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A22, A24

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ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Owner Christi Brunson straightens a giant stuffed bear for sale in A Ring Around the Roses, part of their Valentine's Day offerings. Read about the business' history and how it fulfills orders for every type of special occasion on A16.




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Our motivation this year: You

We made it. We're past the holidays, to the new year and into the height of winter.

In this time of resolutions that are often driven by companies and social trends, I think it's important to be intentional about our priorities. It's too easy to get stuck in all the negative, especially with so many national and global storylines in which we can drown. This is a time of year when many people find it harder to balance mental and physical health with so much telling us we're not good enough, "but this product will fix everything." Life circumstances and factors out of our control prevent people from feeling motivated.

But if you can, do me a favor. Look around you. At your friends, family, co-workers, schools, churches, pets, support groups. Your community. There's so much to be thankful for right here at home. If you simply survived last year, that's enough to be



Kayla Green

able to make this one better.

Some people keep a gratitude journal. Others pray. Whatever floats your gratitude boat, do it.

This new year, here are a few things that stand out to me amid these cold winter

nights.

- Family and friends. My support system.
- That they enjoy celebrating holidays, life's milestones and the mundane everyday over shared, good food.
- My health.
- That my job affords me the opportunity to meet new people and learn new things every day.
- You!

I'm serious. While there's no fix-it-all product out there, reading your local news can make your life better. It makes you more informed about what your community leaders are doing so you can choose to get involved, and it



cuts through the negativity bias of social media, TV and "mainstream" national news to show you people who are doing amazing things right around the corner from your home and work.

I'm thankful I work in a community where people care about local news. You've shown that in a lot of ways in the eight years I've been at *The Sumter*

Item. You've shown it by following us on social media. You've shown it by going to our website. You've shown it by watching videos like Sumter's Next Generation, The Grind and Sumter Today, participating in Best of Sumter, signing up for free emails and maybe even becoming a subscriber to *The Sumter Item*.

For most of 2024, tens of thousands of you read this still-young paper, *The Item Impact*, every month.

It will never be an easy road ahead, but you make it worth it.

What motivates you looking into this year? I'd love to know if you're willing to share. You can always reach me at kayla@theitem.com.

If you haven't heard, I think local news is really important for the quality of life in a community. So in whatever way you have, thank you for supporting our area's only source of local daily news. And stay tuned because we've got plenty more to come.

Kayla Green is executive editor of The Sumter Item.

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126 N. Main Street, Sumter, SC 29151
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Government

4 Sumter government headlines to know from the past month

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

deirdre@theitem.com

1. SWEARING-IN CEREMONIES

As the new year kicked off, so did an important swearing-in ceremony. After Sumter residents made their voices heard at the polls on Nov. 5, 2024, it was finally time for Sumter County's elected officials to officially be sworn into their new or reelected positions.

On Jan. 2, five Sumter County elected officials were sworn in at Sumter County Courthouse, and on Jan. 7, two more Sumter county officials retook their oath.

District 7 Councilwoman Tasha Gardner-Greene is the only new face to join Sumter County Council, and she is the successor to Eugene Baten, who was on council for 20 years before he decided to not run for reelection.

District 3 Councilman Jimmy Byrd and District 5 Councilwoman Vivian Fleming-McGhaney were both sworn in to their seats.

Alongside county council members, Clerk of Court James C. Campbell and Sumter County Coroner Robbie M. Baker Jr. were sworn in, and Baker then swore in his Deputy Coroners Donnie Vickers, William McLeod and Dalton Simon. Baker said Deputy Coroner Earle Robertson was unable to attend.

District 1 Councilman Carlton Washington and Sumter County Sheriff Anthony Dennis also were sworn in during a separate ceremony. Washington and Dennis decided to have a separate ceremony at their home church of



PHOTO PROVIDED

District 7 Sumter County Councilwoman Tasha Gardner-Greene is sworn in by S.C. Supreme Court Justice George C. "Buck" James Jr. at Sumter County Courthouse on Jan. 2.

Mt. Pisgah Missionary Baptist to ensure their community and church family could attend.

2. FINANCIAL CONDITION OF CITY OF SUMTER STRONG ACCORDING TO AUDIT

Before the end of the year, Sumter City Council held a special meeting to hear from an external group, The Brittingham Group L.L.P., for a report on the finances of the fiscal year, which ended in June 2024.

"The financial position of the city is strong with a net position of \$210 mil-

lion," Kendra Vandross with The Brittingham Group said. "The city had an increase in net position of about \$47 million."

Though the city's financial condition is strong, the \$47 million net position increase has already been accounted for in the city's budget.

3. SUMTER CITY COUNCIL APPROVES \$3M SHOT POUCH TRAILHEAD PROJECT

At Sumter City Council's final meeting of the year, a procurement resolution for Shot Pouch Trailhead at Broad

Street was approved, which will consist of two new parking lots, two separate restroom buildings, a playground, walking path, sidewalks, fencing and a food truck pavilion.

The \$3,088,059 project will be done by 3D Dirtworks out of Sumter, and funding will come from state grant money and the Capital Projects (Penny) Sales Tax.

In the future, the city hopes to introduce a second phase to the project that would see a skatepark and bike pump track added to the trailhead, according to City Manager Deron McCormick.

4. PENNY PROJECTS WILL BE ADDED TO TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

At a scheduled Sumter Area Transportation Study meeting on Dec. 18, a revision was approved that would see Sumter's Penny for Progress transportation projects added to the Transportation Improvement Program — a program that lists all federally funded projects and all transportation projects, regardless of the funding source, that have regional significance.

With this revision come updates on some of the transportation-based projects on the list of 30 projects included in the Capital Sales Tax Referendum.

Some of the projects being added to TIP are the U.S. 378 Robert Graham Freeway improvements project, the Lafayette Drive side path and the Harvin Street Redesign and Streetscape.

For all projects discussed at the SUATS meeting, penny projects and otherwise, visit <https://tinyurl.com/2nku2y9t>.

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Education

Top recent storylines include Sumter School District, Liberty and TSA

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

1. NATIONAL NONPROFIT AWARDS LIBERTY STEAM \$2M

A leading nonprofit organization that identifies the nation's best public charter schools and helps to fund their expansion pledged \$2 million to Liberty STEAM Charter School in December.

Colorado-based Charter School Growth Fund added Liberty STEAM to its portfolio with the award to help ensure the school completes its Junior Academy at Sumter Mall and also opens its Senior Academy in fall 2029, according to a news release from the school.

Liberty is the first tuition-free public charter school in Sumter County and opened for students in fall 2021. The school initially received seed investment funding from the national nonprofit that year.

According to school Executive Director Trevor Ivey, Liberty was the first seed school in South Carolina to receive an award from Charter School Growth Fund and is now the first replication school in the state to get financial support from the organization.

2. FORMER SENATOR, 3 OTHERS FILE FOR OPEN AREA 8 SEAT ON SCHOOL BOARD

A range of candidates to include a political newcomer all the way to a retired state senator who served 32 years filed in December for the open Area 8 seat on Sumter School Dis-

trict Board of Trustees.

A special election for the seat is required to serve out the remaining two years of Jeff Zell's term as the area's representative after he ran for and won the state Senate District 36 seat in the November election. The special election is set for Tuesday, Feb. 11, and four candidates filed.

The candidates include Foxy Rae Campbell, Phil Leventis, Tom Montgomery and Keith Schultz, and the 10-day filing period was Dec. 6-16, according to Sumter County Voter Registration and Elections Office.

Area 8 is in the City of Sumter to include the Wilson Hall area and western suburbs in the city.

School board seats are nonpartisan races.

3. THOMAS SUMTER ACADEMY EARNS PURPLE STAR DESIGNATION

Thomas Sumter Academy has always been a school with a strong military presence, and recently it achieved the state's top honor for connection and relationship to families in the armed forces.

On Dec. 5, representatives from the South Carolina Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission and state Military Child Education Coalition recognized the school with the Purple Star designation at the Thomas Sumter campus.

In the process, TSA is the first South Carolina Independent School Association school in the area to earn the honor and just the third SCISA school overall.

The designation is a top honor and brings an ease to military members and their families when transitioning into a new area, according to Sara Jane Arnett, state coordinator of the Military Child Education Coalition.

The support is both for students' academics and extracurricular activities to allow them to continue to grow.

Locally, Sumter School District is a Purple Star School District in South Carolina, and Liberty STEAM Charter School is a Purple Star-designated charter school.

Criteria for the designation include having a trained, designated school liaison for military families to support issues including relocation, deployment and academic training, Arnett said.

WANT TO BECOME A LUNCH BUDDIES PARTNER WITH A SCHOOL?

Contact Erika Williams with Sumter Economic Development Board staff at (803) 418-0700.

4. COUNTY EMPLOYEES HOLD HOLIDAY GIFT GIVEAWAY AT RAFTING CREEK

A gift giveaway can get you in the Christmas spirit, and kids and adults experienced the "good vibes" of the holiday season at Rafting Creek Elementary School in Rembert in mid-December.

After an initial Lunch Buddies program partnership started with

the school, Sumter County administration and employees enjoyed it so much that the county agency fully "adopted" Rafting Creek as its own to include more activities like the holiday gift giveaway, according to assistant county Administrator Lorraine Dennis.

All 130 or so students at the school participated in the gift giveaway that included toys, board games, dolls, books, bracelet makers, skateboards and more, Principal Anita Hunter said.

Organized by Sumter Economic Development Board staff, the purpose of the Lunch Buddies program is to allow community members to volunteer their time once per month and talk about their careers with Sumter School District students and ultimately enhance children's communication skills.

Dennis, who facilitates county government's partnership with Rafting Creek Elementary, said she initially chose the school as a Lunch Buddies partner more than two years ago because rural schools in the remote areas are often forgotten by people in the City of Sumter.

She added county staff members fell in love with Lunch Buddies so much that she decided to expand the agency's side of the program and "adopted Rafting Creek as our school."

That created the Christmas gift giveaway, participation in a job shadowing program and other events set around the school's calendar.

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The disappearance of childhood?

“American culture is hostile to the idea of childhood. But it is a comforting, even exhilarating thought that children are not.”

— Neil Postman, *“The Disappearance of Childhood”*

“Childhood” is disappearing. “Childhood” is a “social artifact, not a biological category,” according to media theorist and cultural critic Neil Postman, noting as an example that “[t]he custom of celebrating a child’s birthday did not exist in America throughout most of the eighteenth century, and, in fact, the precise marking of a child’s age in any way is a relatively recent cultural habit, no more than two hundred years old” (*“The Disappearance of Childhood,”* 1982). Much of what characterizes “childhood,” in other words, is a recent phenomenon.

Two key points from Postman’s work: one, without the concept of “shame” — that there is information that is (in)appropriate for children — then childhood cannot exist; and two, that the invention of the printing press invented the modern idea of “childhood.” The printing press made information and literacy ubiquitous, which meant that the demarcation line between children and adults rested on the ability to read. This invention is largely responsible for the genesis of modern schools, a place that, through appropriate stages, taught you to read (i.e., to be competent in a literate world, to be an adult). But it’s also responsible for a key idea of adulthood — that adults were arbiters of what information kids had access to and when.

But now, with the invention of electronic media (radio, television, internet), we have an information problem — in short, there’s too much of it, and the traditional ways that we have controlled and made sense of information are, in many

cases, failing: parents/family, school curriculum, religion, political parties, news/media. Which means “childhood,” as defined by limited and sequential access to information, is disappearing.

Adults just don’t know what to do with the cascade of information we are drenched by every day, and we don’t know how to appropriately and systematically control the information in a way that makes sense for our children. We are overwhelmed, a brain state known as “cognitive overload.”

Too little information is a problem, but too much information may be an even bigger issue because it often draws out the worst in us. Collectively, we become more polarized (“our information is better than yours”), we shut down and narrow our worldview (“this is the only information I need to navigate the world”), we develop simplistic explanations for massively complex issues (“people just don’t want to work nowadays”), or we cling to conspiracy theories that seemingly make sense of disparate pieces of information (Google “current conspiracy theories”).

And adults, en masse, have done a disservice to children. We have believed in what historian and writer Yuval Noah Harari calls the “naïve view of information.” This is the view that more information is better because more information leads to truth. But as Harari argues, “the truth is very costly; fiction is very cheap. Truth is complicated, and we want simplicity — and truth is sometimes painful. Fiction and lies are the opposite: cheap, simple, and reinforcing [our own narrow beliefs]. In a free market of information, which one wins,” truth or lies? I think events in the last decade provide the answer: adding more disinformation and misinformation to our lives does not help us discern truth. How could it?

Postman reflects on how electronic media like television (or Netflix) “cannot



Brent Kaneft

dwelling upon a subject or explore it deeply [...] There may, for example, be fifty books on Argentina, five hundred on childhood, five thousand on the Civil War. If television has anything to do with these subjects, it will do it once, and then move on” (i.e., “a history of the causes of the Civil War in under an hour”). And though I love documentaries — and I’ve watched ones I thought were brilliant — the danger of course is that truncating events into bite-size episodes leads to intellectual and cultural arrogance, an unearned and puffed-up sense that we really understand highly complex issues because we watched an hour of a TV program. “A proud man,” C.S. Lewis says, “is always looking down.” In other words, the proud man misses a lot. The trick of electronic media is that it moves information rapidly across the screen, and we are taken by and addicted to the movement, not to deep contemplation about the information presented to us. Take, as another example, Facebook/Meta’s recent announcement that it will reduce moderation on certain controversial topics in an effort to support “free expression,” which, in their “naïve view of progress” is the “driving force behind progress in American society.” Mark Zuckerberg might be right if the purpose behind social media were to progress society, but the purpose is to move information rapidly enough to capture your attention and prevent you from spending your time and energy — which makes him money — on activities with higher value propositions. Like economist Herbert Simon argued, “What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.” And what we pay attention to is a “moral act,” in the words of neuroscientist and philosopher Iain McGilchrist.

And this is why handing a child a smartphone that has access to the entire adult world of information is a bad idea. They are not prepared to responsibly make sense of the information they will access, information that is moving at speeds where meaning and understanding are secondary to saturation and consumption. Children need a childhood. They need an “adulthood” to earn through stages. They need rites of passage that are meaningful (an interesting question to ask your spouse is what rites of passage they want to practice in your family). They need to bear the responsibility of living in a complex world that, though often chaotic, demands something from you.

So what does that mean for schools?

We have to reconsider our definition of intelligence. Intelligence can no longer be, if it ever was, the amount of information you can remember and apply to a problem. That is not to say certain information is not important to commit to memory (memory reduces “cognitive load” and allows us to solve higher-order problems). But our common enemy in schools is not ignorance — we do not lack information. Our common enemy is emptiness, that children are growing up in a world with an overabundance of information and don’t know how to make sense or meaning of it (hence the anxiety, depression, loneliness, suicide epidemic).

Wisdom, therefore — patience, understanding, critical thinking, reasoning, discernment, embodied cognition, imagination — is the goal of education. But instead of cultivating wisdom, we are making our lives smaller.

And yet, it is a sign of intelligence to have a strict information diet, to filter out the noise and follow the signal, to pay attention to what is relevant, but this narrow lens can also lead to self-deception. Extreme polarization and intellectual standoffs are the result of that “strict information diet” becoming fundamentalist and rigid. If using information as a weapon against someone’s political or religious enemy is our idea of what “adults” do, then we’ve failed as adults. If our response to the failure and unsustainability of our systems and institutions is to merely shrug and suggest, “Coastal real estate is probably not a good investment right now,” as opposed to deeply reflecting on our lifestyles and hopes for our children, then we have failed as adults. If the topics of conversation with other adults reliably focuses on entertainment, sports and the local gossip instead of how we partner to ensure our children develop into disciplined, trustworthy adults who can delay gratification for higher rewards — or other equally important topics — then we have failed as adults. “Kids these days!” must be followed, then, by “Adults these days!”

It stands to reason that if there is no “childhood” left, then there is no “adulthood” either; and so in our commitment to preserving a childhood that sequentially and appropriately introduces children to topics and information and skills and the ways of being needed to become fully “adult,” we would also be committing to the “social artifact” of adulthood: wise, compassionate and courageous men and women, who can balance conflicting information, engage with paradox and judiciously engage with the “new.” We are preparing our children for a journey, not a destination. Wisdom travels, certainty stagnates.

Kaneft is the headmaster of Wilson Hall in Sumter.

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BEST OF SUMTER 2024

Stash the Trash plans countywide event geared toward students in March

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

deirdre@theitem.com

2025 marks a big year for Sumter County's litter initiative "Stash the Trash." As the county takes its usual trash pickups and prepares its educational presentations, this year will also boast the largest event Sumter County's Public Works has ever put on to spread the word on how to keep Sumter clean.

Stash the Trash is primarily a means of teaching Sumter's youth the importance of properly disposing of waste and never littering, and usually litter control officers visit the four quadrants of Sumter County to speak at different schools with their mascot, General KICS. But this year, the officers are switching it up.

On March 22 at Sumter County Civic Center, Stash the Trash will host a large event open to all schools within the county, including private schools and day cares. All individuals are welcome for free, but the event is specifically targeted toward children to educate them about litter at a young age.

While the event will be free, there will be the opportunity to purchase raffle tickets for \$25 to enter one's name into a drawing for the chance to win an ATV Polaris from Redline Powersports that is valued at about \$8,000. If one's name is drawn, however, they must be present at the event to take the ATV home, and Sumter Public

Works will make sure the vehicle makes it to its new home if the winner does not have the means to transport the vehicle. Other prizes such as bicycles, gift cards and T-shirts will also be available.

The event will not just be educational, but will also feature games, food trucks, live music and other activities for Sumter's youth.

Raffle tickets are available to purchase at Sumter County's Public Works building at 1289 N. Main St. or by reaching out to Nick Murray at nmurray@sumtercountysc.gov or Litter Control Officer Austin Stout at astout@sumtercountysc.gov.

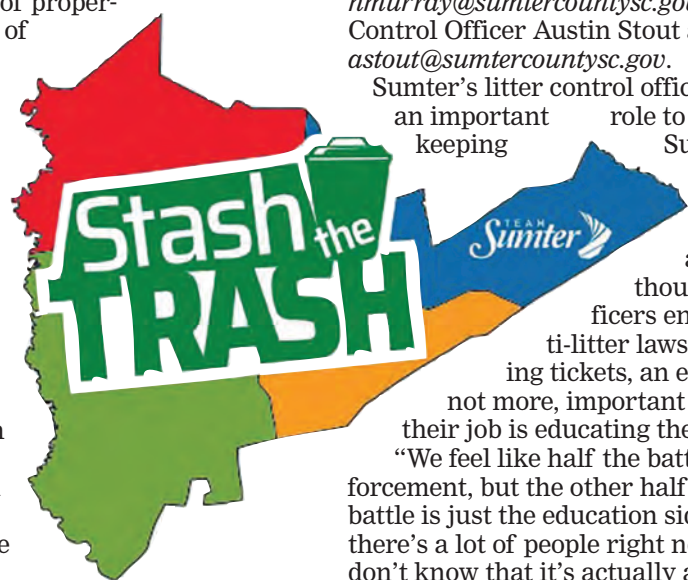
Sumter's litter control officers have an important role to play in keeping Sumter County litter free, and though the officers enforce anti-litter laws by writing tickets, an equally, if not more, important part of their job is educating the public. "We feel like half the battle is enforcement, but the other half of the battle is just the education side, so there's a lot of people right now who don't know that it's actually a law that you have to have your loads covered," Murray said about a law that requires residents hauling trash to cover their loads.

As Sumter Public Works enters a new year, they are also boasting a relatively new litter control officer, Stout. Stout has been a litter control officer for five months now, and he handles enforcement as well as PR. "We find all of the trash that's been thrown [out] throughout Sumter County. We try to go through that trash and find a name and an address and charge accordingly to the suspects that are [doing] the illegal dumping,"

Stout has been a litter control officer for five months now, and he handles enforcement as well as PR.

"We find all of the trash that's been thrown [out] throughout Sumter County. We try to go through that trash and find a name and an address and charge accordingly to the suspects that are [doing] the illegal dumping,"

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SEE TRASH, PAGE A12

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Save Me A Seat: 6 Valentine's Day dining experiences in Sumter

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysa@theitem.com

Valentine's Day is just around the corner, and love is in the air — or maybe that's the smell of sizzling steaks and molten chocolate cake.

From scenic views along the pond to unique spots sure to provide good food and a good time, Sumter has plenty of options to spice up your romantic evening. Whether you're in the mood for something sweet, something sizzling or something totally unexpected, *The Sumter Item* rounded up six "Save Me A Seat" dining experiences that are sure to leave you and your date smitten, stuffed and maybe even wanting seconds.



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Enjoy a savory seasoned steak at Willie Sue's on Patriot Parkway.

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SIMPLY SOUTHERN BISTRO, 67 W. WESMARK BLVD.

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The checkerboard flooring and bright-red paint pull you in for a dining experience you won't forget at Simply Southern Bistro. While the menu is full of good eats, their steaks are a highlight — tender, cooked to your liking and showcasing classic Southern cuisine full of flavor and love.

CASUAL YET COZY

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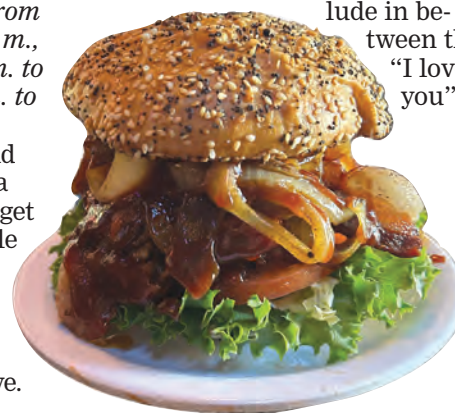
Trade in your slacks and midi dresses for casual threads and enjoy the unique eats that await at DeMara's Italian Restaurant. Fresh ingredients make up its signature dishes — from seafood platters and Southern classics to vegetarian and vegan dishes — with something that everyone can enjoy because of its flavor and the friendly service that brings it to your table. And if your sweet tooth needs taming, their cheesecake will do the trick.

J. O'GRADYS, 5 S. MAIN ST.

Open Monday – Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 5-10 p.m. At J. O'Gradys, you can grab a

beer from the bar, a burger and some bacon bleu fries (a staple for *Item* reporters) and reminisce about local sports legends across generations, from Bobby Richardson to Ja Morant, whose jerseys and memorabilia don the dark wooden walls. Not only will it spark feelings of nostalgia, but it can be a great conversation inter-

lude in between the "I love you"s.



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

J. O'Gradys' diverse menu is sure to entice any burger taste.

SWEET ENDINGS

BAKER'S SWEETS, 1089 ALICE DRIVE

Open Monday to Saturday from 7 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Every savory dinner

needs a sweet ending — and Baker's Sweets has dozens of options. From chocolate truffle cake to homemade cheesecake to Grandma's six-layer cake, there is something for everyone to enjoy. Grab a slice and enjoy it at one of the quaint tables in its cute café, or take it to go.

GIGI'S ICE CREAM, 35C E. WESMARK BLVD.

Open Tuesday to Saturday from 1 to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 2 to 7 p.m.

You can never go wrong with ice cream. And yes, even when it's cold outside. A cool treat is a

SEE DINING, PAGE A9



DINING

FROM PAGE A8



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS

Gigi's Ice Cream offers soft-serve flavors and to-go desserts, perfect for your valentine.

sweet contrast to the warm and fuzzy feelings on Valentine's Day. Milkshakes and soft-serve cones of all kinds can be found at Gigi's — you just take your pick. Looking for a recommendation? The taro milkshake, for sure.



Hamptons offers fresh, locally sourced ingredients and seasonal dishes.

ROMANTIC AND REFINED

MILL POND STEAKHOUSE, 84 BOYKIN MILL ROAD IN REMBERT

Open Tuesday to Thursday from 5 to 8:30 p.m. and Friday to Saturday 5 to 9 p.m.

A bit of a drive from Sumter and tucked inside a quaint building, Mill Pond Steakhouse offers a candlelight dinner experience you won't forget.

The eatery overlooks the historic Mill Pond — its namesake — that provides a serene view for the evening and pairs well with its menu of fresh seafood, perfect steaks, savory lamb chops and side dishes perfect for two; can't go wrong with classic creamed spinach and baked macaroni and aged white cheddar. Be sure to make your reservations early!

HAMPTONS, 33 N. MAIN ST.

Open Wednesday to Friday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 to 9 p.m., Saturday from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

If you're looking for a candlelit dinner in the city, you can find it at Hamptons. Housed in a restored historic building, the eatery combines small-town charm

with big-city elegance. The white tablecloth, pristine glasses and warm lighting match perfectly with its menu of traditional and new American dishes prepared with Italian inspiration using fresh, seasonal ingredients. Call ahead to reserve a table.

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THAI HOUSE, 718 BULTMAN DRIVE

Open Monday-Wednesday from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. to 4:30-10 p.m. and Thursday-Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

For couples craving something international, Thai House and Sushi Bar is a must-visit in Sumter. Its menu blends spices from Thailand with the artistry that is Japanese sushi. The cozy, intimate setting makes it perfect for sharing a romantic meal infused with fine flavors from around the world.

YUCATAN MEXICAN RESTAURANT, 1316 BROAD ST.

Open Monday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Spice up your Valentine's Day with a date with chips and salsa and Tex-Mex tastes. Along with sizzling fajitas and crafted margaritas, Yucatan not only gives you more bang — or food — for your buck but showcases the true meaning of service with a smile. Its lively atmosphere is inviting as you enter, but don't worry as its cozy booths offer the right amount of privacy for those heartfelt conversations.

HIDDEN GEMS

LILFRED'S, 8425 CAMDEN HIGHWAY

Open Thursday to Saturday from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Tucked away along the county line, Lilfred's is known for its elevated Southern cuisine and intimate charm. It's a hidden gem that provides a four-course meal of locally inspired dishes, such as cornmeal-dusted shrimp starters with lemon aioli or duck breast with braised butter beans, barbecue jus and fried cabbage as your entrée — within its cozy dining space.



Lilfred's dining room is seen in 2018. The restaurant is tucked away on Camden Highway.

SHUCKERS OF SUMTER, 401 RAST ST.

Open Monday to Saturday from 11 to 2 a.m. and Sunday from 3 p.m. to 2 a.m.

If you know, you know. And if you don't, well, Shuckers is a private club that accepts guests and offers pool tables, dart boards and the occasional entertainment. But alongside its club status, what makes it a hidden gem is the good eats. Members of its club say everything — from its steaks to its sandwiches to its relaxed, easy-going atmosphere — is delicious.

Check out all there is to do in both Sumter and a close drive away

Come to the downtown library and read to a therapy dog. Sparky, Skipper and Missy love hearing a good story, and young readers can get practice reading their favorite books. This event is held the second Saturday of every month at the downtown Sumter County Library, 111 N. Harvin St. February's reading will be on Feb. 8 from 11 a.m. to noon.

Enjoy a live performance at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 14, with a special **Valentine's Day Acoustic Café with Canadian singer-songwriter Ian Sherwood.** Sherwood, a born storyteller, uses a blend of folk and pop music to bring enjoyable live performances that thrive on intimacy to the Sumter Opera House stage, 21 N. Main St. Champagne and specialty desserts from Brubaker's Café & Bakery are included with the purchase of a ticket. Seating is general admission. To purchase tickets, visit www.sumteroperahouse.com/ian-sherwood. Social hour begins at 6:30 p.m., and the performance starts at 7:30 p.m.

Reignite your love with rock 'n' roll and experience the timeless classics of

Creedence Clearwater Revival, performed by the Georgia Players Guild, at **Ramble Tumble: The Creedence Clearwater Revival Experience** at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, March 15, at the Sumter Opera House, 21 N. Main St. Tickets are between \$28 and \$32 and can be purchased at www.sumteroperahouse.com/ramble-tumble.

Sumter's free celebration of creativity and culture, **Art in the Park including Reading in the Park**, will once again flow through Sumter Memorial Park, 417 W. Hampton Ave., 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, March 29. Arts and crafts, vendors, delicious food and Reading in the Park will ensure a day of fun activities and a chance to support local causes.

CAMDEN

Celebrate Irish and Celtic heritage at **Irish Fest Camden 2025** on Saturday, March 1, on the grounds of Kershaw County Airport, 2203 Airline Drive, Camden. Founded in 2017, this festival has grown into a beloved community event, attracting thousands of visitors each year. Visitors enjoy live Celtic

music, Irish dancing, storytelling, a large selection of Irish beer, delicious food from more than 40 food trucks, whiskey tastings and more. The Lucky Leprechaun 5K takes place on Saturday morning, followed by the Highland Games, where athletes compete in traditional Celtic sports. The festival supports the Irish Cultural Foundation of SC, a South Carolina nonprofit. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit <https://irishfestcamden.com>.

BISHOPVILLE

Author Derek Smith will give a presentation on his new book, "Revolutionary Camden: South Carolina's Bloody Epicenter in the War of Independence," on Tuesday, Jan. 28, at 6 p.m. The talk will be at the City-County Complex, 140 N. Main St., Bishopville. Everyone is invited to attend this 250th anniversary of the American Revolution event.

COLUMBIA

Repticon, a recognized leader in hosting reptile and exotic animal expos throughout the United States, is

returning to Columbia on Saturday-Sunday, Feb. 1-2, at the Jamil Temple, 206 Jamil Road, Columbia. This event offers guests the opportunity to learn about animals not normally seen in local pet stores. Breeder-vendors are always willing to teach in their field of herpetology. Guests can shop for a pet among the hundreds of reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, arachnids and small exotic animals. Also available will be merchandise, cages, supplies, and both live and frozen feeders, as well as to expert advice about caring for these animals. Show hours are 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday. Ticket options (sold online only): \$20 Super Ticket (entry for both days); \$15 Saturday (all day); \$12 Saturday after 1 p.m.; \$15 Sunday (all day); \$7 for children 5-12; children 4 and under are admitted free. To purchase tickets or for more information about the show, visit <https://repticon.com/south-carolina/columbia>.

SEE **EVENTS**, PAGE A11

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EVENTS FROM PAGE A10



FLORENCE

The Florence Stampede and Pro Rodeo, presented by Booty Brothers Western Store, returns to the Florence Center, 3300 W. Radio Drive, on Feb. 7-8, 2025, marking its 10th anniversary with a weekend of high-energy rodeo action and fun for all ages. This event will feature top-ranked cowboys and cowgirls from across the country, competing against some of the most award-winning livestock

in professional rodeo. The lineup will include bareback riding, saddle bronc riding, calf roping, team roping, cowgirls barrel racing and wild Brahma bull riding. Beyond the arena, the Florence Stampede and Pro Rodeo offers an engaging experience for the entire family. Attendees will enjoy a variety of vendors offering delicious food, unique merchandise, and much more. Rising country music singer Shaylen will take the stage for a special performance on Feb. 7 following the rodeo action. Since her debut single — “What If I Don’t,” a streaming sensation on every platform garnering over 26 million streams just on Spotify alone — she has been carving her mark on Nashville with six highly-streamed acclaimed songs released under the Two Hats Music Group banner. Tickets for the rodeo can be purchased at the Florence Center Box Office or online at www.FlorenceCenter.com.

Francis Marion University Performing Arts, 201 S. Dargan St., Florence, welcomes one of the most accomplished bands in American roots music, **The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band**, from 7:30-9 p.m. Saturday, March 1. The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band features

founding members Jeff Hanna (lead vocals, guitar) and Jimmie Fadden (drums, harmonica, vocals); longtime bandmate Bob Carpenter (keys, vocals)—a member since 1980; along with Jim Photoglo (bass, vocals); Jaime Hanna (guitar, vocals); and Ross Holmes (fiddle, mandolin, vocals). According to the FMU website, the band’s “career breakthrough came in 1970 with the release of the record Uncle Charlie & His Dog Teddy and the single “Mr. Bojangles,” a folksy Top 10 pop hit. In 1972, they released the first of three groundbreaking Will The Circle Be Unbroken records, collaborating with many of the best bluegrass, country and folk artists in the world. The band also has enjoyed vast success on the U.S. Country charts with hits like “Fishin’ In The Dark,” “Modern Day Romance” and “Long Hard Road.” The Dirt Band are GRAMMY, CMA and IBMA Award winners, and their Nitty Gritty Dirt Band & Friends – Fifty Years, Circlin’ Back! for PBS was an Emmy Award-winning TV special. The Dirt Band’s latest album, Dirt Does Dylan — released in 2022 — has received widespread critical acclaim.” Purchase

tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/2hnx-4v3f>.

Power Comicon returns on Saturday, March 15, to Florence Center, 3300 W. Radio Drive, Florence. The event will feature comics, toys, statues, art, costume apparel, pop culture memorabilia for all ages, comic artists, writers and other comic-related guests as well as a cosplay contest with more than \$1,000 in cash and prizes. For additional information, visit <https://tinyurl.com/5xvy94p5>.

ORANGEBURG

Turkey hunting aficionados, enjoy a night of fellowship and tasty food to support wild turkey conservation during the TFT Blackwater Flock Conservation Dinner on Friday, Feb. 28, from 6 to 10 p.m. You may also win a raffle prize during the dinner and meet fellow Turkeys for Tomorrow members. If you’re not a member yet, you can sign up or renew your membership at the event to take part in the raffles and help support the wild turkey population. The event is at Govindbhai Community Center, 1175 Five Chop Road, Orangeburg. Get tickets at <https://tftregistration.org/registration>.

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Liberty the Litter Pup visits students in Sumter last year to educate them about cleaning up their community and how to be litter free.

LITTER FROM PAGE A7

Stout said.

Stout was born and raised in Sumter and now gets to help clean up the community he grew up in.

"I know [litter] is not something I've ever liked seeing. I like to keep [Sumter] as clean as I possibly can. Nobody likes to live in trash, so when this job was offered to me five months ago, I jumped on it," Stout said. "I can't see anything better than trying to keep somewhere that we all live as clean as possible. Nobody wants to live in a dirty environment, so think it's a great thing that Sumter County has started, and I'm so glad to be a part of that."

In the five months Stout has been serving as a litter control officer, he has visited schools to educate children about littering, attended trash clean-ups and, according to Murray, shown a real passion for his job.

"With what we do back here [at Sumter County Public Works], yes, we are law enforcement officers, but we have such a large focus on

public relations and getting the message out to kids and the community the way that we do, you really gotta have a passion for what you're doing, and with Austin, he does, so he's been a tremendous addition to what we're trying to accomplish out here," Murray said.

Throughout the year, public works has two types of litter pickups: trash pickups for community members who want to participate in cleaning up Sumter and trash pickups for violators who were given citations.

Public works has also recently gotten a digital display board which can be transported to various places and is used to educate the public about covering up their trash loads when transporting waste.

Sumter County has nine recycling centers, all of which are closed on Tuesdays and Thursdays; they are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and from 1:30 to 7 p.m. on Sunday.

Sumter also has one landfill at 2185 E. Brewington Road that is open Monday to Saturday from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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Nominations begin for annual Best of Sumter readers' choice contest; voting will start on Jan. 29

STAFF REPORT

Best of Sumter is back again, celebrating 25 years of awarding Sumter's favorites in 2025.

Nominations for *The Sumter Item's* annual readers' choice contest are being accepted in more than 300 categories now through Jan. 28.

The contest serves as Sumter's premier and farthest-reaching campaign to recognize all the great people, places, businesses, services and events in the area. Winners will be named in categories spanning auto and transportation, business, community, food and drinks, education, home and finance, medical services, professionals and shopping and commerce. That means if you want to know what your neighbors, co-workers, business associates and

strangers all over town think the best place is in town to find an oil change, a place to take the kids, a specialist doctor, a home appraiser, a tax professional or a hotdog, Best of Sumter has the answer.

The contest also features community-based categories such as teacher, nurse and law enforcement officer. Voters decide on their favorite nonprofit organization, their favorite place to volunteer and their favorite church.

"Winners tell us every day how being named Best of Sumter brings people to their doors, so it's not only a point of pride for people and employees, but a revenue driver for local businesses," *Item* Publisher Vince Johnson said. "And for our staff at *The Item*, the red carpet event where we celebrate all of the winners is one of the great high-

lights of the year."

Having a subscription to *The Sumter Item* is not necessary to participate at any stage of the contest, including being a nominee or winner.

Nominations will be approved by *Item* staff within 48 hours.

Once nominations close, everyone can vote once per day in as many or few categories as they want Jan. 29-Feb. 26.

The red carpet winners' celebration and magazine release will be held on Tuesday, April 29, at Sumter Original Brewery.

To make your nominations, go to www.theitem.com/bestof. If you have been nominated and want to promote your nomination to stand out before and during voting, contact your *Item* sales representative or email advertising@theitem.com.






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Sumter Animal Control shares tips on keeping furry friends safe, warm

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysha@theitem.com

As temperatures drop and frosty mornings continue, winter brings challenges not only for humans, but for our four-legged friends as well.

While cozy sweaters and steaming cocoa keep us warm, our pets rely on us to prepare them for the colder months. From chilly walks to icy driveways, the smallest details of winter weather can impact their health and safety.

Just like people, pets and livestock are susceptible to hypothermia and frostbite, according to American Veterinary Medical Association. Arthritic and elderly pets may have more difficulty walking on snow and ice, making them prone to slipping and falling. Short-haired pets feel

the cold faster because they have less protection, and short-legged pets may become cold faster because their bellies and bodies are more likely to come into contact with ice- or snow-covered ground. Pets with diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease or hormonal imbalances, such as Cushing's disease, may have a harder time regulating their body temperature and may be more susceptible to problems from extreme cold temperature.

Despite long-haired or thick-coated dogs being more cold-tolerant, they are still at risk in cold weather.

Regardless of whether your furry friend is big or small, tall or stout, canine or feline, they're cute and deserve to be well-prepared for the cold.

And it doesn't have to be overwhelming — it's about small, thoughtful steps to ensure they stay happy, healthy and comfortable amid the chill.

To help out, Sumter Animal Control provided tips on how to keep your furry friends warm.



BRING PETS INSIDE

- The best way to protect your pet is to keep them indoors during cold weather. If it's too cold for

you, it's too cold for them.

- Dogs can be taken outside for exercise but should stay inside the rest of the time.

SHELTER FOR OUTDOOR PETS

- If pets must stay outdoors, provide a dry, draft-free shelter large enough for them to move comfortably but small enough to retain body heat.

- Raise the shelter's floor a few inches off the ground and cover it with cedar shavings or straw.

- Turn the shelter's entrance away from the wind and cover the doorway with waterproof burlap or heavy plastic.

- Cats should never be left outdoors, even if they usually roam outside.

- Bang on the hood and honk the horn before starting your car. Feral or outdoor cats may climb into warm engines for shelter.

PROTECT PAWS

- Apply petroleum jelly or vet-approved paw balm to protect your dog's paws from cracking and frostbite.

- Wipe paws after walks to remove ice, salt and chemicals.

AVOID ANTIFREEZE

- Antifreeze is toxic to pets. Clean up spills immediately, and store it securely.

FOOD AND WATER

- Pets need more food in winter to maintain body heat.

- Ensure water bowls are fresh and unfrozen. Use plastic bowls to prevent tongues from sticking to metal.

KEEP COATS LONG

- Let your dog's coat grow longer in winter for added warmth.

- For short-haired dogs, consider a coat or sweater for additional insulation.

IDENTIFICATION AND SAFETY

- Make sure your pet wears an ID tag and is microchipped.

MONITOR THEIR BEHAVIOR

- Look for signs of discomfort or cold, such as shivering or lethargy. Bring your pet inside immediately if they seem cold.

EXERCISE SAFELY

- Limit outdoor activity during extreme weather. Walk dogs during warmer daylight hours.

BE CAUTIOUS WITH ICE AND SALT

- Avoid areas treated with rock salt or chemical de-icers.

By following these tips, your pets will stay warm, safe and healthy throughout the winter chill.



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Religion

Take the time to take care of yourself in 2025

When I was growing up, every classroom had a paper calendar hung



Pastor Stewart Rawson

on the wall. We would cross out days as they passed, and at the beginning of each month we would tear off the last month, revealing the new month.

With the celebration of the new year in the past, it is now 2025, if you still have a paper one, it is

time to hang up your new calendar.

The new year for many is a time of making resolutions. The tradition of making resolutions is not a strictly religious practice, though it certainly could be. Many of us commit that this is the year that we are going to work out more faithfully; some of us join the YMCA or find another gym, and we resolve that we are going to add a day or two each week to our workout schedule. Some of us resolve to read more, put our phones down and turn the pages of a book. The new year does seem like an appropriate time of the year and of our lives to take stock, to look at what we have been doing and to commit to “being better.”

I really don't see a downside to committing to do things that are

healthy for you. But as a glaring sign that we live in a world that is profoundly divided, there are some who make fun of New Years resolutions. If you Google it, you will find that there is a day in January, the second Friday of January to be precise, that is known as Quitters Day. It is the day in January “by this time, motivation for resolutions has declined and 80% of people have already given up.” Did you know there was a Quitters Day?

If you drill down into the data about why our resolutions fail, researchers reveal that most resolutions are not turned into a habit. This same research points out that for many people, to create a habit you must perform the same activity for 30 days in a row (CBS News). The research suggests that for many people, we simply make too many resolu-

tions, and when we don't see a change, we quit. Perhaps a better strategy would be to pick one new thing to focus on and work on that for the next few months. I, for one, find great motivation from my fitness watch. It tracks my daily activity and reminds me when I need to stand up and keep moving. This external motivation can be a powerful tool for helping me accomplish my fitness goals.

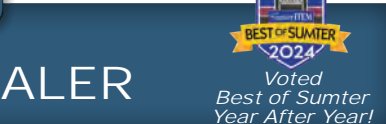
So ignore the naysayers, and forget about Quitters Day! Make this the year that you accomplish your resolutions. Maybe this will be the year that your resolution becomes a habit. Take the time to take care of yourself, and may 2025 be your best year yet!

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

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A banquet of possibilities

A Ring Around The Roses caters to customers' wants for every occasion

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

Diversity in product selection and a talent for working with flowers and designing arrangements are some of the keys to success in the floral business, according to A Ring Around The Roses owner Christi Brunson.

She admits that she “can’t make a bow” and “does not have that talent,” but I surround myself with those who do” while Brunson balances the books and keeps the paperwork in order. That has proven to be a winning formula for the business, which has been in operation since 1997.

Like all florists, A Ring Around The Roses gets its flowers from several suppliers who are “full suppliers” and also deliver vases, easels, ribbon, cards and so forth generally on refrigerated box trucks, Brunson said.

The business has five full-time employees and additional helpers who work on holidays and other busy days.

“I have a wonderful group of people who are like family to me,” she said. “My daughter, Cassidy, manages them now.”

To work in the field, people need to have a knack for working with flowers and be a people person with the ability to communicate well with others.



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

From left, Cassidy Brunson, owner Christi Brunson, Sarah Mims and Liz White pose for a photo inside A Ring Around the Roses.



Liz White assembles a candy arrangement for the upcoming Valentine's Day season of sales at A Ring Around the Roses.



FLORIST

FROM PAGE A16

“For example, when a bride comes in here, there are certain flowers she may want, but it might not be within her budget,” Brunson said. “Or, secondly, on top of that, it may not be the right season for the flower that she wants for her wedding. Then, you will just have to nicely break the news to her that she will need to find something comparable or something that is in season to fulfill her wants. It is her special day, so you want to do all that you can do to please her.”

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON REQUESTS?

The most popular flower requests are a dozen roses, sunflowers and mixed arrangements catered toward the season of the year.

A Ring Around The Roses will also pair flowers with candy, balloons, stuffed animals and other items.

The most common requests also depend on the occasion, she said.

For Mother’s Day, a popular request is a spring, mixed arrangement.

Valentine’s Day is the biggest one-day event of the year, Brunson said. (It’s Feb. 14, for guys who are prone to forget!)

“Definitely, a dozen red roses are the most popular request,” she said. “We have hundreds of orders that day. We order thousands of red roses ahead of time but also other flowers for Valentine’s. You would be killing yourself if you didn’t order in the thousands of red roses.”

Birthdays are usually bright-colored, mixed arrangements with perhaps a balloon added.

When the new baby arrives, blues and pinks are popular to go to the hospital and are reflective of the little boy or little girl.

For deaths, the family may want the casket spray on top of the casket or standing spray on an easel to say something specifically about the deceased, such as colors or a banner that reflects if they were a Carolina or Clemson fan.

“Another example could be someone

who walks into the store and her husband passed away,” Brunson said. “She may say, ‘I need a casket spray, and he was an outdoorsman and very much into hunting and fishing.’ Then, you may want the casket spray to have greenery, a fake fish or lures or something that reflects that gentleman and what he did. So, you cater to what the customer wants that basically will reflect the deceased. Or it may be a green plant that the family can take home with them and last.”

With weddings, the bride-to-be will come in with ideas of what her “dream wedding” is going to be and a budget that she needs to stay within for flowers for both the wedding and the reception, Brunson said. A florist will sit with them for a while and decide upon the flowers, color scheme and much more.

“The wedding is massive as far as planning,” she said. “Brides are pretty specific in what they want, so you are trying to meet every want because it is their special day. They have their fairytale wedding in their head, and you are trying to make that happen.”

For weddings, staff also decorate the church or other venue.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MOST HEART-WARMING OCCASIONS FOR FLOWERS?

Years ago, A Ring Around The Roses had the privilege of being the florist chosen by Publishers Clearing House to make its bouquet for a Sumter winner in the contest.

“They always hand a bouquet of roses to the winner,” Brunson said. “The Publishers Clearing House people came by here and also sent me a thank-you letter.”

The business has also done flowers for the Pittsburgh Steelers and Memphis Grizzlies, she said. With the Grizzlies, professional basketball player Ja Morant’s family — which lives in Sumter — had a death in the family, and A Ring Around The

Roses provided flowers for that funeral service.

Also, in October, the business did the flowers for University of North Carolina for former Tar Heel receiver Tylee Craft’s memorial service held at Sumter



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sarah Mims assembles a flower arrangement at A Ring Around the Roses.



PHOTO PROVIDED

In its early years in business, A Ring Around The Roses was chosen as the florist by Publishers Clearing House to make its bouquet for a Sumter winner in the contest. Here, representatives from Publishers Clearing House stopped by the store to pick up the flowers.

High School. Craft was a Sumter High alumnus and died at 23 after a battle with cancer.

HOW ABOUT THE MOST UNUSUAL OCCASION?

According to Brunson, during the week of Valentine’s Day for several years, a specific person would come in to the store and buy herself an arrangement for every day of the week from a “secret admirer” to be delivered to her workplace.

“The ‘secret admirer’ was herself,” Brunson said. “She wanted her co-workers to be jealous of what her secret admirer was giving her; so, every day she had something else delivered from her

secret admirer. She paid for every bit of it. We had to sign the card because she didn’t want her handwriting to be recognized, and it had to be the same one of us who signed the card every day. So, her desk looked like a funeral home by the time the week was over.

“She did this for several years that way and had quite the extravagant story to go along with her flowers that she was receiving. And, year to year, the gift became something different.

“She wanted it to look like this one person was sending her this every day, when it was actually her who was sending it. She was single and didn’t have a Valentine, but she didn’t want the rest of the people at work to know that.”

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Item photographer made great memories, met great people in Sumter

A sports team taking a group photo and in a sea of cameras one of the athletes saying “Everyone look at Adam!” because they know and trust you despite me not working for the team.



Adam Flash

Seeing an owner months after you helped feature his new restaurant in Lakeside Magazine and him saying he still excitedly shows people the issue and that it’s helped bring in business. Moments like these are what it’s all about.

My time in Sumter was relatively short. While it certainly had its challenges as I navigated a new life in a new city, I owe a lot to Sumter for helping me grow as a journalist and person. Now it’s time to say goodbye.

I came to Sumter not knowing what to expect. It was far from home, and I didn’t have much work experience. I just knew I wanted to feel a part of a community. Thank you, Sumter, for welcoming me into the community and your lives. Sometimes, your actual homes. Thank you for the photos, the conversations — both formal and not — and for trusting me to tell your stories. I hope I did you justice.

My camera and this job have opened

SEE **FLASH**, PAGE A21



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

South Carolina Paranormal Research & Investigations investigated VFW Post 3034 on Sept. 16, 2023, after a string of suspicious activities and employees saying the building is haunted.



Bobby Richardson speaks to a crowd of fans at Sumter Opera House during the premiere for “Graceball,” the ETV documentary on the Sumter local and New York Yankees legend, in fall 2024.



Lynn Kennedy, is sworn in to the Sumter City Council at a swearing-in ceremony for newly and reelected officials inside the Sumter Opera House on Nov. 26, 2024.



The Sumter Item traveled with a group of local pilots to Spruce Pine, North Carolina, to drop off supplies for those affected by Hurricane Helene, witnessing a bit of the natural damage done to the area on the flights there and back.



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FLASH

FROM PAGE A20

both literal and figurative doors I never thought possible. I've met people, covered events and had access to parts of the community I never otherwise would have. I've helped spotlight the good and contributed to highlighting important issues that will hopefully spark change.

From ghost hunting to horse and motocross racing. From prescribed burns, firefighter training and a rodeo to a flight up to western North Carolina in a small plane with local pilots dropping off supplies for Hurricane Helene victims. From photographing big names who came to town to documenting daily local Sumterites of all ages, their businesses, their passions and their lives. Not to mention the countless sporting events, some state championship

wins and losses and the individuals I got to connect with through series like *The Grind* and *Sumter's Next Generation*, among countless other portraits taken and stories told.

While not every day was highlight reel-worthy, I've made a lot of great memories and met a lot of great people in Sumter. I've done much to be proud of in such a short time. We as local journalists can lose sight of that in the thick of the daily grind.

I found it special to work for a place so historic, *The Sumter Item* having been around since 1894. It's an honor to put my own extremely small stamp on the history of this newspaper and to tell the stories of Sumter for a short while. As I leave with many exciting things still happening around town, I'll be a fan from afar, excited to see how Sumter evolves and grows. Maybe one day I'll return for a visit, camera in hand of course.



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Nick Becharas, senior fuels technician and the day's Fire Boss, monitors a prescribed fire at Poinsett State Park on Feb. 22, 2024.



Laurence Manning hosted Hammond for Game 2 of the SCISA 4A state championship series on Tuesday night, May 14, and won 9-0, sweeping the series and claiming the title.



Jeff Zell is sworn in to the District 36 state Senate seat inside the old Sumter County courthouse on Nov. 22, 2024, after beating longtime Sen. Kevin Johnson in the Nov. 5 general election.

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Premier talent *Sumter Item* names 25 to All-Area Football Team

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

The Sumter Item has selected 25 players to its All-Area Football Team.

The team was selected based on nominations from local South Carolina High School League school coaches. The final selections were chosen by *The Item* sports department.

This year, the team consists of eight Gamecocks from Sumter High, four Manning Monarchs, four Lee Central Stallions, three Eagles from Scott's Branch, three Crestwood Knights, two East Clarendon Wolverines and a Lakewood Gator.

The quarterback for the team is Sumter High's Franklin Richardson. The sophomore was a threat with his arm and legs all season long, completing 57 of his 96 attempts for 1,209 yards and 15 touchdowns, while rushing for 949 yards and 11 scores on 107 attempts.

He'll be joined by both of the running backs on the All-Area team in Sumter High career yardage and touchdown record holders John Peeples and Kameron Fortune. The senior running backs, along with Richardson, helped set the new school record for rushing yards and touchdowns in a season. Peeples, an All-State selection, ran for 1,317 yards and 29 touchdowns despite missing two games due to injury. Fortune added 1,340 yards and 18 touchdowns. He averaged 11.2 yards per carry, breaking a Sumter High record previously held by Freddie Solomon. The SHS running game helped them play for the SCHSL 5A Division I lower state championship.

The receivers for the team are Quintin Jackson of Scott's Branch, Jeremie Richardson of Crestwood and Christopher Bentley of Sumter High.

THE SUMTER ITEM ALL-AREA TEAM

QUARTERBACK

Franklin Richardson – Sumter High

RUNNING BACK

John Peeples – Sumter High
Kam Fortune – Sumter High

WIDE RECEIVER

Quintin Jackson – Scott's Branch
Christopher Bentley – Sumter High
Jeremie Richardson – Crestwood

OFFENSIVE LINE

Jerius Williams – Sumter High
Savion Williams – Lee Central
Xavier Smith – East Clarendon
Isaiah Hamilton – Manning High
Jeremie Blanding – Manning High

ATHLETE

JuJu Davis – Lee Central

SPECIAL TEAMER

Alex Krivejko – Sumter High
Jorge Hernandez-Lara – Crestwood

DEFENSIVE LINE

Anthony Addison – Sumter High
Jalynn Coard – Manning High
Danny Ragin – Scott's Branch

LINEBACKER

Jeremiah Burson – Sumter High
Shadrach Williams – Lee Central
Nyren Bowman – Scott's Branch
Hunter Mixon – East Clarendon

DEFENSIVE BACK

Jeffery Ceasar – Manning High
Cedric Cisse – Lakewood
Dashawn Scriven – Crestwood High
Chuck Harry – Lee Central

Jackson did a little bit of everything for the Eagles, catching 16 passes for 350 yards and seven touchdowns while adding three rushing scores and three special teams touchdowns. He was also a dynamic defender with 70 tackles, five interceptions and two fumble recoveries.



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

From left, Sumter High's John Peeples, Jeremiah Burson and Franklin Richardson were all named to *The Sumter Item's* All-Area team.



TIM LEIBLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

Crestwood's Dashawn Scriven led SCHSL 4A in interceptions this season.



Manning's Jeffery Ceasar was an All-State defensive back and electric as both a returner and receiver this season.

ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter High's Anthony Addison was named to *The Sumter Item's* All-Area team after earning All-State honors and leading the SHS defense to the lower state championship.

TIM LEIBLE / THE SUMTER ITEM



ALL-AREA FROM PAGE A22

Richardson was an offensive and special teams weapon for the Knights. He caught 27 passes for 360 yards and four scores while adding 275 yards and two touchdowns on the ground. He added 400 kick return yards and a touchdown on special teams while intercepting a pass and breaking up three more on defense.

Bentley was a deep play threat for Sumter High all season long, catching 18 passes for 544 yards and seven touchdowns.

The offensive line consists of Jerius Williams of Sumter High, Isaiah Hamilton and Jeremie Blanding of Manning, Savion Williams of Lee Central and Xavier Smith of East Clarendon.

J. Williams helped open up holes for the Gamecocks' cavalcade of runners as they piled up 4,187 yards on the ground. He graded out at 81% with 12 knockdowns at guard for the Gamecocks. He was named to the SCHSL 5A All-State team.

Hamilton and Blanding were machines for the Monarchs up front as Manning piled up 2,214 yards on the ground and 1,001 yards through the air on their way to the SCHSL 2A lower state championship. Hamilton graded out at 92% with 32 pancakes, while Blanding had a 91% grade with 28 pancakes.

Sa. Williams helped open the door for a Lee Central rushing attack that piled up 3,128 yards and 35 touchdowns on the season. He graded out at 89% and had four knockdowns on the season. He also contributed 27 tackles, three sacks and seven tackles for a loss on defense. He was named All-State in SCHSL 2A.

Smith had 26 knockdowns for the Wolverines while starting on both sides of the ball. He added 34 solo tackles, nine tackles for a loss, two forced fumbles and two sacks on defense. He helped East Clarendon move the ball for a combined 3,445 yards of total offense.

The athlete on the team is JuJu Davis. The senior earned All-State honors for the Stallions as he led the team with 794 rushing yards and seven touchdowns, while passing for 738 yards and five touchdowns.

The special teamers are Sumter High's Alex Krivejko and Crestwood's Jorge Hernandez-Lara.

Krivejko made 73 of his 76 extra points on the season and buried a 31-yard field goal in double overtime to seal a victory over White Knoll for the Gamecocks. He also averaged 31.2 yards



per punt on the season.

Hernandez-Lara averaged 35 yards per punt and pinned 16 punts inside the 20. He added five field goals and converted all 32 of his extra point attempts.

The defensive line is Sumter High's Anthony Addison, Manning's Jalynn Coard and Danny Ragin of Scott's Branch.

Addison, an All-State player and South Carolina signee, was a monster for the SHS defensive front. The Shrine Bowl player had 112 total tackles, 24 tackles for a loss, 10.5 sacks, four forced fumbles and three fumble recoveries, one of which he returned for a touchdown.

Coard was named to the overall All-State team for the state and was the Region VII-2A Defensive Player of the Year, while also earning a spot in the Shrine Bowl. He was an unstoppable force for Manning on both sides of the ball. He had 67 total tackles, 17 tackles for a loss and one sack. He forced two fumbles and batted down a pass. On offense, he was Manning's top running back, rushing for 707 yards on 79 carries, good for 8.95 yards a pop and 14 touchdowns. He added 24 two-point conversions on the season.

Manning's Jalynn Coard was named to the overall All-State team for the South Carolina Football Coaches Association after a monster season at both running back and defensive tackle.

NICH PITTS / ITEM CONTRIBUTOR

Scott's Branch was represented on *The Sumter Item* All-Area team by both Danny Ragin (15) and Nyren Bowman (6).

ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Ragin was an All-State player for the Eagles after amassing 96 tackles, 23 tackles for a loss and eight sacks. He added 13 catches for 500 yards and four touchdowns as a tight end/H-back.

The linebackers for the team are Sumter High's Jeremiah Burson, Lee Central's Shadrach Williams, Nyren Bowman of Scott's Branch and East Clarendon's Hunter Mixon.

Burson was a tackling machine for Sumter High, leading the team with 132 tackles. He added 15 tackles for a loss, four interceptions, five pass breakups, five forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries.

Sh. Williams was an All-State defender for the Stallions after racking up 97 total tackles and 21.5 tackles for a loss. He also had four sacks, while chipping in 304 yards and nine touchdowns on offense.

Bowman was an All-State linebacker for Scott's Branch after totaling 97 tackles, 24 tackles for a loss, four sacks, an interception, two forced fumbles, two fumble recoveries and a defensive score. He added 35 catches for 414 yards and five touchdowns along with two rushing scores on offense.

Mixon only played in nine games due



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Lakewood's Cedric Cisse was one of the top defensive backs in the area after intercepting four passes and breaking up six more pass attempts.

to injury and still managed to amass 74 solo tackles, 20 tackles for a loss, three sacks, three fumble recoveries and two interceptions.

The defensive backs are Manning's Jeffery Ceasar, Lakewood's Cedric Cisse, Crestwood's Dashawn Scriven and Lee Central's Chuck Harry.

Ceasar was an All-State selection and Shrine Bowl player as an electric all-around player for the Monarchs. He led Manning with seven interceptions, returning two for scores, while breaking up seven more passes. He also forced and recovered a fumble. He chipped in 41 tackles. On offense, he had 39 catches for 530 yards and six scores, while returning seven combined kicks and punts for touchdowns. He averaged 34 yards on kick returns and 38 yards per punt return.

Cisse, a Touchstone Energy Bowl selection, was named to the 4A All-State team after an incredible season for the Gators. The senior had 44 tackles, four interceptions, six pass breakups, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery for Lakewood this fall.

Harry split time between defensive back and linebacker for Lee Central, thriving at both spots. The All-State selection had eight interceptions to go with 68 tackles, 10 tackles for a loss and two sacks. He also led the team with 311 receiving yards and three scores.

Scriven rounds out the team after leading SCHSL 4A with five interceptions. He added 45 total tackles, two tackles for a loss, two sacks, 10 pass breakups, two fumble recoveries and a forced fumble. He also had a defensive score.

SCISA's finest

Sumter Item names 25 to All-Independent Football Team

BY TIM LEIBLE

tim@theitem.com

The Sumter Item has selected 25 players to its All-Independent Football Team.

The team was selected based on nominations from local South Carolina Independent School Association school coaches. Final selections were chosen by *The Item* sports department.

This year's team consists of 10 players from Wilson Hall, eight players from Laurence Manning, four players from Lee Academy, two from Thomas Sumter and one from Clarendon Hall.

The quarterback of the team is Laurence Manning's Grainger Powell. The sophomore threw for 2,242 yards and 18 touchdowns on the season.

The running backs are Lee Academy's Andrew Bowers and Wilson Hall's Milling Galloway.

Bowers was a machine for the Cavaliers, rushing for 1,010 yards and 13 touchdowns, while catching 12 passes for 152 yards and a touchdown.

Galloway ran 100 times for 777 yards and eight touchdowns, adding six catches for 92 yards and a touchdown.

The pass-catchers are Wilson Hall's Ford Wilder and a duo from Laurence Manning, BJ Balls and Drew Ferriell.

Wilder caught 27 passes for 518 yards and five touchdowns, earning all-region and SCISA all-star honors.

Balls caught 32 passes for 576 yards and six touchdowns. Ferriell added 15 catches for 162 yards and three scores, while grading out at 89% as a blocker at tight end.

The offensive line is Cooper Scott and Carson Wilsey of Wilson Hall, Trace June of Lee Academy, Laurence Manning's Dillon Smith and Thomas Sumter's Jake Lessard.

Scott graded out at 81% for the Barons' offensive line, adding 25 tackles and a sack on defense. Wilsey and Scott are both two-time all-region players and SCISA all-stars. On defense, Wilsey also had 52 total tackles and three sacks at linebacker.

June graded out at 81% with 18

THE SUMTER ITEM ALL-INDEPENDENT TEAM

QUARTERBACK

Grainger Powell – Laurence Manning

RUNNING BACK

Andrew Bowers – Lee Academy
Milling Galloway – Wilson Hall

PASS-CATCHER

Ford Wilder – Wilson Hall
BJ Balls – Laurence Manning
Drew Ferriell – Laurence Manning

OFFENSIVE LINE

Cooper Scott – Wilson Hall
Carson Wilsey – Wilson Hall
Trace June – Lee Academy
Dillon Smith – Laurence Manning
Jake Lessard – Thomas Sumter

ATHLETE

Cain June – Lee Academy

SPECIAL TEAMER

Jackson Bonser – Wilson Hall
Daniel Vargas – Laurence Manning

DEFENSIVE LINE

Walker Wilson – Wilson Hall
Andrew Howle – Wilson Hall
Tristen White – Laurence Manning

LINEBACKER

Owen Meyers – Wilson Hall
Ben McLaurin – Wilson Hall
Tucker Boyce – Lee Academy
Griffin McIntosh – Clarendon Hall

DEFENSIVE BACK

Zy Dennis – Laurence Manning
Scoop Dennis – Laurence Manning
Carter Hill – Thomas Sumter
Harris Naylor – Wilson Hall

knockdowns.

Smith graded out at 84% for the Swampcats.

Lessard was TSA's most consistent offensive lineman while starting on both sides of the ball.

The all-around athlete of the team is Cain June of Lee Academy. He played defensive back, linebacker, wide receiver, running back and quarterback for the Cavaliers this season. He had 31 catches for 358 yards and two touchdowns, 24 carries for 54 yards and a touchdown, 34 tackles, two interceptions and a forced fumble.

The special teamers are Wilson Hall's Jackson Bonser and Laurence



PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Laurence Manning's Grainger Powell passed for 2,242 yards and 18 touchdowns as a sophomore.



Laurence Manning's BJ Balls was one of eight Swampcats selected for *The Sumter Item* All-Independent team.

SEE SCISA, PAGE A25

Wilson Hall's Walker Wilson (54) and Carson Wilsey (76) were both All-Independent selections by *The Sumter Item*.

PHOTOS BY ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM



Lee Academy's Andrew Bowers rushed for 1,010 yards and 13 touchdowns this season.



Wilson Hall's Jackson Bonser (29) was automatic for the Barons this season, going 34-37 on extra points while making seven field goals.



Wilson Hall's Ford Wilder caught five touchdowns for the Barons this season.

SCISA FROM PAGE A24

Manning's Daniel Vargas.

Bonser was a rock for the Barons, going 34-37 on extra points while connecting on seven of his nine field goal attempts with a long of 48. He added 50 tackles on defense.

Vargas was 24-25 on extra points, while making four of his six field goal attempts with a long of 38.

The defensive line consists of Walker Wilson and Andrew Howle of Wilson Hall and Laurence Manning's Tristen White.

Wilson had 51 total tackles and

five sacks for the Barons, while Howle finished with 24 total tackles and seven sacks.

White had 40 tackles and eight tackles for a loss as the anchor for the Swampcat defensive line.

The linebackers are Owen Meyers and Ben McLaurin of Wilson Hall, Clarendon Hall's Griffin McIntosh and Lee Academy's Tucker Boyce.

Meyers had 61 total tackles, nine tackles for a loss and five sacks while also lining up at quarterback for the Barons. He completed 63 passes for 1,009 yards and 12 touchdowns as he led Wilson Hall to the SCISA 3A state championship

game. McLaurin finished with 38 total tackles, two interceptions and two tackles for a loss. He also contributed offensively with 106 carries for 511 yards and six touchdowns.

McIntosh had 133 tackles for Clarendon Hall, adding 14 tackles for a loss, a pick-six and three forced fumbles.

Boyce finished the season with 88 tackles and four tackles for a loss.

The defensive backs are Zy and Scoop Dennis from Laurence Manning, Carter Hill of Thomas Sumter and Wilson Hall's Harris Naylor.

Z. Dennis had 40 tackles, four in-

terceptions and two fumble recoveries on defense while adding 37 catches for 277 yards and five touchdowns on offense. S. Dennis added 43 tackles on defense while contributing 37 catches for 418 yards and six touchdowns on offense.

Hill led Thomas Sumter in tackles while pulling in six interceptions. He also had three total touchdowns on the season.

Naylor had 24 total tackles in the Baron secondary while adding 36 carries for 246 yards and seven catches for 176 yards with three total touchdowns on offense.

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Entertainment

'Sonic the Hedgehog 3' darker, emotional but is perfect for families

The majority of popular video game adaptations translated into the live-action format receive reviews ranging from decent and mixed to polarizing results. It is safe to say not



A REVIEW BY
ISAIAH RIDLEY

every video game concept is meant for cinematic treatment.

As of late, the quality of certain adaptations has begun to improve, with the recent releases of "Super Mario Brothers" and "Sonic the Hedgehog."

Paramount Studios entered the fray, announcing its intention to adapt "Sonic the Hedgehog" into a live-action treatment. Upon releasing the first trailer, "Sonic's" original design received significant polarizing backlash, forcing Paramount to delay its first release date, returning designers to the drawing board and creating a Sonic image closer to his faithful representation.

The fact Paramount listened to fan response opened a window of opportunity for the potential of a Sonic franchise. As a token of appreciation, fans collectively ventured into the theaters for the first film. Despite mixed reception, it proved to be a box-office success with a majority of fans being pleased with the special effects, "Sonic's" design, simplistic story and Jim Carrey's performance as Dr. Robotnik.

"Sonic's" sequel brought similar success for the franchise, increasing and improving the special effects, including the two fan-favorite characters of Tails

and Knuckles, Carrey's fantastic performance and the providing exciting entertainment for the viewer. "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" brings forth another fan-favorite anti-hero character, Shadow, voiced by Keanu Reeves. The third film focuses on Shadow arriving to Earth seeking revenge for his traumatic and tragic past, bringing a level of chaos, destruction, and darkness unlike anything Team Sonic has experienced.

Team Sonic forges an unlikely alliance with archenemy Dr. Robotnik (Eggman) with Carrey reprising the iconic video game villain. Its story is more of understanding Shadow's motivation exploring his creation, experimentation and the one human connection he cherished while in captivity. "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" is a combined presentation of escapism and nostalgia. There were moments I was watching where a journey down memory lane began to manifest, with memories of my mother and father purchasing a Sega Genesis for Christmas along with the first "Sonic the Hedgehog" game. Every single day I played the game religiously. I remember my father stating how the game made him dizzy with the array of dazzling colors, Sonic's inhuman speed and the screen making it difficult keeping up with spinning angles.

From the film's beginning, it became apparent how its creation came with passion toward the lore of Sonic the Hedgehog. Carrey is at his most energetic portraying Dr. Robotnik and his grandfather Dr. Gerald Robotnik. If my memory is correct, this is the first time Carrey has performed simultaneously as two characters. The performance is massively energetic, electric and pure physical comedy with a mixture of introspective emotionality. Reeves' voicing the character of Shadow is too perfect for words. Aside from Shadow hav-



PARAMOUNT PICTURES AND SEGA OF AMERICA INC. VIA AP

This image released by Paramount Pictures and Sega of America shows the character Sonic, voiced by Ben Schwartz, in a scene from "Sonic the Hedgehog 3."

ing one of the most tragic and darker stories, it was refreshing having a performance where the vocal torment and dialogue fits the tone of the character. He brings the perfect amount of anguish, naivety and emotional gravity to Shadow the Hedgehog.

Another element this film improved upon is experimenting with the concept of deviating from the focus of human characters. "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" brings more character development to Sonic, Tails, Knuckles and Shadow included. Experiencing the growth of Sonic, Tails and Knuckles as their bond grows stronger throughout the story is a wholesome and heartwarming tale.

Returning to their roles is Ben Schwartz as Sonic, Colleen O'Shaughnessy as Tails and Idris Elba as the Echidna warrior Knuckles channeling their natural chemistry, brilliant comedic timing and vocal acting talents by bringing these characters to life once again in creative fashion. The action sequences are amazingly splendid to behold on the big screen. Sequences with Sonic and Shadow are the absolute highlights, making me yearn for more in the process. I will say the action spectacle during the climax is pure "Sonic the Hedgehog" in complete video game form. I could not contain my smile, for it returned me to being a child in the '90s playing all three "Sonic" games. It would be massively difficult to articulate how beautiful, exciting, innovative and fantastic the se-

quence is for the eyes.

Minor flaws prevent the film from reaching a perfect score. Moments of humor oddly placed within various parts of the story or unexpected cuts to dialogue dampen the momentum of a previous scene of intense drama, action and consequential stakes. Where the film shines brightly are the flashback sequences with Shadow and his human friend Maria, his interactions with Sonic, Tails, Knuckles and both Robotniks. Including Shadow gives the story a much-needed sense of dark emotion. I can honestly state "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" is one of the darker, serious and emotional stories.

In closing, this is still an exciting adventure that is perfect for children and families alike. Those who grew up playing "Sonic" will love it, and children will embrace it as well. Even if you are not a fan the video games or animated series, it has something for everyone. Whether it is cute callbacks/Easter egg references using music cues or popular culture pieces, "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" is the perfect feature presentation for a family gathering. My final rating for this film is a resounding two thumbs up and a 9/10 score.

There are two scenes during the credits that are a must-see, leaving it open for a highly anticipated sequel.

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

Military museum welcomes all to visit this year

Sumter Military Museum wishes all Sumter residents a Happy New Year as we welcome 2025.

Last year saw the groundbreaking of the new site on the Sumter Museum grounds on 3.75 acres at 122 N. Washington St. and 201 W. Hampton Ave.



Sammy Way
REFLECTIONS

The new state-of-the-art building will be about 30,000 feet and have dedicated exhibit spaces as well as a research center. Sumter leaders such as Mayor David Merchant and Speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives Rep. Murrell Smith spoke during the groundbreaking ceremony in October 2024 about the museum being an inspiration to others to serve their country and being a tribute to all who have served to ensure the free-

dom of United States citizens.

The new site is scheduled to open in 2026, according to Sumter Museum Executive Director Annie Rivers. The project is being funded by city, county and state money, Williams-Brice-Edwards Charitable Trust and other groups.

Families in Sumter are encouraged to share mementos of their loved ones who served in the United States military to be included in the museum. Photos can be copied and returned. Veterans do not have to be from Sumter to be included in the display.

The current Military Museum is at 129 S. Harvin St. in the James E. Clyburn Intermodal Transportation Center. Visitors are encouraged to learn more about Sumter's military history for free on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 1 to 4 p.m.; Thursdays 10 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.; Fridays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sundays 1 to 4 p.m. Contact Sammy Way for more information about submitting items for the museum and to arrange individual or group tours at (803) 983-8946 or (803) 968-1901.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Site work for the new Sumter Military Museum continues in November 2024 next to Sumter Museum.



PHOTO PROVIDED



ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter Museum held its groundbreaking for the new Sumter Military Museum on Wednesday, Oct. 16.



A display of memorabilia from local military members is set up during the groundbreaking for the new Sumter Military Museum on Wednesday, Oct. 16, 2024.

ADAM FLASH / THE SUMTER ITEM

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS
1. Certain exam
5. Drove too fast
9. Food container
12. PBS science show
13. Roof edge
14. Be in debt
15. Fastener
16. Neat
17. Intersected
18. Born first
20. Ham spice
22. Olympic sled
24. Bloodhound's clue
27. Had being
30. Hairless
32. Fishing string
33. Forever
35. Inheritance
37. Arouse
38. Angelic head-gear
40. Doze, with "off"
41. Catcher's place
42. Out of control
44. Observe
47. Flight path
51. Fruit-filled pastry
53. Banister
55. Likewise
56. Important span
57. Eyeball
58. Black-tie event
59. ____ your request
60. Land document
61. Molt

- DOWN
1. Single time
2. Teacher's list
3. Eager
4. Boutonniere's site
5. Tennis unit
6. Package
7. Rotten
8. Dealer's car
9. Funnyman
10. Fill with wonder
11. After taxes
19. Deep red
21. Electrical unit

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15					16					17		
18				19		20			21			
			22		23			24		25	26	
27	28	29		30			31		32			
33			34				35	36				
37					38	39				40		
41						42			43			
		44		45	46			47		48	49	50
51	52			53			54		55			
56				57					58			
59				60					61			

23. Slash
25. Atop
26. Hollow plant
27. Cleanse
28. Choir member
29. Beach clothing
31. Appetizing store
34. Neighborhood
36. Fly alone
39. A short time
43. Hauls
45. Walked
46. Confine
48. Dull
49. Florida Key, e.g.
50. Kermit's kin
51. Verve
52. Ill temper
54. Commanded

SOLUTION

P	E	R		D	E	D		S	H	E	D	
P	E	R		O	G	L	E	G	A	L	A	
P	I	E		R	A	I	L	A	L	S	O	
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C	L	I	P		T	R	I	M		M	E	T
N	O	V	A		E	A	V	E		O	W	E
O	R	A	L		S	P	E	D		C	A	N

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SUDOKU

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

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

Social Security Matters

Veteran asks if it's possible to get back Medicare taxes paid

BY RUSSELL GLOOR

National Social Security Advisor at the AMAC Foundation, the non-profit arm of the Association of Mature American Citizens

DEAR RUSTY: I'm 72 years old with 20 years of military service. I am retired collecting Social Security, my military pension and state retirement benefits. According to my SSA statement, over my working lifetime I paid \$14,302 into Medicare, but I never used that medical plan. I only bring in \$33,000 in annual income. Can I get those Medicare taxes back somehow? I've run into dead ends at SSA, Medicare and IRS websites. Signed: Veteran Seeking Answers

DEAR VETERAN SEEKING ANSWERS:



Russell Gloor

First, I want to thank you for your military service to our country. You may find the "For Veterans" section of our www.amacfoundation.org website of interest.

Regarding the contributions you have made over the years to federal Medicare, I'm afraid you cannot get any of those taxes back even though you have never used Medicare health care services. That's because Medicare, like Social Security, is a "pay as you go" program where all contributions received from workers are used to pay for benefits for current beneficiaries (contributions aren't put

into a separate account to pay for your coverage). It's also important to know that your Medicare taxes were used only to fund Medicare Part A, which is coverage for inpatient hospitalization services. Those contributions (via payroll taxes) did not entitle you to outpatient health care services, as provided by Medicare Part B (for which there is a monthly premium).

FYI, you must be enrolled in Medicare Part A to collect Social Security benefits after age 65. Medicare Part B isn't mandatory to collect Social Security, but assuming that, as a retired military veteran, you now receive health care benefits under the military's TriCare-for-Life program for retired veterans, you must be enrolled in Medicare Part A and Part B to maintain your TriCare-for-Life coverage. Your military TriCare coverage coordinates with Medicare to pay for your health care costs. Thus, even though it may not be transparent to you, you may be benefiting from your current enrollment in Medicare.

Note that some non-career veterans

can use VA health care services based on their service years, instead of TriCare-for-Life for retired military veterans. Non-career recipients of standard VA health care services are not required to be enrolled in Medicare but, in any case, cannot receive their past Medicare Part A contributions back if they choose to decline Medicare. You may have interest in this article I previously published on the topic of VA benefits versus Medicare: <https://tinyurl.com/nbu65y4c>.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.



Bostic Insurance Agcy, Inc.
Charles Bostic, JR. Agent
704 Bultman Drive

Corner of Bultman and Wise Drive, Sumter

I am a second generation State Farm agent, continuing the legacy started by my father, Bo Bostic. He established his agency in Sumter back in 1965 and ran it until his retirement in 1985.

In 1984, I opened my own agency in Sumter, becoming the third one in the area at that time. It's amazing how quickly 40 years have passed!

My father, who served in the Korean war, eventually settled in Mullins, SC and worked at Martin hospital. It was there that he had his insurance with a State Farm agent named Doc Capps. Doc played a significant role in my father's life and introduced him to the State Farm organization.

The Bostic family has a long-standing reputation of serving Sumter. My daughter, Lauren Locklear, works for Gateway Mortgage in Sumter, and my son, Charles (Chas) III, owns and operates AmeriSpec inspection company, providing home inspections in Sumter and the surrounding counties.

I have truly enjoyed serving Sumter and the surrounding areas for the past 40 years, and I have no plans of slowing down. You can find my office located on the corner of Bultman and Wise Dr, where my team, with over 68 years of combined experience, is ready to assist you with all your insurance needs.

We eagerly look forward to seeing you and providing you with top-notch service.

Charles Bostic, Jr. Agent

803-775-8371

charles@bosticagency.com

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