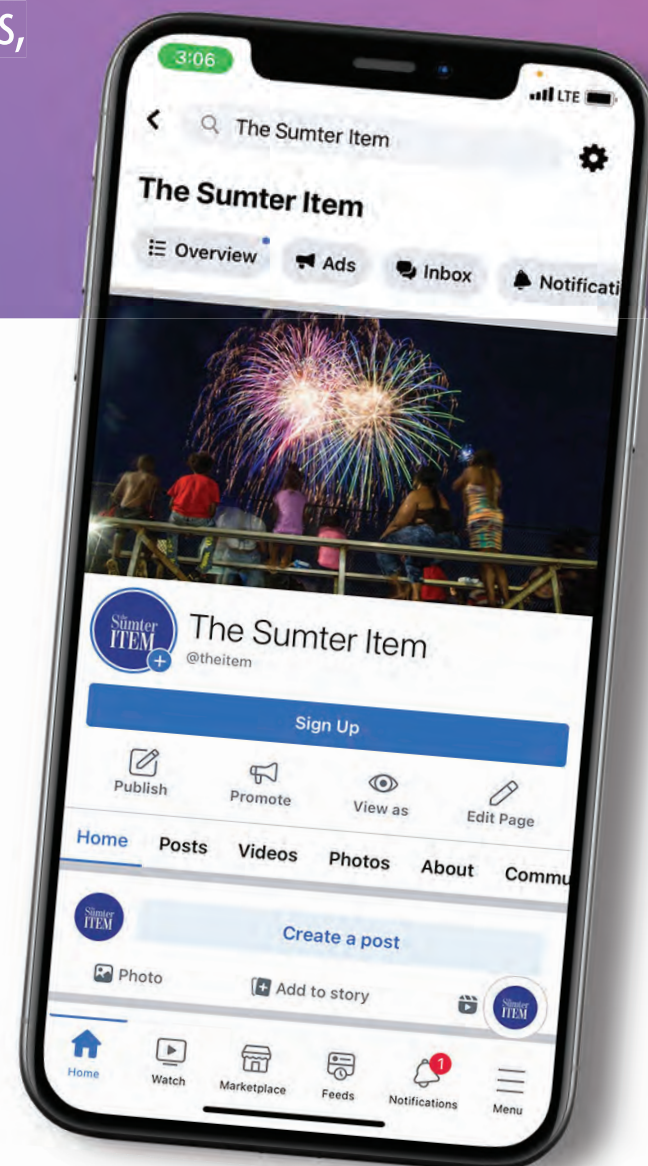


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Arts & entertainment

Billy Lane greets guests at the weekly Wings and Strings music night at Pizza Lane.



It's a wing-dingin' good time!

Sumter's Pizza Lane brings back Wings & Strings

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysha@theitem.com

Some of the greatest ideas come from crazy conversations with your friends. Take Billy Lane and Hank Martin, for example.

Lane, the namesake and founder of

Sumter's beloved Pizza Lane, was hanging out in one of the restaurant's booths one fateful day, watching renowned artist Martin cut a rug to his song "Doin' The James Brown." Enamored with the vibe of the pizza parlor when filled with music, Martin suggested, "Bill, you should start having music up here."

"I said, 'Man, this is a pizza place. I can't do that,'" Lane recalled, reenacting his disbelief at the wild idea. It seemed so far-fetched for the quaint restaurant but not impossible.

The more Lane pondered the idea, the better it started to sound.

After working with the late, great Francis Hanna to tuck sound system wires underneath the cushion of a booth a few tables down from the stage to act as Hanna's mixing console, Wings and Strings was born in the early 2000s. Local musicians would rock the small stage every week, joined in harmony by the bright-faced patrons who were in the mood for good food and a good time. Anyone interested in performing could show up, sign up and sing and play the night away.

"We stayed in here until the [news] paper came the next morning," Lane said.

Martin would be one of many to take the stage over the years. Others would include seasoned musicians like the late Brooks Wilkinson of Prime Tyme and As If and the late



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Musicians light up the stage at Pizza Lane's Wings and Strings, bringing a mix of nostalgia and fresh talent to the music night.

SEE **STRINGS**, PAGE A29

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**BEST of SUMTER
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STRINGS FROM PAGE A28

Bill Pinkney of the Original Drifters. Many musicians also got their start on the same historic stage, including Kevin Jarvis.

“I’ve played here with several different groups, and some duos I used to play with and then by myself. Over time, when things like this happen, musicians gravitate towards it,” Jarvis said.

Jarvis is a member of the hometown band Green Swamp Collective. The group, formed within the walls of his at-home recording studio, has traveled across

South Carolina, playing its folk American bluegrass songs. Its origin story began when Jarvis, who plays in several bands, decided to create a John Denver tribute album, recording in each band’s unique style. Kurt Ackerman and Rick Walker both stopped by for their sessions to record on the tribute album. The duo entertained Jarvis’ idea of starting a band of their own, and thus, on the shores of Green Swamp that runs through his property, the Green Swamp Collective was born.

But in light of his success with the band and his devotion to being praise team director at First Church of God, Jarvis couldn’t resist his roots at Pizza Lane when word spread that Wings and Strings made its return on Aug. 21.

“Very nostalgic,” Jarvis described re-

turning to the stage on Sept. 4. “Goodness, when I first played at Wings and Strings, I’m guessing it was 2004-05. We’re all different people than we were 20 years ago. But to see so many of the same people here coming back and Billy — his love of music is so deep and passionate. He’s got a big smile on his face; it’s just wonderful to see that.”

Surrounded by the same vibrant game machines, enjoying the same beloved pizza and catching up with the same friends from decades ago, Wings and Strings also offered new musicians the chance to be part of history. Chandler Evans, a young musician from Manning, got the chance to



Endless names of musicians who have played at Pizza Lane’s Wings and Strings line the walls.

play alongside Jarvis, Martin, Johnny Hilton and more. And the cherry on top of a core performance, he signed his name on the stage’s ceiling, sealing his place in Wings and Strings history.

“When the place is packed like this, the music up there, it does something to your heart,” Lane said about seeing the generations of music lovers come together. “Music does a lot of things for you.”

And for you — yes, you — it could do wonders. Stop by and check it out for yourself.

Whether you’re looking to bring the music or just enjoy it, Wings and Strings will happen every Wednesday at Pizza Lane, 460 Broad St., beginning at 7 p.m. Musicians of all expertise are welcome to come and play, free of charge.



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Kevin Jarvis, member of the Green Swamp Collective, remembers playing on the Pizza Lane stage for Wings and Strings night more than 20 years ago. His return to the stage was “very nostalgic,” he said.



Founder Billy Lane started the weekly Wings and Strings music night at Pizza Lane more than 20 years ago, joining good food and good music together for the great people of Sumter.


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Former Sumter High DB Gregg guiding next generation as Gamecock assistant coach

Jordan Gregg was a standout defensive back for Sumter High in the mid-2010's.

After graduating in 2018, he took his talents to Catawba College and UNC Pembroke, where he continued to thrive.

In four years at Catawba, he collected 142 total tackles, broke up 12 passes and created three turnovers. In a season at UNC Pembroke, he picked off a pass, recovered a fumble and racked up 30 tackles, making four stops in the backfield.

But part of Gregg's heart was always back in Sumter. He regularly came back to coach in various camps, including a Flight School he launched with fellow SHS alumnus Tylee Craft in the summer of 2023. That itch for coaching never went away, so when the opportunity to turn pro didn't fully materialize, Gregg returned to his alma mater and is spending his first year out of school molding the next generation of star defensive backs at Sumter High.

"It was always a backup plan for me to come back," he said. "I always stayed in contact with Coach (Brian) Wilson when I was in college, and he'd tell me, 'Whenever your time is up,



TIM LEIBLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

Former Sumter High defensive back Jordan Gregg, right, celebrates a turnover with defensive back Omari Parker (21) against Lake-wood. Gregg joined the coaching staff this fall after finishing his college career at UNC Pembroke.

SEE **GREGG**, PAGE A31

GREGG FROM PAGE A30

we have something for you here.'

For Sumter High defensive coordinator Brian Wilson, who coached Gregg during his senior season with the Gamecocks, it was a no-brainer to bring in his former pupil.

"He was one of the guys that I knew always wanted to coach and would be a good coach, so this is something we've been talking about for probably two years now," the SHS defensive coordinator said. "Having the opportunity to bring a player back that's been through (head) Coach (Mark) Barnes' regimen of a program and understands the standard that it takes to not only play here, but play at the college level is phenomenal for the school, the football program and the community as a whole."

During the spring, Gregg was still fighting to keep his dream of being an NFL defensive back alive. He played in two senior bowls. The first was the FCS Bowl, in which he was named his team's defensive MVP. The second

was the FBS Tropical Bowl, in which he had the chance to compete against Division I athletes.

He would go back and forth between different opportunities to show his skills to professional scouts. He missed some of the Gamecocks' summer activities to go to a United Football League combine in June, but he came right back to continue work with SHS.

"Coach Barnes was very supportive of Jordan's desire to still play, so we found a way to work around it," Wilson said. "When he was here, he was here. When he wasn't, he was working to achieve the goal he wanted to achieve, and I think that's something we wanted the kids to see. That even though he was done with college ball, that there were still



Former Sumter High defensive back Jordan Gregg coaches from the sideline against Lake-wood. Gregg joined the coaching staff this fall after finishing his college career at UNC Pembroke.

PHOTOS BY TIM LEIBLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

'Having the opportunity to bring a player back that's been through (head) Coach (Mark) Barnes' regimen of a program and understands the standard that it takes to not only play here, but play at the college level is phenomenal for the school, the football program and the community as a whole.'

BRIAN WILSON

Sumter High School defensive coordinator



opportunities out there and he was still trying to pursue his dream."

Gregg isn't shutting the door on a pro career yet, but he's also fully committed to helping Sumter High continue an excellent 2024 season. Through all of the trials and tribulations of trying to prove his skills to pro scouts, he's gaining more experi-

ence to feed right back into the current crop of Gamecock defensive backs.

"It was always a long shot, coming from a DII, but I do believe in the saying, 'If you're good enough, they'll find you,'" Gregg said. "I want to be that person here on the coaching staff that came from DII, was successful in

college and had a chance to play in two senior bowls, and I'm playing against people that were at Alabama, Colorado, Kansas, and I came from a small DII college at UNC Pembroke."

Gregg was the perfect player to bring back into the program because of his experience as a Division II athlete. Most players aren't going to get the opportunity to suit up for a Power 5 program, but that doesn't mean they won't have a successful career after high school. Gregg wants to be that first-hand example for the current team.

"I think it's important because with me just freshly out of college, I can relate more with them. To be able to tell them that not everybody is going to go DI and just because you don't go to Division I doesn't mean you won't have success or make it to the NFL. If you're good enough, you're going to play," he said. "Me coming from the community, I can relate to them. I feel like a lot of them respect me. And outside of football, I try to be like a big brother to them and help them go to college and get out of Sumter."

Wilson and Gregg walked a similar path. Before Gregg made the jump from Sumter High to Division II football, Wilson did the same thing,

SEE **GREGG**, PAGE A32

GREGG FROM PAGE A31

suiting up for Presbyterian College after playing for Paul Sorrells with the Gamecocks. While Wilson only coached Gregg for a year, the two quickly bonded, which made the coaching reunion such a perfect fit.

“He made such an impact in that one year. I could tell the difference in my play between my junior year and my senior year. He made me a better corner, a better player and a better man in that one year he had me,” Gregg said. “I always call him like a big brother. We have some type of the same story.”

Sumter High is known for sending defensive talent to the next level. Gregg is part of a long line of defensive backs that have made the leap. Former teammates like O’Donnell Fortune and Abraham Temoney both took their talents to the Division I level at South Carolina and Coastal Carolina, respectively. Former all-state defensive back Zyeir Gamble is currently at Appalachian State. So many more former Gamecocks have played Division II ball like Gregg. He takes great pride in helping the next generation of SHS defensive backs follow in those footsteps.

“I’m glad that I’m here because I can speak on those guys because I played with those guys, whether it was in high school or trained with them in the summertime,” Gregg said. “They can see if you come here, play DB, do what you’re supposed to do and you show out, we’ll get you to college, and the guys that do go to college have good, successful careers in college.”

Wilson thought his protégé picked things up quickly because of the way he was able to connect with the players. While Gregg learned a ton about coaching from Wilson, the SHS defensive coordinator was quick to tell him that he didn’t need to be a parrot.

“I told him he has to figure out what works for him,” Wilson said. “What worked for me, worked for me and, of course, I’m going to have certain aspects I’m going to want, but I want to have him find his direction of how he wants his guys to look, shape, feel, move and those types of things. That’s the challenge he’s going to battle for a while. It took me a while to get a plan of how I wanted practice to run and drills I wanted to do.

“It’s going to take time, but he’s improving every day and he’s a smart



TIM LEIBLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter High assistant coach Jordan Gregg, second from left, watches the fourth quarter of the Gamecocks’ matchup with Lakewood alongside former teammates Tylee Craft, center, and O’Donnell Fortune, center right.

‘With me being in college, being in the footsteps where they want to follow, they listen because I’ve been where they want to be.’

JORDAN GREGG

Sumter High assistant on coaching after finishing his college career

guy, he’s a student of the game, so he’s doing what he needs to do to be successful.”

Gregg admitted that it was hard to switch out of player mode at first, but his experience as a player is a blessing. He knows the kinds of coaches he worked well with and carries some of those attributes with him.

“Learning each player, how they react to certain things, so you can talk to them in different ways because every player is different,” Gregg said of what he’s focused on as a coach. “I let them know when they’re wrong, be honest with them and encourage them when things do go wrong. With me

being in college, being in the footsteps where they want to follow, they listen because I’ve been where they want to be.”

Gregg is working with a young defensive back group. While seniors like Terrence Burgess are anchors for the group, they also have a junior in Bryce Allen and a sophomore in Brian Wilson II, the son of the team’s defensive coordinator. That youth can be a blessing and a curse for a new coach.

“The blessing is that it’s a blank canvas, so he can mold them a lot easier, but the struggles of being young is they’re going to make mistakes. Him being a young guy, that can be frus-

trating,” Coach Wilson said. “But he understands that it’s a process.”

Coach Wilson is also glad there’s a great buffer between himself and his son. He knows the sophomore DB is in good hands with Gregg.

“To have this guy in the room, especially with my son, I think is awesome. It takes a lot of stress off me,” the DC said. “It allows my son to be a lot more free because I don’t spend as much time with that group as I used to, so it’s an awesome experience for him to grow, for them to grow and for me to grow. I’m a little older, and the game has changed since I’ve been out of it, so with him being able to bring in new techniques is awesome.

“(Gregg) is the nice guy, and I’m the bad guy,” Coach Wilson added with a laugh. “He came in at the right time, as Brian was becoming a sophomore and starting. He has somebody who’s young, who may see things similar to how he does and who is going to be hard and firm on him but not as hard as I am. I’m sometimes a little too hard on him because he’s the coach’s son.”

Sumter High works to establish boys volleyball program

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

Starting a program is never easy, but the Sumter High boys volleyball team is trying to lay a strong foundation.

The Gamecocks hosted their home opener on Aug. 3 and even managed to pull out a 25-22 victory in the second set against Wilson High School. Rome wasn't built in a day, but head coach Terrie Wood-McCray thinks her team is setting the groundwork for long-term success.

"The teacher in me says you've got to start somewhere," she said. "It's very rare that you're going to start on the top; you have to work your way up. From this one, we're going to work on winning more and more as we go until we blow it out every time."

This first season was years in the making at Sumter High. Athletic Director Crasten Davis has been interested in forming a team since joining the Gamecocks, but the pieces didn't fall into place until this year. They were able to build a team of 13 players after a few rounds of interest meetings and tryouts. Luckily for Wood-McCray, it's easier to start a program for a sport like volleyball when the girls already have most of the basic equipment in tow.

"We didn't have to worry about that," the SHS head coach said of equipment like nets and volleyballs. "We really just had to get the skills into them. I started out with just me, then I found an amazing assistant coach. Now, together, we're trying to get them on the road to winning."

Of course, they needed a schedule, too. That task was a challenge in and of itself. There are several 5A schools with volleyball programs, but many are out in the Myrtle Beach region where Sumter High resided in all of their sports for the last few years. Those schools were hesitant to add a team so far away onto their schedule,

especially when there was no guarantee they'd have enough athletes to form a team. The Gamecocks caught a break when Lakewood, which started a boys volleyball program last year, did not have enough players for a team this fall. Sumter High simply took over their schedule instead, leading to an opener against Wilson.

With a schedule in place, the next task was teaching volleyball skills. While Wood-McCray and assistant



Sumter High head coach Terrie Wood-McCray talks to her team after their home opener against Wilson on Aug. 3.

SEE VOLLEYBALL, PAGE A34



The Sumter High boys volleyball team celebrates after winning a set for the first time against Wilson High School.

PHOTOS BY TIM LEIBLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

VOLLEYBALL

FROM PAGE A33

coach Jessrel Gilbuena found that their players had some basic skills, the Gamecocks needed some structure to learn how to play proper volleyball.

“I found volleyball reflexes with some of them,” Gilbuena said. “We really have to work hard with a lot of skills, especially with the basic ones. They had minor experience, but they never had a system.” Wood-McCray added, “We did have to break them out of the P.E. volleyball mindset. In P.E., everyone goes for the ball.”

General athleticism was an important baseline for picking up volleyball quickly, but Wood-McCray said that having a background in different sports could definitely give certain athletes a leg up.

“The more generally athletic they are, the easier it is for them to learn some of these things,” she said. “Also, if they have played other sports before, it gives them a leg up. If they have played tennis, because it's kind of the same swing. And the footwork. We've



Sumter High's Xavier Andrews (21) has been the Gamecocks' main leader in their first season.

SEE VOLLEYBALL, PAGE A35



PHOTOS BY TIM LEIBLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter High's Owen Sunderland serves against Wilson High School on Aug. 3.

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VOLLEYBALL FROM PAGE A34

got a couple tennis players, so they already have some of the makings of what they need to be great volleyball players.”

Owen Sunderland is one of a handful of tennis players who joined the volleyball team this fall. He showed an early ability to serve and strike the ball consistently because of those ingrained movements.

“He’s very athletic, and he is all in,” Wood-McCray said of Sunderland. “If we say you’re running, you’re serving, whatever we ask him to do, he does it most of the time.”

Of course, a new team means needing to find new leaders. While the buck stops with the coaching staff, teams that thrive tend to have a player who can motivate their teammates. For Sumter High, that’s been senior Xavier Andrews.

“He’s a natural. He fell right into the leadership role, which I really appreciated,” Wood-McCray said. “He’s very good at communicating with the team. He’s very good communicating with us. We can give him instructions, and he makes sure it gets down without us having to chase behind him, which we’ll miss because he’s a senior, but he’ll pass the torch to the up-and-comings.”

The Gamecocks are getting stronger with each passing day. The key to long-term success will be constantly replenishing their roster and continuing to drill down the basics of the sport.

“We need to take those skills and make them natural, so that’s what they fall back on immediately,” the SHS head coach said. “Muscle memory, we talk about that a lot.”



TIM LEIBLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

From left, Sumter High’s Xavier Andrews, Nick Woods and Owen Sunderland jump for a block against Wilson.

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Catching up with local stars early in the college season

BY TIM LEIBLE

tim@theitem.com

The college football season has been packed with some excellent action so far, and athletes from the tri-county have been in the middle of it all. It can be hard to keep track of athletes spread across the country, but this is an overview of some of the biggest area stars making an impact across Division I college football.

O'DONNELL FORTUNE AND JOSH SIMON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Former Sumter High defensive back O'Donnell Fortune and Crestwood alumnus Josh Simon have been on a wild ride through the first three weeks of the college football season.

The Gamecocks started with what should've been a walk in the park against Old Dominion, but weather delays and a shaky start from LaNorris Sellers made for an odd first game. Fortune was spectacular, snagging his first interception of the season to go along with four tackles. Sellers' inconsistent day through the air led to just one catch from Simon for 10 yards.

South Carolina rebounded in a big way in Week 2, rushing Kentucky on the road 31-6. Simon caught his first touchdown of the season, a 16-yard strike from Sellers, but it proved to be his only catch on the day. Fortune, meanwhile, had two tackles and a tackle for a loss as the Gamecock defense played lights out.

Carolina's third game was their most controversial. With ESPN's College GameDay in attendance, the Gamecocks hosted No. 16 LSU for a matchup in which the Gamecocks couldn't catch a break. They led for much of the game despite an onslaught of penalties, one of which negated a pick-six by Nick Emmanwori that would've pushed the Carolina lead back to double digits. USC also lost Sellers just before halftime to a knee injury after he ran for two touchdowns. USC lost 36-33 as Alex Herrera narrowly missed a game-tying field goal.

Simon shared the team lead with three catches in the loss, collecting 40



Former Sumter High star and current South Carolina defensive back O'Donnell Fortune (3) defends against LSU on Saturday, Sept. 14.

PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM



Former Crestwood star and current South Carolina tight end Josh Simon (6) lines up against LSU on Saturday, Sept. 14.

STARS FROM PAGE A36

yards through the air. He fumbled early, but the Gamecocks jumped on the loose ball. Fortune broke up a pass and had five tackles.

BRANDON CISSE AND DAVIN JACKSON, NORTH CAROLINA STATE

The Wolfpack opened the season 2-1 thanks in part to two local defenders, former Lakewood defensive back Brandon Cisse and Davin Jackson, the former Sumter High defensive lineman who has battled injuries throughout his career.

The Wolfpack started with Western Carolina, where they ran into another former Gator, Zayveon Wells, though the defensive back didn't see any action in the 38-21 N.C. State victory. Cisse finished with three tackles. Jackson made his N.C. State debut after missing time with ACL and Achilles injuries but was held without a tackle.

N.C. State followed with a tough 51-10 loss to Tennessee. Cisse had four tackles and .5 tackles for a loss while Jackson was again held stat-less in a tough defensive performance.

The Wolfpack then took down Louisiana Tech 30-20 with a big second half after an injury to quarterback Grayson McCall, the N.C. State QB who transferred in from Coastal Carolina. Cisse started the game but also left with an injury on the second defensive play. Head coach Dave Doeren said the following Monday that the injury wasn't serious. Both local stars were held without a stat.

SEE STARS, PAGE A38



Former Lakewood star and current North Carolina State defensive back Brandon Cisse (2) defends a pass against Western Carolina wide receiver AJ Colombo (0) in Raleigh, North Carolina, on Thursday, Aug. 29.

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Former Sumter High standout and current N.C. State defensive lineman Davin Jackson (99) rushes Louisiana Tech quarterback Jack Turner (10) on Saturday, Sept. 14, in Raleigh, North Carolina.

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AP FILE PHOTO
Former Sumter High star and current Florida defensive lineman Justus Boone is back for the Gators after missing last season with an ACL injury.



AP FILE PHOTO
Former Sumter High and current Vanderbilt defensive lineman Miles Capers has made a major impact for the Commodores this fall.



COURTESY OF COASTAL CAROLINA ATHLETICS
Former Sumter High standout and current Coastal Carolina defensive back Abraham Temoney III is in his second season with the Chants this fall.

STARS FROM PAGE A37

JUSTUS BOONE, FLORIDA

The Gators have gotten out to a slow start as former Sumter High defensive lineman Justus Boone returns to the fold after missing the entire 2023 season with a torn ACL. Florida suffered a 41-17 loss at the hands of Miami to start the team. After a blowout 45-7 win over Samford, they dropped a game with Texas A&M 33-20.

Boone has played in all three games, amassing a total of four tackles and 1.5 tackles for a loss. He also had a quarterback hit against Samford.

MILES CAPERS, VANDERBILT

Former Sumter High linebacker Miles Capers had a busy first three games of the season with the Commodores, helping Vandy get out to a 2-1 start.

Capers was all over the field in the season opener against Virginia Tech, racking up seven tackles, two tackles for a loss and half a sack in a 34-27 victory. He didn't need to do much in a 55-0 win over Alcorn the following week but had three tackles, .5 tackles for a loss and broke up a pass. He also defended a pass in a 36-32 loss against Georgia Tech, adding four tackles.

ABRAHAM TEMONEY III, COASTAL CAROLINA

Former Sumter High defensive back Abraham Temoney is in his second season with the Chants after transferring from Erskine. He played in each



COURTESY OF SENECA MOORE
Former Crestwood standout and current Liberty linebacker Seneca Moore (34) gets amped up before a game with the Flames.

of the Chants' games during their 3-0 start.

Temoney had three solo tackles in a 55-27 thumping of Jacksonville State. He had three more tackles, three of which were solo, in a 40-21 home win over William & Mary. The former Gamecock was held without a stat in a 28-20 win over Temple.

SENECA MOORE, LIBERTY

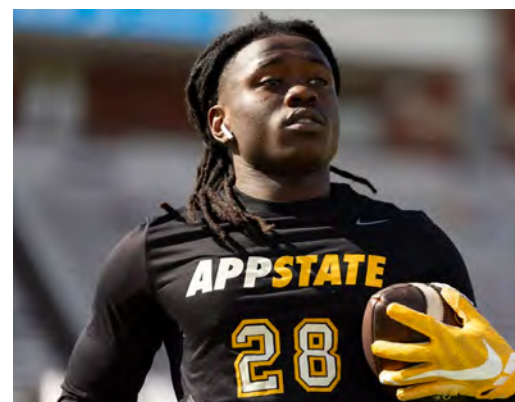
Former Crestwood standout Seneca Moore played one game during his freshman season with the Flames. He saw action during Liberty's season-opening 41-24 win over Campbell.

ZYEIR GAMBLE, APPALACHIAN STATE

Former Sumter High defensive back Gamble played in two of App State's first two games. After watching the opener against East Tennessee State, he saw playing time against Clemson and East Carolina but did not record a statistic.

KAMERON PEARSON, TEXAS STATE

Former Sumter High defensive back Kameron Pearson transferred to Texas State this fall and played in their first three games, including wins over Lamar and University of Texas-San Antonio. He did not record any statistics.



COURTESY OF APPALACHIAN STATE ATHLETICS
Former Sumter High and current Appalachian State defensive back Zyeir Gamble warms up for the Mountaineers.



COURTESY OF TEXAS STATE ATHLETICS
Former Sumter High defensive back Kameron Pearson transferred to Texas State and played in the first three games this fall.

Entertainment

Reynolds', Jackman's comedic chemistry in 'Deadpool and Wolverine' is perfection

The Marvel Cinematic Universe combined with Disney surged with record-breaking successes like an unstoppable juggernaut. All their theatrical outings with the Marvel logo displayed guaranteed, confirmed success in the box office and critical acclaim. It became quite conceivable to wonder if they were invincible, given there were no signs of any weaknesses in their foundation.



A REVIEW BY
ISAIAH RIDLEY

Years later the Marvel Cinematic brand began a gradual descent into a realm of unfamiliarity, coming face to face with a reality it has never experienced. The initial phase titled "The Infinity Saga" came to a satisfying conclusion with the release of "Avengers: Endgame" that tied up all revelatory storylines and brought closure to significant character themes, and as a result, fans and the public found themselves asking, "Is there anywhere else to go after 'Endgame?'"

Unfortunately, Marvel/Disney showed obvious signs of complacency with the approach of churning out products in quantity over quality. The result created an essence of burning out the core audience with storylines exhibiting no important stakes, character development concepts not resonating on an emotional level and without the key actors that made the Marvel Cinematic Universe work as a collective force of nature. It became painfully obvious there was no coherent plan in determining a direction after "Endgame" concluded.

July 26, 2024, marked the official debut of "Deadpool and Wolverine's" inclusion within the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Ryan Reynolds reprised his role as the unstable, vulgar, fourth wall breaking mercenary Wade Wilson/Deadpool, and Hugh Jackman reprised his iconic role as Logan/Wolverine. It is also ironic to note how the character of Wolverine received a

beautiful and emotional swansong cinematic feature titled "Logan." Reynolds successfully convinced Jackman to return to the character and join the Marvel franchise. Fans rejoiced knowing that Wolverine appearing means the X-Men will appear in the future.

The storyline of "Deadpool and Wolverine" begins with Wilson retiring the moniker of Deadpool, living a nice, quiet life with his friends, working as a used car sales associate, until he finds himself called upon in repairing a fracture within the multiverse of existence. To successfully complete the task at hand, he must find and recruit Wolverine in his quest. The Logan he encounters is a far different version than the one from previous X-Men outings.

Reynolds' and Jackman's comedic chemistry is absolute perfection with their performances. Both of their naturally charismatic personalities capturing the essence of their respective characters are what propel the film into an entertaining spectrum with intelligent and humorous banter, important convincing facial expressions and scathing, witty dialogue audiences alike easily relate to based on their own experiences. Wade's representation is annoying little brother, refusing to take matters seriously, going out of his way to press the buttons of his ally and Logan being the gruff, blunt, outspoken mindset reeling from an exorbitant amount of grief in relation to the pain of his past.

What I always felt was missing from past comic book adaptations is the element of excitement and pure entertainment value. Deadpool and Wolverine bring forth a unique atmosphere, which I can only describe as pure comic book bliss. Witnessing Wolverine wear his comic book-accurate costume on the big screen was a dream come true. For years, debates echoed across myriad internet forums questioning how the overall look would translate into a live-action perspective. Audiences received their answer with how wonderfully the full-color scheme worked with the dynamic of this film.



20TH CENTURY STUDIOS / MARVEL STUDIOS VIA AP

This image released by 20th Century Studios/Marvel Studios shows Ryan Reynolds as Deadpool/Wade Wilson, left, and Hugh Jackman as Wolverine/Logan in a scene from "Deadpool & Wolverine."

The action sequences provided a refreshing approach, resembling actual comic book pages coming to life in ways I did not believe were possible.

Statements from the past conveyed that brighter and faithful color schemes would be too distracting, providing no substance, which were effectively proven wrong with "Deadpool and Wolverine." It honestly disappoints me that the embrace of the faithful comic book costume approach came later rather than sooner. My advice is to pick up any X-Men comic from the past or watch the animated series from the '90s. Afterward, watch "Deadpool and Wolverine" to fully understand what I am articulating with the description of how visually this film captured the comic book atmosphere.

"Deadpool and Wolverine" offers surprise cameos I will not spoil for those who have not watched the film. This cinematic story is a love letter to the fans and overall audience that have followed the superhero genre from its inception. Surprisingly, this film also has sentimental moments touching the emotional core.

Is this going to revitalize the Marvel Cinematic Universe? Probably not, although it is a step in the right direction with providing true entertain-

ment and excitement without over-complicating the feature presentation. The action is gruesome, violent, bloody and fun. Reynolds and Jackman easily slip into their roles as if they never left, and in the end, "Deadpool and Wolverine" arrived at the perfect time with the correct approach.

Another way of viewing this film is to think classic buddy cop comedies like "48 Hours," "Beverly Hills Cop" and "Police Academy" intertwined with the world of Marvel Comics. I can safely say this was the most fun I had in a theater for a comic book presentation since "Spider-Man: No Way Home." I apologize for the vagueness of this review. It is important to experience "Deadpool and Wolverine" on the big screen for the full appreciation and effect of the story.

My final rating is a resounding 10/10 and two thumbs up for giving fans like me and the public what we had yearned for from our childhood into our adult years. Be prepared for violent, profane, humorous hilarity, graphic fight sequences and a truly entertaining adventure through memory lane.

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

Arts & entertainment

Come and enjoy the show at Sumter Opera House this fall

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysa@theitem.com

Theater services coordinator Kara Grover is excited about the acts getting ready to grace the Opera House stage.

PREMIERE PREVIEW OF SOUTHERN SONGWRITERS WITH PATRICK DAVIS – OCT. 10

The Opera House will host a premiere preview screening of Southern Songwriters with Patrick Davis on Thursday, Oct. 10. Davis, a native of Camden, ventured to Sumter in February to tape a live performance featuring the musical stylings of Charles Kelly, Gabe Dixon and Maggie Rose. Now, it's time to share the final product with Sumter. Tickets are free, so reserve your spot at sumteroperahouse.com/special-events.

WILLIAM LEE MARTIN – NOV. 9

Southern comedian William Lee



Comedian William Lee will take the Opera House stage Nov. 9.

deep into Texan culture and touch on themes of Tejano music, the iconic figure Selena and much, much more. This family fun event will begin at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 9. Tickets can be purchased at sumteroperahouse.com/mainstage.

ACOUSTIC CAFÉ PRESENTS ADMIRAL RADIO – NOV. 15

After a successful sold-out debut

Martin is bringing the funny to the Opera House on his "King of Cowtown" Tour. His comedic journey will take audience members

for its Acoustic Café series, its second show will feature award-winning husband-and-wife duo and South Carolina-based couple Coty Hoover and Becca Smith.

The couple will venture to Sumter to share their heartfelt performance, complete with tight-knit harmonies, lyrical storytelling and palpable sincerity, all set within the City Centre for an intimate acoustic experience. By sharing the stage with bluegrass icons and winning multiple awards, including first-place wins and finalist placements both nationally and internationally, Admiral Radio is redefining what it means to "gather 'round the radio" in modern times.

The couple will perform on Friday, Nov. 15, at 7:30 p.m. Seating is limited, so it is encouraged to get your tickets sooner rather than later. To purchase tickets, visit sumteroperahouse.com/acousticcafe. The Sumter Opera House will an-



PHOTOS PROVIDED

South Carolina-based couple Admiral Radio will be coming to Sumter Opera House on Nov. 15.

nounce more shows later this year for the second half of the season in 2025.

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DPH awarded DOJ grant to assist people affected by sexual assault

BY S.C. DPH

COLUMBIA — A federal grant worth \$925,389 was recently awarded to the South Carolina Department of Public Health to continue the agency's collaborative efforts with stakeholders across the state to provide services for people who have experienced sexual assault. The money also will allow DPH to increase awareness about sexual violence in underserved communities.

The Sexual Assault Services Program Formula grant money was awarded by the United States Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women and will cover two years.

During the past several decades, dedicated volunteers, survivors and staff members across South Carolina have advocated and provided services for

those whose lives have been affected by sexual violence through the work of the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the 15 rape crisis centers serving communities throughout the state.

DPH has assisted the coalition and crisis centers in their efforts to serve people who have experienced sexual assault and provide education and awareness to South Carolinians for more than 20 years through its Sexual Violence Services Program.

"Supporting rape crisis centers is essential not only for the immediate and long-term care of survivors, but also for cultivating a community that recognizes, addresses and strives to prevent sexual violence," said Danielle Wingo, director of DPH's Bureau of Maternal and Child Health. "It is a privilege to collaborate with and advocate for these organizations."

DPH's program focuses on assisting the coalition and crisis centers in providing high-quality sexual violence services to people affected by sexual violence with funding provided by OVW. Rape crisis centers also provide prevention services through other sources of funding. All 15 of the state's centers offer services that are deemed neces-

NEED HELP?

If you or someone you know needs help, call the RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline at **1-800-656-HOPE (4673)**, visit the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline at <https://rainn.org/resources> or reach out to a rape crisis center in your area:

— **Lee County** — The Family Resource Center, <https://thefamilyresourcecenter.org/>, 24-hour crisis hotline **1-800-585-4455**; office (803) 425-4357

— **Sumter and Clarendon** — Pathways to Healing, <https://pathwaystohealing.com/>, 24-hour crisis hotline **1-803-771-7273**; office (803) 790-8208.

In case of a medical emergency or if your life or someone else's life is in danger, call 911.

For additional information, visit <https://www.sccadvasa.org>.

sary to meet the needs of primary and secondary sexual violence survivors and their communities.

Sexual violence remains a substantial issue in South Carolina, affecting people of every gender, race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status.

The South Carolina Law Enforcement Division reported there were 2,515 reported cases of sexual battery committed in 2021, and many more cases are not reported.

"Almost 30% of women in South Carolina are raped during their lifetime, with over 50% estimated to experience some form of sexual violence," said

Sara Barber, the coalition's executive director. "This funding is critical to sustaining the services provided by rape crisis centers in communities across our state that provide hope, healing and a pathway to wellbeing for survivors of these devastating intimate assaults."

While the centers in the state continue to provide the best services they can, sexual violence is one of the most under-reported acts of violence. If you have experienced any form of sexual violence or know someone who has, there are resources available to you, and the dedicated staff of the centers are there to help. Services are available without having to report to law enforcement.

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Sumter military museum continues to gather treasures awaiting new building groundbreaking

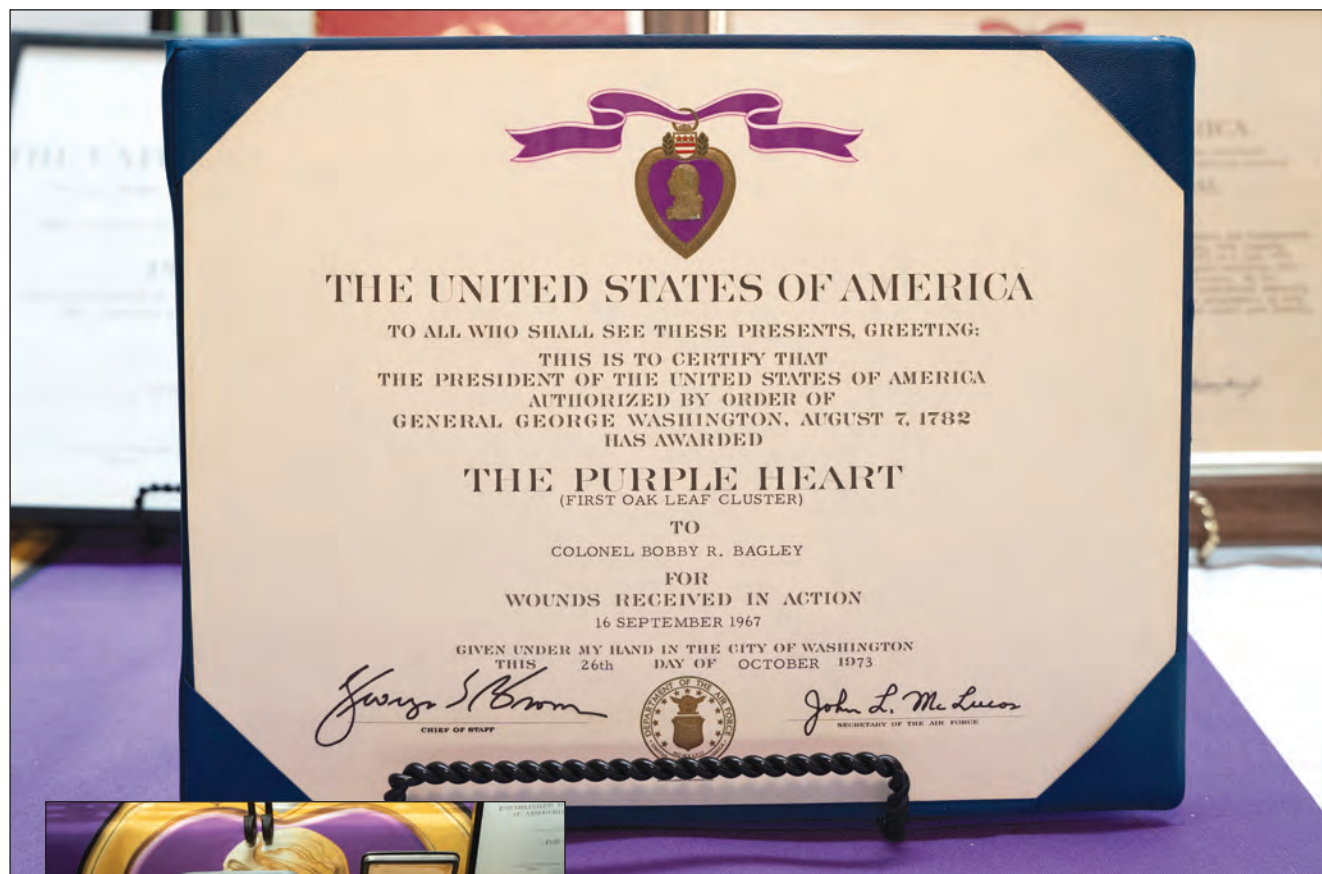
BY ADAM FLASH
adam@theitem.com

One can't help but notice the sheer amount of artifacts of all shapes and sizes inside the Sumter Military Museum upon walking in the door.

From flags flown overseas during various wars and above the U.S. Capitol building to countless medals, uniforms, pictures and much more, they all tell the story of the American armed forces through the years. It's an impressive amount of items displayed in a relatively small room.

However, museum curator Sammy Way says what's on display is only part of what he's gathered. New additions come in frequently with donors wanting to honor the lives and legacies of family members and friends. Many have connections to Sumter, Shaw Air Force Base or South Carolina, and some do not. Way accepts it all regardless. He also emphasizes people can have their belongings back at any time if they

SEE MUSEUM, PAGE A43



Sumter Military Museum at the Clyburn Intermodal Transportation Center includes thousands of pieces of memorabilia and artifacts from veterans and their families and friends. The collection is curated by *Sumter Item* archivist and historian Sammy Way, and the public can visit the museum several days per week for free.

PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM





PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

The Sumter Military Museum will move into a new 30,000-square-foot building on the grounds of Sumter Museum with construction expected to start soon.

MUSEUM

FROM PAGE A42

so desire.

“This is a place of honor,” he said. “People want places to put their loved ones’ memories. “It is to show [them] the nation respects and loves and appreciates your service.”

Recently, numerous items belonging to Col. Bobby Bagley were given to the museum. Col. Bagley, a

Vietnam War pilot, was a prisoner of war for five-and-a-half years in Hanoi before being liberated.

Among many of his belongings, more than 10 of Bagley’s military medals were donated, most notably two Silver Stars and two Purple Hearts — awards given for valor in combat as well as to those who have been wounded or killed in combat, respectively.

“This is some of the rarest stuff you’ll find,” Way said of Bagley’s prison-worn clothes, among other items, as he expressed his honor to house Bagley’s Purple Hearts and other belongings.

The Purple Heart is the nation’s oldest military medal, created by Gen. George Washington in 1782 as a way to show appreciation for his soldiers’ sacrifices. Originating as the “Badge of Military Merit,” it evolved into its modern form by Gen. Douglas MacArthur in 1932.

As Way sifts through Bagley’s collection pieces and begins to catalog them, more information will become available.



WAY



SEE MUSEUM, PAGE A44

MUSEUM

FROM PAGE A43

In addition, the Sumter Military Museum will soon acquire Maj. Gen. George Lafayette Mabry Jr.'s Medal of Honor that will be on display permanently in the museum's new building set to break ground soon.

The new \$23 million building, totaling 3.75 acres at 122 N. Washington St. and 201 W. Hampton Ave., will be roughly 30,000 feet and have dedicated exhibit spaces as well as a research center.

The larger space is more than 20 years in the making, according to Way, who began his passion project of running the museum decades ago and ed-

ucating the public on military history.

"This is a house of treasures. All the uniforms, memorabilia, all this stuff belongs to history. It doesn't belong to me," he said. "I do this because it's my passion. I think as a human being and as an American, it's my responsibility."

He added on running the museum, "This to me is an honor. I have been chosen, whether it's by the Lord or whether it's the city."

The museum at 129 S. Harvin St. is usually open on Tuesday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Wednesday and Thursday noon to 4 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m., or by special request.

Way can be contacted at (803) 983-8946 regarding donations or museum visits.



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM



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ACROSS

1. Blond shade
4. Go by
8. Wind instrument
12. Fawn's ma
13. Pain
14. Disgusting
15. Owed
16. Intersection sign
17. Figure
18. Divided
20. Shakes, as a tail
22. Tourist's need
24. Metal container
27. Right-minded
30. Not written
31. Tint
32. Magician's word
34. Renter
36. Atmosphere
37. Initial wager
39. Picks
40. Smidgen
41. Playground items
43. Slip
44. Had in mind
48. Keep expectations
51. Bestow
53. Seek the affection of
54. Aristocrat
55. Will beneficiary
56. Carpenter insect
57. Instructor, for short
58. Server
59. Approval word

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28. Elaborate solo
29. Geek
33. Chore
35. Sniffer
38. More orderly
42. Grinding material
43. Character
45. Gone
46. Nil
47. Little children
48. In the know
49. Rowboat item
50. NHL athlete, e.g.
52. By route of

DOWN

1. Says further
2. Minestrone, e.g.
3. Foot part
4. Spaghetti or ziti
5. Feat
6. Bath alternative
7. Forced apart
8. Switch positions
9. Heckler's call
10. ____ Father (Lord's Prayer)
11. Large tree
19. Freezes
21. Storm
23. Nighttime illumination
24. Dude
25. Clara or Bee
26. Butterfly snares
27. Petty dispute

SOLUTION

A	S	H	P	A	S	S	O	B	O	E		
D	O	E	D	O	E	S	T	O	P	F	O	R
S	P	L	I	T	W	A	G	S				
S	A	N	E	O	R	A	L					
P	R	E	S	T	O	T	E	N	A	N	T	
A	I	R	A	N	T	E	O	P	T	S		
T	A	D	S	L	I	D	E	S				
S	K	I	D	M	E	A	N	T				
H	O	P	E	G	I	V	E	W	O	O		
E	A	R	L	H	E	I	R	A	N	T		
P	R	O	F	T	R	A	V	Y				

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SUDOKU

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

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

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

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Social Security Matters

Does some of my SS payment include repayment of my contributions?

BY RUSSELL GLOOR

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

DEAR RUSTY: I have a question about my Social Security benefits. Would I be correct to assume that part of the monthly Social Security income I get is a repayment of what I contributed to the fund while I was working? If so, how much of my monthly benefit payment is my own money coming back to me?

CURIOUS BENEFICIARY

DEAR CURIOUS: I'm afraid that is not how Social Security works. The money you contribute to Social Security during your working years does not go into a special account to be repaid to you. Rather, the Social Security taxes you pay while working are used to pay benefits to all those currently receiv-

ing Social Security benefits. The system is, in effect, a "pay as you go" program where all those currently contributing help pay benefits for all those now receiving.



GLOOR

What your contributions do, however, is earn you "quarter credits" and, when you have enough credits, you become eligible for Social Security retirement benefits for life. Generally, someone must have about 40 quarters (about 10 years) contributing to Social Security to be eligible for SS retirement benefits.

How much you receive monthly is determined not by how much you contributed but, rather, by how much your work earnings were over your lifetime. You will get a percentage of your average pre-retirement work income as your monthly Social Security

payment, but that is also affected by your age when you claim benefits. It is your average lifetime earnings (adjusted for inflation) which determines your "Primary Insurance Amount" (or "PIA"). Your PIA is what you get at your Social Security full retirement age (FRA), but your age when you claim benefits determines if you get more or less than your PIA. Claiming SS before your FRA means a smaller monthly benefit, while waiting longer than your FRA means a benefit higher than your PIA. (SS benefits reach maximum at age 70). FYI, each person's FRA is different based on the year they were born, but full retirement age today is between age 66 and 67. When you claim benefits relative to your FRA determines how much of your PIA you will receive each month.

So, your contributions to Social Security aren't used to determine your monthly benefit amount, but your av-

erage lifetime work earnings and age when you claim are. Nevertheless, you may be interested to know that most people get back everything they have personally contributed to Social Security within about 3 to 5 years of collecting their benefits. In that sense, Social Security is an exceptionally good deal, since most Americans now collect benefits for about two decades. And therein lies much of Social Security's financial dilemma — people are now collecting benefits for many more years than the current program is designed to support. And that is what Congress needs to fix as soon as possible. The Social Security trust funds (which now provide supplemental money to pay benefits) are projected to be depleted around 2033, which will mean a cut in everyone's monthly Social Security payment, unless Congress acts soon to reform the program and restore it to fiscal solvency.



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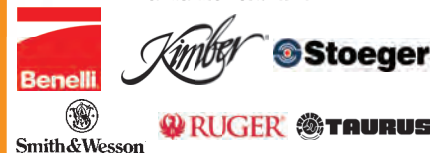


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