



Former Manning, S.C. State star Smith sets eyes on NFL Draft

A22

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ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Danny Chandler and Britton Moseley are co-owners of Galloway and Moseley Jewelers. Galloway and Moseley celebrates 90 years of business in 2025. Read more about the business's long history in Sumter on A16.



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I'd like to welcome you to this edition of *The Sumter Item Impact*.

I'm writing this from Orlando, Florida, and the 2025 America's Newspapers Mega-Conference. It's a place where local media leaders come together annually to discuss challenges and opportunities, and while there are some similarities among the gathering, there are also differences because of the sizes of the organizations and communities, the leadership structures, community support and so on.

Trust is a word that's used here a lot. A recent study that's commonly brought up showed that, while trust in national media is at a low point, trust in local media has remained or grown in the last few months and years.

That's not a surprise to me. I see it in Sumter in the trust our audience has for *The Item*.

To me, trust isn't about being perfect. It's not about covering every story, getting every sentence structure right or equally reporting on dif-

ferent aspects of our community.

Trust comes from knowing our reporters, seeing our team in the community and understanding that we're driven to make our communities better, just like you are.

You can trust *The Item* because you know us. Our staff represents various aspects of what makes Sumter the place it is.



Vince Johnson

When I moved to Sumter in 2017, one of my first memories is seeing the local delegation from the Statehouse, Democrats and Republicans alike, proudly referring to themselves as Team Sumter. Even with political differences, they were aligned in making moves to make our communities better.

That's always resonated with me, and the cohesion — quite startling compared to other communities where I've lived — largely continues today.

The Item plays a large role in the betterment of Sumter as well. Our



staff highlights issues that emerge and holds conversations that need to be had. We celebrate accomplishments of our neighbors and promote the local businesses that help make our communities thrive.

Having come to these conferences for more than a decade, it's not lost

on me that they're smaller than before.

Local communities are losing local newspapers at a rapid rate, reportedly averaging two closures per week. Communities similar to Sumter having an independent local newspaper are becoming more of the exception rather than the rule.

With that said, I have a strong belief in our staff's ability to adapt, transform and innovate to better serve our residents. I have a strong belief in our residents and the value they hold in *The Item*, both for informing themselves and the protection of the larger community.

Seeing what's happening elsewhere is a warning, but it's not a statement of conclusion. We can be different, an improving local community with a strong, independent local news source playing an important role.

But none of this can happen without trust, and I'm thankful for the trust the community continues to hold in *The Item*.

Vince Johnson is publisher of The Sumter Item.

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Government

3 local government headlines to know from the past month

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

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SCOTT WINS HOUSE DISTRICT 50 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY



SCOTT

Following a 10-vote difference on Tuesday, April 1, candidate Keishan Scott appeared to be the winner of the S.C. House District 50 Democratic Primary. Following a recount of votes because the votes fell within a 1% margin, Scott maintained his win by an updated 11 votes.

After the recount on Friday, April 4, the final results saw Scott secure 1,436, or 50.19%, of the votes. Opponent Carl Whetsel obtained 1,425, or 49.81%, of votes.

June 3 will be when Scott and unopposed Republican candidate Bill Oden go head to head for the House seat.

The special election is taking place after former Rep. Will Wheeler resigned in January to seek a 12th Circuit Court judge seat, which by law requires he be out of the General Assembly for at least one year.

FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET ENTERS PRELIMINARY PHASE FOR CITY OF SUMTER

It's budget season, and the City of Sumter has introduced its first preliminary draft budget.

The draft currently shows a \$1.7 million deficit, which is not abnormal in the draft stages of a budget.

As it stands, the budget estimate shows projected revenue of \$91,726,269 and projected expenditures of \$93,466,302. The general fund balance shows \$53,547,337 in projected revenue and \$55,287,370 in projected expenditures.

Council will vote on the budget's readings in June for the budget to go into effect on July 1, meaning it

will need to be balanced before then.

All of these numbers are subject to change, as they are part of a draft. A budget must be produced no less than 40 days before the start of the fiscal year, hence the draft is looked at in April. The draft did not include a proposed millage increase, and according to City of Sumter Assistant City Manager Howie Owens, a millage increase has not been in any discussions regarding the city's budget.

DEVELOPMENT OF 96-UNIT APARTMENT COMPLEX APPROVED FOLLOWING DISCUSSION OF TREE PROTECTION

A 96-unit apartment complex at 3075, 3095 and 3125 Carter Road was approved by Sumter Planning Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on Wednesday, March 23. This was after lengthy discussions about the number of trees being re-

moved by the developer. In total, 27 trees are planned to be removed, but part of the development will see 61 trees added to the area. Ultimately, the development was approved by council.

The proposed development is expected to have four three-story buildings with 24 one-bedroom units, 60 two-bedroom units and 12 three-bedroom units.

The commission also approved the rezoning of a property at 1071 Pine-wood Road from Residential-15 to Planned Development. The property is planned to become a walkable community with upscale housing and sidewalks.

The property would also be home to a mini-warehouse development, which requires creating a special zoning ordinance specific to the tract of land.

The plan itself is only in its conceptual phase, so the commission was only voting on the rezoning.



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Education

District grade floor becomes community issue; Wilson Hall senior recognized

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

50% GRADE FLOOR IN DISTRICT FAILS IN 4-4 TIE VOTE

Without a voting majority at the April 7 meeting, Sumter school board did not pass a proposed policy requiring teachers to give students at least 50% as a grade as opposed to final grades based on performance.

In a 4-4 tie vote with one trustee abstaining, Sumter School District's Board of Trustees did not reinstate a quarterly grade floor for students. Robert's Rules of Order, which governs conduct and decision-making for school boards in the state, requires a

majority for a motion to pass.

The motion for the grade floor was in its second and final reading after passing first reading 4-3 on March 24 and would have been a reversal after the previous board, in place until the November 2024 election, removed the floor last summer.

Those voting to reinstate the 50% floor included Chairman Shawn Ragin, Vice Chairman Brian Alston, Brittany English and Gloria Lee.

Board members voting against the measure included the Rev. Ralph Canty, Bonnie Disney, Phil Lev-



RAGIN



Sumter High School senior Kelly Gristwood speaks against reinstating the 50% grade floor policy during public participation at Sumter School District's Board of Trustees meeting on April 7 at the district office, 1345 Wilson Hall Road.

BRUCE MILLS / THE SUMTER ITEM

entis and Matthew "Mac" McLeod.

Area 4 Trustee Tarah Johnson abstained from the vote.

In previous discussions, Canty, Disney and Leventis stressed that a 50% grade floor did not hold students accountable or promote excellence in education. A life-long educator, Disney also emphasized a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is already in place in the district to help students and gives additional chances.

Those in favor of the floor said it allowed students a "second chance" to

eventually pass a course.

However, Ragin told *The Sumter Item* after first-reading approval that he and other trustees were looking to reinstate the 50% grade floor because the previous board was "railroaded by that new policy" last year and it was done "a little bit behind our backs."

"Right now, we are reinstating because the way that policy was enacted was a little bit behind our backs," he said on March 28.

SEE EDUCATION, PAGE A12

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Willow Drive turns 75

Elementary school caps birthday with celebration event, time capsule burial

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

One of Sumter's oldest schools celebrated its 75th anniversary recently and featured a fun-filled week of activities to mark the milestone.

Willow Drive Elementary School turned 75 years old this school year and marked the diamond anniversary with a celebration night on April 8 and a student time capsule burial of artifacts on April 11. The week's activities also included retro-dress days.

Currently with about 500 students in grades K-5 and 75 staff members, Willow Drive is a Title I (high poverty) school, and federal funding this school year helped pay for two reading interventionists, a STEAM teacher and a math coach, according to school officials. Title I money also helped with school supplies for students, professional development for teachers and staff and field trips, among other items.

Honorary guests at the April 8 celebration included some members of Sumter School District's Board of

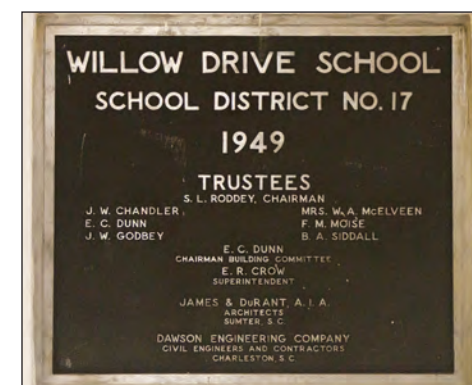


PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Fifth-grade students bury a time capsule outside Willow Drive Elementary School on Friday, April 11. The school celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2025.

SEE **WILLOW**, PAGE A7

During a conversation about what a time capsule is and what will be inside the 2025 time capsule, Willow Drive Elementary School students notice a previous time capsule that was buried in 2000. The 2025 capsule was buried on Friday, April 11, as part of Willow Drive's 75th anniversary celebration.



A fifth-grade student places a slip of paper in the Willow Drive Elementary School time capsule on Friday, April 11. Students buried the time capsule as part of Willow Drive's 75th anniversary celebration.



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

A Willow Drive Elementary School teacher instructs students outside the school around 1960.



PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Fifth-grade classes at Willow Drive Elementary sit in front of the school's sign after burying a time capsule on Friday, April 11. The school celebrates its 75th anniversary this year.

WILLOW

FROM PAGE A6

Trustees, district administrators, Sumter Mayor David Merchant, Willow Drive alumni, former principals, assistant principals, teachers and staff.

Merchant proclaimed April 8, 2025, as Willow Drive Elementary School 75th Anniversary Day in the City of Sumter.

Sumter school board member Matthew "Mac" McLeod, who is also a Willow Drive alumnus from the 1970s, served as the event's guest speaker.

McLeod described the school as providing a "strong foundation" locally.

"A building that has been standing for 75 years has a strong foundation, and similarly this school has built a strong foundation in this community, in our students and in myself," he said.



The Willow Drive Elementary School choir performs as part of the school's 75th anniversary celebration on Tuesday, April 8.

McLeod went through Sumter's public schools and graduated in 1984. He said after high school he went directly into the workforce and then at 40 years old enrolled in college at University of South Carolina.

He finished college in three years and then became a teacher for 13 years, he said. Now, he owns a small construction business.

Before a dinner was served to all attendees, Willow Drive's Eagle Choir provided musical entertainment. The choir consists of 31

third- through fifth-graders at the school. The choir's selections represented traditional and classical themes prevalent during the school's early years and also focused on inspiration, cultural appreciation, teamwork, fun and light-heartedness.

Willow Drive Elementary opened in 1949 and initially served white children in the City of Sumter in grades 1-6 before integration occurred locally in the 1970-71 school year.



Carter Lesane, 5, plays in a classroom that became a display of archival photos and yearbooks at the Willow Drive Elementary School 75th anniversary celebration on Tuesday, April 8.

ALUMNI SHARE MEMORIES OF WILLOW DRIVE ELEMENTARY

MATTHEW "MAC" MCLEOD

McLeod attended Willow Drive from 1972-77 and rode his bike to school because he lived nearby on Miller Road.

He remembers after school each day he and his friends would go to the former Burger Chief restaurant on Broad Street, the Sumter YMCA next door, hang out at a friend's house or on the school's playground before going home.

McLeod said he remembered the school's two principals during that timeframe, Mr. Witherspoon and before that Mr. Don Barber, whose son is currently the pastor at First Baptist Church.

In the fifth grade, McLeod was in the school's Safety Patrol.

"When I was in Safety Patrol as a fifth-grader, we would stop traffic on Broad Street to allow the kids to walk across," he said. "I don't think we would do that anymore."

McLeod would graduate from Furman High School in Sumter in 1984.

Currently, McLeod is a small business owner and member of Sumter School District's Board of Trustees.



MCLEOD

RASHIDA JOHNSON

Johnson attended Willow Drive from 1982-87 for first through fifth grade.

She doesn't remember much from the school, but she does recall her first day there and her first-grade teacher, Ms. Bonnie Shuler.

Johnson said her mom took her to school that first day, and both were "very nervous," but Ms. Shuler calmed her nerves.

"I did not want my mom to leave me there, but — of course — she had to," Johnson said. "I just remember walking in that room and being very nervous. I do not remember what Ms. Shuler said to me, but she made me feel right at home."

"All my mom could say was 'By the time she came to pick me up at end of the day, I was a very happy child.'"

"I just remember Ms. Shuler being very nurturing and just a good teacher."

Recently, Johnson pulled out her 1982-83 yearbook from that year.

"I found it, and it is the only one that I have from there, too," she said.

Willow Drive's principal at the time was Mr. Eli Baker.

Johnson would graduate from Sumter High School in 1994.

Today, she is a speech therapist in Sumter School District at Crosswell Drive Elementary School. She has worked in the district for more than 20 years.



JOHNSON



PHOTOS BY ALAYSHA MAPLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

At Logan's Academy of Cosmetology, students learn both basics — color, cut, shape and so on — while also being given the freedom to explore their own styles and find themselves, both professionally and personally.



Janette Logan, owner/director and instructor of Logan's Academy of Cosmetology, has been in the industry for 40-plus years and is a graduate of the former Sumter Beauty College. She opened Logan's Academy to share her knowledge and passion for cosmetology with the next generation of creatives set to inherit the rewarding career field.

Beauty by the book and from the heart

Sumter beauty school owner shares knowledge, passion for beauty with next generation of cosmetologists

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysha@theitem.com

Very few professions allow you to reap benefits in real time. And it's not always monetary.

For Janette Logan, it comes in the form of a student's first confident haircut. A trembling hand going steadily. A whisper doused with pride, "Miss Janette, did you see that?" A classroom full of aspiring hair artists becoming professionals in real time.

At 61, Logan is the heart behind Sumter's newest and only cosmetology school, Logan's Academy of Cosmetology, a dream she carried for decades and brought to life against all odds, including a global pandemic.

"I often thought to myself, 'Who does this?'" she said, her smile giving way to soft laughter. "I said to my friend, 'Who opens a school during a pandemic?'" She

SEE **COSMETOLOGY**, PAGE A9

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COSMETOLOGY

FROM PAGE A8

said, 'Well, evidently, you do.'"

With more than 40 years in the beauty industry, Logan's journey began behind the chair in Clarendon County, transformed into barbering and eventually evolved into teaching. Her resume includes instructing at multiple schools across South Carolina before finally opening her dream school three years ago after Sumter Beauty College — the legacy institution where she once studied and taught — closed its doors.

Her face took on a warmer disposition as her mind drifted to the late Faye Smith. She reminisced on the impact the former Sumter Beauty College owner and instructor had on her and her life. How she poured into Logan and countless other students the knowledge and nurturing needed for this industry.

There are not many professions outside of medicine where you're licensed to care for someone through touch. In cosmetology, full-time students are licensed in 13 months while part-time can be in 18 months. It's a fast-growing industry, and Logan strives to keep educational entry into it affordable and inspiring.

Upon enrollment into Logan's Acade-

my, whether novice or expert to cosmetology, everyone goes back to the basics. The curriculum blends old-school discipline, from finger waves and jheri curls to pressing combs, with modern trends, from bold fashion colors to less chemically processed styles and electric flat irons. Logan remembers the days of little girls shaking in the vinyl beauty school styling chairs, a hair shorter than the student stylist chosen to pull the piping hot pressing comb through their thick tresses. It was hard to tell whose shoulders were raised in fear the most: the child or the student.

Which is why Logan and instructors at the academy believe in teaching cosmetology front to back, from then

until now. Whether it be hair, skin or nails, it all allows students to stare their fears in the face and realize "what you get is what you give," so give it your best. Many of the students, the majority just 17 when they enroll, arrive unsure and quiet, molded by a generation steeped in digital screens instead of face-to-face dialogue, Logan explained. Technology, though useful in keeping stu-

dents up on trends in the beauty and fashion industry, sparking their creativity and allowing them to market their skills to build clientele, can handicap communication.

"This profession is a people-person profession, and we rely on communicating a lot of times. Many times, if



Logan's Academy opened three years ago and currently serves as Sumter's only beauty school. The school has brought home many awards in its short time of being open, including the School of the Year award in 2024 at the Association of Cosmetology Salon Professionals competition in Myrtle Beach.



PHOTOS BY ALAYSHA MAPLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

Janette Logan, owner/director and instructor of Logan's Academy of Cosmetology, has been in the industry for 40-plus years and is a graduate of the former Sumter Beauty College. She opened Logan's Academy to share her knowledge and passion for cosmetology with the next generation of creatives set to inherit the rewarding career field.

the customer is not happy, it's because of lack of communication, so communication is key."

They may arrive quiet, but that's not how they leave, Logan assured.

In three years, 22 students have graduated from the local academy, boasting a 99% pass rate on the state boards. Logan sees many of her former students — loved as if they were her own — employed in salons, barbershops or running their own businesses. To see them prosper, both personally and professionally, emotionally and financially, to see folks around town sporting cuts, colors and smiles courtesy of her former pupil, it's priceless.

"It's a reward that money can't buy," she expressed. "This is the next generation of cosmetologists. Let's face it, we don't live forever. But what we can

do is pay it forward."

Going from the pupil to the instructor, she knows the ins and outs of what her students face, what they endure, what they dream for and what it takes to achieve it. Cosmetology may not be for everyone, but it's for a lot of us, Logan expressed. This is her means of paying it forward — and encouraged those interested to reap the benefits of it.

"To me, it's the best job in the world. It is, in all aspects, whether I'm cutting someone's hair or whether I'm teaching you to cut hair. Whether I'm showing you how to paint a nail and not get it on the skin or I'm actually painting nails, it's the best profession in the world," she said, a knowing smile growing on her face. "But of course, I'm a little biased."

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EDUCATION

FROM PAGE A5

He was referencing previous board member and Policy Committee Chairwoman Shery White, who, acting as an individual board member and not as a recommendation from the committee, introduced a policy motion against the grade floor for first reading to the full board on June 10, 2024. Ragin, a member of the Policy Committee at that time, said he took offense in that meeting to White's actions.

White said then she had received counsel from the South Carolina School Boards Association, state Department of Education and board attorney Allen Smith before pursuing the measure.

In the weeks in March and April while the school board was deliberating on the matter, the grade floor became a hot-button issue in the community and on social media.

ZELL, PEDALINO INTRODUCE BILLS TO PROHIBIT GRADE FLOORS ACROSS S.C.

In response to Sumter school board's actions, Sumter County delegation members introduced companion bills in both chambers of the General Assembly to prohibit grade floors in South Carolina public school districts.



ZELL



PEDALINO

In early April, state Sen. Jeff Zell (R-Sumter) and Rep. Fawn Pedalino (R-Manning) sponsored new proposed legislation in the state Senate and House of Representatives, respectively, that does not allow districts to require teachers to assign a minimum grade or score that exceeds the student's actual performance.

This spring at both the committee level and full board level, Sumter school board members discussed and tried to reinstate a 50% quarterly grade floor for students after the previous board removed the floor in 2024. Zell was a member of that board and was against the minimum grading policy and said it enabled mediocrity and was against

the concept of work ethic.

In the November 2024 general election, he won the state Senate 36 seat and had to resign from the school board.

Zell told *The Sumter Item* on April 10 he delayed introducing his bill for about a month because he wanted the local school board to do the right thing, in his opinion, and not reinstate the grade floor.

In the year-plus discussion of the 50% floor in the district's grading manual, community members who spoke in public participation at board meetings overwhelmingly were against the policy, saying it did not hold students accountable or promote excellence.

Additionally, a district teacher survey administered last year showed that 83% of teachers were against the minimum grading policy.

Those trustees in favor of the 50% floor contested that the survey was sent to all district users and other employees might have completed it, even though it specifically stated only teachers were to respond. They also said a single respondent could have submitted a survey multiple times.

After the full board voted in first-reading approval to reinstate the grade floor on March 24, Zell proceeded to introduce his bill on April 3.

"I wanted to give the school district the opportunity to make the right choice, and earnestly I did," he said. "I had a lingering feeling that they would not because the ones that are proponents of this in Sumter schools are dogmatic in their approach to it. They will not relinquish, and this is a hill they are going to die on. That's fine."

"But I can't, in good conscience, sit back and hear the will of the people online and in phone calls, emails and face-to-face conversations overwhelmingly opposing this thing for reasons that I think are absolutely justified and allow this school district to just pretend that the voice of the people is not being spoken."

To the surprise of many, including Zell, Sumter's board did not pass reinstating the grade floor at second and final reading on April 7, given a 4-4 tie vote with one abstention.

Both bills were at the committee

stage in mid-April and will need hearings before they can go back to the full chambers for full deliberation and votes, he said.

Companion bills streamline the entire deliberation process because they go through the chambers in tandem, Zell added.

In the deliberation process, amendments are often added to bills, and Zell said he is fine with that as long as the intent and desired results of the bill remain intact.

This year is the first of a two-year session for the General Assembly, and if the proposed legislation is not passed now, it would not have to be reintroduced next year.

WILSON HALL SENIOR NAMED NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

Wilson Hall senior Sara Helen Simmons achieved one of the highest honors for a high school student in the U.S. when she was named a National Merit Scholarship award winner in late March.



SIMMONS

The recognition only goes to about 7,140 high school seniors in the nation annually, and she is the first student to reach the finalist level at the rigorous, private college-preparatory school in seven years.

Simmons will attend Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, in the fall and has career aspirations to become a neurosurgeon, she said.

Simmons is a top five student in Wilson Hall's senior class of 52 students with a 5.36 weighted GPA, which is a 4.0 on the traditional scale. She also scored a 35 on the ACT out of a maximum of 36.

CENTRAL CAROLINA TECHNICAL COLLEGE PRESIDENT TO RETIRE JUNE 30

Central Carolina Technical College President Kevin Pollock has announced his retirement, effective June 30.



POLLOCK

A lifelong educator and the head of the college since January 2021, Pollock shared his decision at a special-called meeting of CCTC's Area Commission on April 2.

"It has been a privilege and honor to serve as president of Central Carolina Technical College for the past four-and-a-half years," he said. "My years here have been incredibly rewarding, and I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside such an amazing Titan community."

Among the college's accomplishments during his four-plus-year tenure, CCTC has added a new, \$39 million Academic and Student Services Building projected to open for the fall semester in August. The three-story facility was paid for entirely by state funding.

For Pollock, Central Carolina is the third college where he has served as president. He remains committed to ensuring a smooth handover to CCTC's next leader, Pollock said.

The Area Commission is determining next steps, and more details about the transition process will be shared in the coming months, according to a college news release.

MORRIS OFFICIALS HOLD INVESTITURE CEREMONY FOR NEW PRESIDENT

Morris College Board of Trustees, alumni and staff held the official investiture, or installation, ceremony for new college President Said Sewell on April 4 on the campus grounds.



SEWELL

Investiture services are a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages and in more modern terms mark a new chapter of leadership for a college or university.

"This investiture signals a new day for our beloved college," Morris board Chairman Phillip Baldwin said. "Today marks a new era in academic, intellectual and spiritual leadership of an institution that has stood for more than 117 years and has in a myriad of ways shaped the course of our nation's history."

The ceremony included music and speeches from a multitude of people including Morris staff, the college's student body president and even Sewell's family priest and childhood spiritual mentor.

An ordained minister himself, Sewell began his position at the college on July 1, 2024, and is the HBCU's 11th president.

Entertainment

'Angel' is one of the greatest TV series of all time

In the early 2000s, Warner Brothers established a small channel outlet simply labeled "WB." At one point, it was a station that highlighted an underrated series which paved the way for the experience that is modern television today.

Joss Whedon's creative genius became recognized with his ability at crafting unique, powerful and emotional story lines featuring an ensemble array of characters without losing the importance of their impactful development. Before reaching the stratosphere of success with Marvel's "Avengers" and its sequel "Avengers: Age of Ultron," he brought



Isaiah Ridley

forth two influential supernatural series with massive fan bases, spin-off comics, video games and fan-fiction sites. The first was "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," with its spin-off "Angel."

The character of Angel portrayed by David Boreanaz first appeared as a mysterious ally to vampire slayer Buffy Summers in her battle against the forces of evil via vampires, demons and other mythological beings threatening the sanctity of Sunnydale's existence. Revelations unveil Angel is an 18th-century vampire from Ireland. His centuries as a soulless vampire made him a legend for his known brutality and sadistic nature. During his chaotic spree, he slaughtered a blessed ancient Traveller. As punishment for his crime, he became cursed with a human soul, granting centuries of internal torment filled with guilt, pain and a constant reminder of his past deeds. Using his newly acquired soul, he begins a journey of atonement as a champion in battle of good versus evil.

I have to say to understand the expanded story line of Angel, it is imperative to watch "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" before venturing into its related



Actors David Boreanaz, left, and James Marsters, who star in The WB's thriller series "Angel," pose for a photo on the set of the show Sept. 29, 2003, in Los Angeles.

AP FILE PHOTO

spin-off series. "Angel" and "Buffy" go off on their separate ways, with Angel transitioning to Los Angeles, initially working as a reclusive private investigator. The first season of "Angel" has alumni members from "Buffy" joining the cast with Charisma Carpenter as Cordelia Chase allying herself with Angel. Both characters find an ally in a half-demon/human named Doyle who uses his premonition-like visions in assisting Angel in helping the helpless.

"Angel" in comparison with "Buffy" became more of a preference for me on an emotional and thematic level. Its darker story lines; deep, intriguing characters; and the raw acting combined with genius writing made far more memorable episodes having a re-watchable factor. Eventually Angel and Cordelia gain an ally from another "Buffy" alumni cast member with Alexis Denisof portraying Wesley Wyndam-Pryce, an English scholar/hunter from the Watcher's Council. Whedon excelled with each season having more personal stakes and at the same time exploring impending apocalyptic themes challenging Angel physically, emotionally and even spiritually, considering he is a creature of the night with a human soul. It is diffi-

cult to create stories focusing on multiple characters without one or the other losing their importance to the actual plot. Whedon successfully weaves masterful character development of everyone experiencing a level of dramatic change.

It becomes more apparent with Angel's journey expanding into personal and painful themes in the second, third and fourth seasons. I still have memories of how the series became a family event in the Ridley household every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. My mother, father and I would record each episode, never missing one during its syndicated run. The third and fourth seasons are the pinnacle of excellent writing, acting, atmosphere and apocalyptic themes with more characters introduced, making the series fire on all cylinders.

One of the greatest character transformations is on full display with Wyndam-Pryce as he grows from being a whimsical and pompous hindrance to a far more ruthless, dangerous and intense member of Angel Investigations. This is all in part due to the wonderful acting of underrated actor Denisof. I cannot stress enough how shocking it is that he has yet to receive any signifi-

cant roles in the world of cinema. He is a wonderfully gifted actor capable of conveying every range of emotion.

All the actors and actresses involved give powerful performances that can, will and have moved viewing audiences like me to tears. What makes the series special is Whedon's fearlessness in exploring the darker reflections of complicated themes. One episode tackled a harsh topic of domestic violence, and another homed in on religious concepts and even child/parent relationships. Considering the series' early 2000s period run, it had the ability to present rough and complicated topics without the concern of controversy.

The series ran for five seasons as one of the most popular and highest-rated shows on the WB network before cancellation. Its fifth season ended on an exciting cliffhanger, prompting Whedon to continue the aftermath in a spin-off comic book titled "Angel: After the Fall." Angel was the first television series I remember becoming emotionally invested in from the beginning after my father mentioned it to me in passing one evening.

Boreanaz exhibits the ability to convey innocence, shyness, determination and viciousness, which make Angel relatable and even realistic. Its ensemble cast of Carpenter, Denisof, J. August Richards, Amy Acker, Vincent Kartheiser and James Marsters solidified "Angel" as one of the greatest, most underrated and exciting series that should have had one more season to complete the story.

It will always remain a favorite series of mine which I highly recommend to anyone interested in vampires, monster of the week and supernatural mythology combined with a serious and atmospheric approach without apologies. Whedon's creative and artistic genius is another reason he deserves acclaim as a visionary. The series has it all with drama, horror, action, comedy, suspense, interesting and unique characters, intelligent writing and haunting atmospherics, making it one of the greatest television series of all time.

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

Enjoy everything these spring weekends will bring in Sumter

Love shrimp? This feast's for you. Sumter Museum's 23th-annual **Shrimp Feast** featuring shrimp prepared a variety of ways is returning from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday, April 24, at the museum, 122 N. Washington St. Tickets are \$50 members; \$75 non-members. Purchase tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/432t2szp>. Also, don't miss out on the museum's Silent Auction in McKenzie Hall. Bid on incredible items and take home something special. Also, try your luck in the 50/50 drawing — winner takes half the pot.



Support veterans through the Wounded Warrior Project and Air Force Wounded Warrior Program and get some exercise at the same time at the **Wounded Warrior 5K** at Patriot Park. Race day is Saturday, April 26, beginning at 8 a.m. with check-in at

the park at 380 General Drive. Race begins at 9 a.m. The first 300 total participants who register will receive a T-shirt, Wounded Warrior bracelets, bib and Fleet Feet of Augusta goody bag. All money from signups will go toward the two veterans' projects. Register for \$30 at <https://tinyurl.com/2psfve6s>.

It's time to start planning float entries for the **Sumter Iris Festival Parade**. This year's parade will be held Saturday, May 17, at 10 a.m. with the theme "Purple Wonder." If your school, civic club, church or business would like an application, please visit irisfestival.org, or contact Gail Hyatt at (803) 983-3916, or via email, gailhyatt@sc.rr.com. Deadline for entry is Friday, April 25. The parade kicks off the weekend days of the **annual Iris Festival**, held each year in



May. This year's festival falls earlier, before Memorial Day weekend, and includes four days of good food, plenty of shopping opportunities, games and rides for the kids and the young at heart, plants to beautify your garden and much more. It all begins with the annual Taste at the Gardens on Thursday, May 15. Look for more information on the annual event at <https://tinyurl.com/bdhtv48y>.

ArtFields will turn Lake City into an art gallery from April 25 to May 3. The annual event will include a plethora of events, classes and chances to enjoy the town, the artwork and the community. More than 40 venues are open each day of the festival from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. except Sunday, when viewing hours are 1 to 6 p.m. Artwork from artists across the Southeast will be displayed, including from Sumter and the sur-

rounding area. There will be Makers Market days, a portrait contest, live music, competition artwork on display, artist talks and much more. For more information and updates on the Art Fields schedule, visit artfieldssc.org.

Pinewood's **BirdFest** is scheduled for Friday, May 2, and Saturday, May 3, at the beautiful South Carolina Waterfowl Association Wildlife Education Center at 8444 Old River Road with a lineup that has something for everyone. This year's lineup includes Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder, Della Mae, Fireside Collective, Chatham Rabbits, Holler Choir, Stoneface Mountain, Cosmic Possum and the festival's host band, Steep Canyon Rangers. Food and drink vendors will offer a variety of goods for attendees including barbecue, coffee, seafood and pizza. Bounce houses, zip lines, face painting and a petting zoo are all free kids' events for ticketholders, and kids 12 and under are admitted for free.

SEE **EVENTS**, PAGE A15

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EVENTS FROM PAGE A14

Tickets can be purchased at <https://birdfestmusic.com/buy-tickets>. For the camping or glamping sorts, there are options to purchase a spot for an RV or a tent at the URL. Tickets are only available online and are liable to sell out.

Bring your favorite colorful kite, a picnic basket and lawn chairs to enjoy a day out for a good cause. Phase Three Center will host its second **Kite Festival** at Patriot Park, 380 General Drive, Field 6, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on May 3. The festival will raise awareness of National Foster Care Awareness Month and "have a little fun in the meantime," said Elanda Ross, president and director of the center.

Dig your '80s sweaters, socks and hairspray out to dress up for the Palmetto Optimist Club's **Microbrew Festival** on Saturday, May 10. The theme is Rockin' the '80s, and the event will kick off in downtown Sumter's Rotary Plaza. Bad Water will play hits from the era, and you can stroll through downtown to different host

locations for food and beers provided by Yahnis while enjoying the '80s vibe in costume. There will be a contest for best costume, complete with prizes. Guests can also vote for their favorite host location decorations. Snag the early bird rate of \$35 until April 30. After that, the fee is \$40 until the festival or \$45 at the door. Military members and seniors get a \$5 discount. Buy tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/4sk84u8k>.

The 15th-annual **Daffodil Arts and Crafts Show** will be held May 17-18 in the Fair Memorial Building, 30 Artillery Drive. Hours will be 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday and noon-4 p.m. Sunday. The event will support K.A.T.S Special Kneads, Toys for Tots, Pack 339, Troops 339 and Second Chance Animal Shelter. Free parking and free admission. Please bring non-perishable food items for Sumter United Ministries. Three items get your name entered into a drawing for a \$25 giftcard. The craft/vendor lists includes A&R Crafts, Bows & More, Cornerstone Creations, Crafts by Madi, Dan's Woodworks, Debbie's Birdfeeders, Donna's Arts and Crafts, Embellished Art Decor, Everything Paper, Haley

Brooke Design's, K.A.T.S Special Kneads, Kit's Handmade Baskets, LGM Crafts, Pack 339, Reeca's Gifts, RK Art, Scentsy Independent consultant, The Hickory Nut, TLEC Creations, Tree of Liberty Crafts and Troop 339. The event is sponsored by K.A.T.S Special Kneads Small Animal Shelter, 3845 Highway 15 N., Sumter, (803) 469-3906. For more information, call Debra at (803) 983-3235.

Don't miss all the horse shows, delicious food, line dancing and much more at the 28th-annual **Black Cowboy Festival**, which will be held May 22-25 on the land of Greenfield Farm in Rembert. The three-day event is organized and promoted by the non-profit Black Cultural Enlightenment Society and is hosted by Mark and Sandra Myers. The festival teaches the community about the lives of Black cowboys and their legacy through educational shows, entertainment and cultural appreciation. You can buy tickets at BlackCowboyFestival.net for the different events held within the festival, such as a fish fry, Western Dinner and Dance, rodeos, Motown Dance and more. You can also buy a 3- or 4-day week-

end pass to enjoy the whole festival.

CLARENDON COUNTY

The **Annual Clarendon County Master Gardeners' Tomato Sale** will be held from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Good Friday, April 18, at the Land, Parker & Welch Courtyard near the corner of West Keitt and South Mill streets, Manning. Dozens of tomato plant varieties will be on sale including popular heirloom varieties. Shop early for the best selection of tomato plants including Sun Gold, Verona, Brandy Wine, Big Beef, Cherokee Purple and Juliet Roma.

The **Annual Clarendon County Master Gardeners' Plant Sale** will be held from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Friday, May 2, and from 9 a.m. until noon on Saturday, May 3, at the Land, Parker & Welch Courtyard near the corner of West Keitt and South Mill street, Manning. Stan the "Citrus Man" will be on hand answering questions and suggesting the best varieties for planting area. Annuals, perennials and "pass-along" plants will be on sale. Hundreds of plants will be on sale, but don't wait. The best varieties sell out fast.



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Business



Jewelry pieces are displayed at Galloway and Moseley Jewelers recently. Galloway and Moseley celebrates 90 years of business in 2025.



Hearts on Fire pieces are available at Galloway and Moseley Jewelers.

Galloway and Moseley celebrates legacy of *love, craft* and *community*

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysa@theitem.com

There's a burgundy bag in Sumter that makes hearts skip. It's not flashy or loud. In fact, it's quite simple — elegant even. But for generations of families in Sumter and surrounding areas, that bag holds far more than fine jewelry.

It holds trust. Love. Legacy.

And this April, Galloway and Moseley Fine Jewelers celebrates a resounding 90 years in business — Sumter's oldest jewelry store. Nine decades of polishing engagement rings, repairing heirlooms and helping customers say "I love you" without uttering a single word.

The Galloway & Moseley jewelry firm, initially at 36 S. Main St., was opened April 12, 1935, by founders G. Moseley and J.D. Galloway.

Over time, the business has been handed over from generation to generation,

and now Britton Moseley, son of G.B. Moseley, carries half of the family's legacy on his shoulders.

Britton chuckled softly when asked about his start. He remembers being a little boy in the original store downtown, crawling around on the shop floor looking for scraps of gold. If he found one, he'd pocket it, fueled by the excitement that he was "rich."

"Of course, I always had to give it back," he said, laughing lightly.

SEE 90 YEARS, PAGE A17

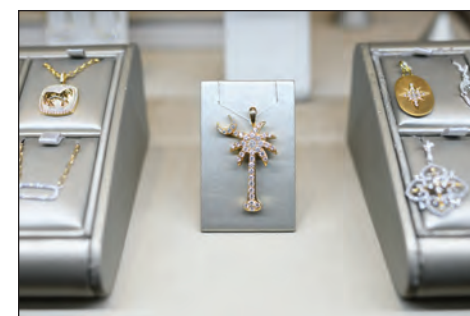


Danny Chandler and Britton Moseley, co-owners, pose for a portrait inside Galloway and Moseley Jewelers on Monday, April 7.

PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM



Tim Hipkins works on a custom ring at Galloway and Moseley Jewelers, also using a microscope, below.



90 YEARS FROM PAGE A16

As he aged, he'd take on various responsibilities, from cleaning glass cases and making bows for the gift wrap department to being a pivotal player in the store's migration in 1980 to its current 444 N. Guignard Drive location and the landscaping of the storefront. This move would be a defining moment for the business — going from leasing to owning a brick-and-mortar — and Britton.

"There's a place for you here," his father told him. When it was time to get serious about a career, Britton attended Gemological Institute of America to study gemology and take his place within the family business as owner and vice president.

The other half of the jewelry store's partnership rests on the shoulders of Danny Chandler. Hired by G.B. Moseley, Chandler has spent 51 of the store's 90 years learning different aspects of the business, from crafting jewelry and setting diamonds to working on the bench and making sales to now being owner and president.

The pair have been equals in the business since 1996 and, together, expanded the store's sparkle into Florence nearly 20 years ago in 2006. Both businesses have maintained the same quality collections, cuts and customer service they were founded on, Chandler explained.

While diamonds may be forever, the jewelry industry is not without its changes. The biggest shift has been technology. The business is highly regarded for its custom jewelry, and many of the wax molds, once upon a time, were carved by hand. Today, customers can come with printed pictures or vague ideas of what they desire and through 3D-printed molds, steady hands and pure pizzazz from staff storewide walk away with unique pieces that will become the focal point of many precious memories.

But what hasn't changed is the commitment to service. Bringing new folks into the firm to work the floor, man the shop and carry the nearly century-old legacy forward is not taken lightly by Britton or Chandler. Employees are held to high standards, ones they are eager to meet and exceed. Not for the praise or the perks. But to be part of serving third- and fourth-generation customers who seek out their inventory to add a sparkle to their special moments.



PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Danny Chandler and Britton Moseley are co-owners of Galloway and Moseley Jewelers. Galloway and Moseley celebrates 90 years of business in 2025.



Iris Festival returns a bit earlier this year

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN

deirdre@theitem.com

Sumter is home to the longest-running festival in South Carolina, which is, of course, the Iris Festival.

Surrounded by beautiful irises cared for by Master Gardeners and the scenic natural beauty of the gardens and water, the Sumter Iris Festival is not one you want to miss.

In Sumter's idealistic Swan Lake Iris Gardens, the festival is seen as one of Sumter's best, but this year there will be one change. Even when the festival began back in 1940, it was on Memorial Day weekend, but this year, the iconic festival will take place the weekend before from May 16 to May 18.

The date shift follows changes to the dates of the school year, said City of Sumter Communications and Tourism Director Shelley Kile. If the festival took place on its usual weekend, it would have coincided with five graduations, spreading Sumter's police department thin and affecting volunteers who had celebrations to attend. With the new date, not only will it be more convenient for the public, but it will also allow city employees and volunteers to have the holiday weekend off for the first time.

For those who don't know, the Iris Festival is one of the biggest festivals in Sumter, with a large focus on the arts. One of the city's stipulations of use for acquiring Swan Lake Iris Gardens was to never charge an entrance fee, so the Iris Festival is completely free. In fact, it's completely possible to enjoy the day without spending any money, as only purchasing from vendors costs guests



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS

The annual Iris Festival will return this year a bit earlier, starting May 16.

money. The musical entertainment, games and rides are all free. The festival is also the only time the city offers boat rides on Swan Lake, and even that is free.

On the topic of vendors, there will be more than 150 to choose from, coming from not only Sumter, but other states as well. These will be selling various

items including art, crafted goods, toys and artisan food. And, of course, what's a festival without food?

A variety of good eats will be available to choose from, including Thai food, Mexican cuisine, barbecue, popcorn, and there will even be a coffee food truck.

For the first time, the festival will feature a large tent with seating, providing shade for those who need a second to sit down or a cool place to eat.

The festival is so old, one of the only times it was canceled was during World War II, so it has seen a lot of iterations throughout its life, but some things have stayed the same. For example, the parade. On Saturday at 10 a.m., the festival will have its traditional parade. Sponsored by Palmetto Optimist Club, the pa-

rade will start at USC Sumter and travel down Miller Road to Liberty Street heading toward Sumter County Civic Center.

In the past, the festival has had certain rides on certain days, but this year, to quell any disappointment from missing a certain attraction, the festival will have all rides and games for the whole weekend. There will be something for everyone, including a large foam play structure for the littlest of children, an activity trailer from Department of Natural Resources, a dunk tank, skee ball machine, basketball hoops, a large rock-climbing wall and jungle gym.

The festival will also coincide with the Moonless International Film Festival on May 18, which may become an annual event. You can catch some of the actors and actresses who were part of the film festival in the parade.

Every year, the Iris Festival showcases an art and that discipline's local artists. This year, it will be the literary arts, and local authors will be available to read excerpts from, sell and sign their books.

Though the official dates for the festival are May 16-18, it will kick off on the night of Thursday, May 15, at 6 p.m. with "Taste at the Gardens." The event was described by Kile as a "foodie event" where there will only be food vendors

and local chefs serving up dishes. Entertainment for the night will be DJ Howie D, and there will be the crowning of the king and queen of the Iris Festival.

The crowning of the king and queen of the Iris Festival is also traditional. Two seniors — one female and one male — from every high school in the county are nominated by the schools. All of the nominees get scholarship money, but the king and queen of the Iris Festival will get the most with \$500 in scholarship money.

If one thing is true, it's that the Iris Festival has a lot to offer its attendees this year. Go to <https://tinyurl.com/bdhtv48y> to learn even more about the three-day celebration.



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PHOTOS PROVIDED

Sumter Speed is teaching more field events this spring, including the long jump.

Next Level Athletics continues to build athlete opportunities for local youth

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

When Rip Ripley founded Next Level Athletics in 2022, his goal was simple. He wanted to open doorways into athletics for local youth and help spark growth in various sports. That mission has never changed, but Ripley is always trying to find ways to grow as an organization.

Ripley took a different approach to

AAU basketball this season. In the past, NLA has traveled to the state's biggest tournaments every weekend, but Ripley didn't feel like his athletes were getting the bang for their buck on that circuit.

"With a lot of these younger kids and in the world today with recruiting and NIL (Name, Image and Likeness) and transfer portal and all these things with older kids, yes, you have these big-time tournaments, like in Rock Hill where these big companies come in, Big Shots, Phenom, etc., will come in and host tournaments," Ripley said. "And the Rock Hill Sports Complex is phenomenal, but unless you're one of the top 17 teams, you're playing in Indian Land's aux gym. We



The Next Level 15U AAU girls basketball team, coached by Brittany Lee, back left, and Demetress Adams-Ludd, back right, finished in second during their first tournament of the spring over the first weekend of April.

did it last year, and we were like, 'What are we doing? Why are we traveling, spending the weekend, doing all this stuff to play over here? Why don't we focus on doing stuff more local?'"

So that's what Ripley decided to do.

Next Level is staying a little closer to home this spring and focusing on making better basketball players first and foremost. They played their first tournament in Columbia the first weekend

SEE **NEXT LEVEL**, PAGE A21

NEXT LEVEL

FROM PAGE A20

in April and found great success, including a second-place finish with their 15U girls.

“It’s more family friendly, it’s more pocket-friendly, it’s easier on the kids. So we took a step back and realized we didn’t need to play 100 games a year. The kids want to play games. They would play open gym every weekend, all weekend if we let them, but we need to develop our skills,” Ripley said. “Especially with our younger groups, but even up into our ninth-, 10th- and 11th-grade groups, we’ve really focused on fundamentals.

“The coolest thing that I’m excited about is we play our tournaments. We’ll probably end up playing four tournaments throughout the year. All will be semi-local, but every Sunday afternoon, we’re strictly doing skills.”

Basketball has seen some excellent growth at Next Level. They started with one team four years ago, and they now have a total of eight boys and girls teams in various age groups. That growth has been driven by an influx of incredible local coaches who are willing to work together to see the area’s development continue to improve. The 15U team has a pair of local former stars teaming up, as East Clarendon head coach Demetress Adams-Ludd coaches alongside Sumter High assistant Brittany Lee (Starling). On the boys side, three SCISA head coaches are in the mix. Along with Ripley, Laurence Manning’s Patrick Anderson and Thomas Sumter’s TJ Green are helping to guide different age groups. Sumter High assistant Dione Coleman is also in the mix. Eric Watford, a former AAU coach who is new to the Sumter area, was added to the fold this year to help mentor coaches and develop the skills of the athletes.

“We’ve got a phenomenal coaching staff. I’m really impressed with the



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Next Level AAU basketball plays in the Wilson Hall gym.

group we’ve been able to pull together to pour into these kids,” Ripley said. “You have a lot of high school coaches, so we’re all pretty like-minded with what our goals are. We’re very careful to make sure they’re not coaching their own kids in AAU, and that makes it even better because we’re helping each other out. I’m coaching your kids, you’re coaching my kids, we obviously want both of our kids to get better, so for that to happen, I have to coach them up.

“You’ve got a lot of the local schools represented in our coaching staff, and it’s really cool the way it’s come together.”

In the winter, basketball was strictly focused on skills. Players were busy with

their school, YMCA and Parks and Rec seasons — as were the gyms at their various schools — so NLA wanted to focus on clinics.

“We do a lot of youth clinics, so our goal this winter was to kind of supplement what the kids are getting as parts of the Y and PARD because their leagues are more game-focused; they don’t get weekly practices and things anymore. We had our weekly clinics in

January where we would meet on Sunday afternoons and just do skills. There was no game play; it was strictly skill development.”

The spring season also includes plenty of track and field with Sumter Speed. The organization has after-school programs at a growing number of schools in the area, including Alice Drive, Millwood, Liberty, Westside Christian, Thomas Sumter and Wilson Hall. There is also one community group for any young athlete who is interested in joining. The after-school programs have roughly doubled in size since last year. Those programs run in the fall and spring but this year have some fun additions. Sumter Speed is working to implement more field events into the mix so kids can learn the fundamentals of the main jumps, along with some of the throwing events.

“What we focused the after-school part on was running and conditioning. We go two days a week, and one is more endurance-based, and one is more speed-based. This year, we’re offering a series of six different field clinic days, and we host those at Wilson Hall,” Ripley said. “All the kids are invited. The last two Sundays we’ve had them, we had about 85 kids there each week, and that’s where we’re going to teach how to do long jump, how to do javelin, relay handoffs, things like that.

“Our hope is that this is a great thing to set the foundation.”

The eight-week spring program is nearing its end. Everything will culminate with a track meet at Wilson Hall on April 26. They’ll have four events, a

mile for distance, a 100m dash for a sprint, the long jump and the javelin. Kids can take part in as many of those four events as they’d like, and ribbons will be given out afterward. There will also be a 4x100 relay for fun to cap things off.

“We found that it was easier to streamline things for the kids and the parents,” Ripley said. “They’re new to track and field; they don’t know if their kid needs to be running the 200 or the 400. I think it’s important to show the options they have.”

After the spring meet, prep begins for the summer. Sumter Speed will give their athletes a week to cool down before taking part in the United States Track and Field circuit. Athletes will be able to compete in a few meets leading up to the state meet, where qualifiers will have the chance to play against some of the nation’s top talent in regional and national meets. Luckily, those larger meets will actually be closer to home this summer.

“The regionals this year are actually in South Carolina, which is super exciting, and I think the nationals this year are in Greensboro, which is much more doable than Texas, like it was last year,” Ripley said. “It really is a year that lines up for potentially continuing competing as they go through the year.”

Anyone interested in the programs at Next Level Athletics, which also include flag football, cross country and volleyball, can find more information at the organization’s website, nextlevelathleticssc.com.



Sumter Speed is teaching more field events this spring, including the long jump.



Former Manning, S.C. State star Smith sets eyes on NFL Draft

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

Former Manning line-backer Aaron “Boog” Smith saw it all during his collegiate career at South Carolina State.

His journey to Orangeburg started with COVID-19, and ever since that lost season, the Bulldog linebacker has been in the lab honing his craft.

As a senior, Smith led the team and

Former Manning and South Carolina State linebacker Aaron Smith drew comparisons to another former Bulldog, Shaq Leonard, from NFL Network personality Steve Wyche.

COURTESY OF SOUTH CAROLINA STATE ATHLETICS

MEAC with 95 tackles, while adding 8.5 tackles for a loss, a pick and a forced fumble. He helped lead the Bulldogs to a 9-3 record and a spot in the Cricket Celebration Bowl, where he went off on the national stage. Smith set a new career high with 17 tackles in this final game at S.C. State and added a stop in the backfield for good measure. Now, he’s hoping his senior year will propel him to every football player’s dream: the National Football League.

Ever since taking his final collegiate snap, Smith has received invitations to major senior showcases, talked with NFL teams and tried to catch the eye of evaluators from across the league.

“It’s just a blessing. I give all praise to the Lord because without him, I wouldn’t make it this far,” Smith said. “It hasn’t been overwhelming. The overwhelming part of this process for me was getting ready for pro day. That was where I felt the most stress. Since the pro day has

been over, I’m not free, but I’m free of the pressure. I went out there and did what I needed to do. Now the rest of it is in God’s hands. I did what I can control, so now I’m just waiting. I’m blessed to be even in this process and have interest from teams.”

Smith started his journey to the draft in Tampa, Florida, where he trained with Yo Murphy Performance. The former Monarch was rehabbing a quad injury, so his first priority was getting healthy enough to show off his skills at the South Carolina State pro day. Smith received invitations to both the East-West Shrine Bowl — where former Sumter High and South Carolina defensive back O’Donnell Fortune was named the defensive MVP — and the HBCU Legacy Bowl but couldn’t take part in football activities as he recovered from his injury. Still, he went to the

SEE **DRAFT**, PAGE A23



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DRAFT

 FROM PAGE A22

Shrine Bowl and met with NFL personnel and had some great meetings.

"A lot of it was that I was probably a little undersized," Smith said of the main talking points with teams. "They wanted to see how fast I could run in the 40. They talked about my linear speed, but they wanted to see how fast I could move in the 40 and move through my drills."

Smith finally had the chance to show off his athleticism at the S.C. State pro day on March 18. While teams questioned his size, Smith measured in at 6'2", 230 pounds and had some great performances at the pro day. He ran the 40-yard dash in 4.58 seconds and showed off a 35" vertical leap and a broad jump of 10'3". He had a 4.37 short shuttle and 7.12 three-cone drill and ripped off 25 reps of 225 pounds on the bench. After he wrapped up, Smith had a chance to meet with a few teams again.

"I actually sat down with the Jets, and we talked for about an hour, an hour and a half," Smith said. "I talked with the Chargers, the Houston Texans.



COURTESY OF SOUTH CAROLINA STATE ATHLETICS

Former Manning and South Carolina State linebacker Aaron Smith (11) led the MEAC in tackles this fall with 95.

"They told me I showed them everything that they were expecting out of me and, in a few aspects, I kinda did better than what they thought. I felt good about my performance."

Despite coming from a smaller

school, Smith hasn't just been flying under the radar. Maybe the most impressive was getting a shoutout from Steve Wyche on the NFL Network.

"The comparisons to Darius 'Shaq' Leonard, who also played at S.C. State, (they're) very similar," Wyche said in late March. "You talk about speed, that's what he has. Coverage-ability, speed, he also arrives with some thump; it's just that he does not have that ideal interior linebacker size. We'll see if he puts that on heading into the draft."

Smith was also graded at 80.6 by Pro Football Focus for his performance as a senior.

While the former Monarch isn't trying to pay too much attention to headlines, he was happy to get a shout on the NFL Network.

"I actually didn't see it when it first got posted," Smith said. "To see it and hear it, it felt kinda good to know there's someone out there watching me and giving me high praise. They actually see me. I'm not just invisible out here in this draft pool. Somebody put some respect on my name."

While Smith has drawn comparisons to Leonard, who was also a South Carolina native before playing at S.C.

State and being drafted by the Indianapolis Colts in the second round of the 2018 draft, the former Manning star turned to more recent graduates for advice.

"It's just a blessing to follow behind guys that paved the way, and to be the next guy is absolutely a blessing," Smith said. "I definitely talk to (former S.C. State and current Atlanta Falcons defensive back) Antonio Hamilton and (Los Angeles Rams defensive back) Cobie Durant. He got drafted in 2022, and I actually played with him his senior year. That's big bro to me, so I call him fairly often just to pick his brain, ask him questions just to see any information he has to help me."

Now, Smith just has to wait and see if his name is called. He'll be at home with his family watching the draft April 24-26 and expects to hear his name called on the third day. If it's not, he knows he'll be scooped up pretty quickly after the draft.

"The earliest I may hear my name called is the fifth based on some draft grades from some teams," Smith said. "If I go undrafted, it's going to be like a bidding war. That's pretty much what I've been hearing."

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Art



MICAH GREEN / SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Dominique Hodge gives instruction during his Fantastic Beasts and Superheroes Art Camp at the Sumter County Gallery of Art in 2019.

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AI continues to grow, but how could it affect local artists?

Area artist and Sumter gallery curator share thoughts on tech trend

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN
deirdre@theitem.com

The use of artificial intelligence for artistic renderings, research and writings has been a hot topic for a couple years now.

It seems like every day there is a new piece of AI technology, and that can be hard to navigate. In artist spaces, AI has especially become a topic of discussion — both positive and negative.

For local Manning artist Dominique Hodge, AI lacks the emotion and intention his art requires.

“I’ve been working in the arts most of my adult life; it’s really all I’ve ever wanted to do, honestly,” Hodge said.

SEE AI, PAGE A25



PHOTO PROVIDED

Dominique Hodge’s artwork has been featured in the Upstairs Gallery at USC Sumter and Sumter County Gallery of Art.

‘Seeing this AI concept come into play, it’s interesting because you think about something that you’ve always dreamed of doing, all you’ve ever wanted to do, and now you have people who have never thought about art like, ‘oh, well, we could just mass produce it.’

DOMINIQUE HODGE

Manning artist

AI FROM PAGE A24

“Seeing this AI concept come into play, it’s interesting because you think about something that you’ve always dreamed of doing, all you’ve ever wanted to do, and now you have people who have never thought about art like, ‘oh, well, we could just mass produce it.’”

Hodge is a visual artist whose art has a focus on afrofuturism. Looking at older science fiction and fantasy media, which Hodge frequents, there is a lack of Black characters or just one “token” Black character. Afrofuturism is an artistic style that pulls from the past but also places Black people in the future, showing that “we are all-encompassing,” Hodge said.

“It seems like Hollywood has always had a way of removing us from pictures and artwork, for that matter,” Hodge remarked.

It wasn’t until college that Hodge saw Black people represented in art. Now, he makes his own afrofuturistic art that focuses on the Black experience, not just in the modern day, but as it transcends time and space.

The bottom line is, Hodge has spent a while building his style, working to perfect it and his concepts. He saw a future exempt of Black people and built something different. That is why he teaches elementary art, so students don’t have to wait until college to see themselves represented in the art world.

Now, AI can make art in seconds. Carefully thought-out concepts like Hodge’s can become a reality almost immediately. Some even think of AI art as art theft.

“I know that there’s all sorts of people who feel very strongly vehemently against artificial intelligence, especially in the arts, and I can absolutely appreciate their concern, their worry,” Curator and Assistant Director of Sumter County Gallery of Art Eric Lachance said. “You know, some of the bad things are that it’s learning through material that is posted online, so it’s appropriating people’s words, essentially, to train this large model. So, from a perspective of plagiarizing, I can absolutely appreciate the worry, the anger, coming from creatives who

have seen that they’re essentially teaching artificial intelligence without the permission granted.”

But for Lachance, and even Hodge, there is a different side to AI. Both have heard from artists about how AI can be used as a tool. Maybe an artist does not know how a concept would look and needs a jump start. Lachance said a

photographer told him he used ChatGPT to help him title his showcase that was showing at the gallery. When speaking of AI as a tool for artists, Lachance compared it to a calculator, saying the devices “demystified math.”

Many people have a different opinion on AI and when it’s all right to use versus when it is not, while some have zero opinions on AI’s use. To Hodge, it’s all about intention.

“AI is a tool like anything else, but I feel it also kind of depends on whose hands it’s in,” Hodge said. “So, for example, from someone who pursues art as a profession there’s study, skill, all that experience that has to go into developing quality art-

work. So, an artist [may use] AI as a tool to assist them with something, but they’ve still taken time out to learn the fundamentals like the elements of art, the principles of design, who have put in years of work and experience.”

However, for those who have taken no time to pursue art and use AI to generate “full artistic concepts,” Hodge says he sees where that may be a trickier situation.

Hodge says it’s the artist who makes art unique. For example, in his classes, he will give his students the same prompt just to show them how the same tools can make different concepts and designs. But when an AI piece of art is mass produced, Hodge said it can be soulless.

For now, it is still a little early to know how exactly AI will affect artists in the long run, but no matter how it is used, it is here to stay.

“As far as AI goes, it’s here, and I think we just have to acclimate ourselves to it and go about it the right way,” Hodge said. “I don’t believe you can unring a bell, so it’s here now — it’s going to be part of the future, so we just have to adapt to it as a society, arts included.”



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Dominique Hodge’s artwork has been featured in the Upstairs Gallery at USC Sumter and Sumter County Gallery of Art.





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Sumter Police Department's 1st Sgt. Robert Beckford, school resource officer for Sumter High School, talks of how he went from patrolling the streets to local high school halls and found his calling in the process.

PHOTOS BY ALAYSHA MAPLE / THE SUMTER ITEM



Beyond the badge

How 1st Sgt. Robert Beckford found his calling at Sumter High

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysa@theitem.com

Before the buses pull in and the sun rises over Sumter High School, 1st Sgt. Robert Beckford is already walking the halls — boots quiet on the waxed floors, heart wide open, smile on display as he greets the early drop-offs.

He can hold casual conversation about day-to-day strides and struggles. Or he can do check-ins as simple as, “You good?” But if you’ve ever been a teenager carrying more than just your bookbag, you know how much weight that question can lift.

A somber “no” is all it takes for Beckford to turn that “no” into help and that help into hope.

It’s these transformative interactions that clicked for Beckford — this job, the students, it’s his calling.

“It’s beyond the badge. Being an SRO [school resource officer] goes way beyond right and wrong,” he explained.

Across 22 years, Beckford has donned many uniforms, from a corrections officer in a youth offender facility at 18 to a Sumter Police Department K-9 handler to narcotics to organized crime and so on. But none compared to being “Unc” in a building of more than 2,000 teenagers.

“Being in the schools, this is what my community looks like. This is exactly what my

SEE **SGT. BECKFORD**, PAGE A27



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SGT. BECKFORD

FROM PAGE A26

community is going to look like, and so why not be a positive role model?"

A first-generation American raised by Jamaican and Panamanian parents, Beckford was born in Brooklyn, New York, raised in Sumter by way of Shaw Air Force Base and graduated from Hillcrest High School in 1996. Inspired by family members in law enforcement and corrections, he knew the meaning of respect and the weight of expectation, which led him to start his career in law enforcement young. Though the same age as many of the offenders he guarded, he tried to show them the difference between their decision and endless opportunities that await them. Now, at 47, he continues to sharpen young minds while also getting a few pointers from the youngins himself.

That mutual respect — earned, not demanded — is the foundation to Beckford's positive approach at Sumter High. He walks the halls not to be a figure of fear but as an approachable presence. His journey from patrolling the streets to halls came after a weary prayer of wanting to fight for citizens, not with



Sumter Police Department's 1st Sgt. Robert Beckford, school resource officer for Sumter High School, stands with Principal Anamaria Sandor. Sgt. Beckford works closely with administration to modify safety protocols and school routines to ensure safety of the students.

ALAYSHA MAPLE /
THE SUMTER ITEM

them. Over time, he's had to unlearn what he thought it meant to be an SRO. Unlearn that he's not just here to police the fights. He's there for the kids who don't have someone to look out for them. For the kids who need help finding tutoring. For the kids trying to navigate big emotions with no roadmap.

"I can't do this job without them. They may need me in their times of need, and I just want to be the best," Beckford expressed. "The positivity that you give back is going to be reciprocated tenfold."

The badge is just one piece of who he is. His presence has transformed per-

ceptions, safety protocols and school routines. He's become a thesaurus for the best haircuts, great food spots and sources of laughter the kids tease him about hearing hallways away. Beckford can barely contain his smile when he talks of the thousands of students and staff who've become more like family.

"Security is just one small part of the job. It's the relationship-building that's even more important," he explained.

Like family, those relationships extend beyond the school day. His days beginning at 7 a.m. can last well into the night as he attends every sports game, whether home or away, learning about

both the sport and the talented young athletes who play. Further than that, he leads Youth Core, which teaches teens life skills, such as cutting grass, compassion, like caring for elders, and potential careers that serve their city or country.

His fellow brothers and sisters in blue have caught on to the positive impact Beckford's had on students. They often travel to the school to witness it firsthand and provide a second positive interaction with law enforcement.

Beckford doesn't romanticize his work. There are heavy days, ones where he laughs more at school than he does at home. But he gives it all willingly because it's what the students need to see: positivity. In a world where they're often misunderstood, mislabeled or missed entirely, Beckford sees them. And they see him, too.

Not just as an officer, but also as a mentor, a mirror of what's possible when love is louder than fear. Maybe that's what the work really is — standing in the gap, offering grace and leaving students better than when you found them.

So, that simple question wrapped with care, "You good?" could be all it takes to remind someone they still are.

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The origin of Bland's Pond

Reflections recalls the beginning of what is known as the Iris Gardens. In 1927, H.C. Bland, who managed Ford Motor Co., illustrated his love for gardening by purchasing a landfill from F.M. Cain. According to Dr. Anne King Gregorie, this small fishing pond, along with some additional lots on the outskirts of Sumter, would be transformed into a destination for thousands of flower lovers who made annual visits. Information and photos were obtained from *The Sumter Item* archives and the writings of Gregorie and Cassie Nicholes.



Sammy Way
REFLECTIONS

Richard Bradford "... established a saw mill on the spot now known as Swan Lake Gardens. The stream that provided water for First Mill and the Blanding Pond is known as Shot Pouch." An article appearing in *The Sumter Daily Item* in August 1927 noted, "Mr. H.C. Bland had completed a great deal of work at First Mill. This labor included the planting of Japanese irises and flowering trees, which he planned to convert into an aquatic garden. The lake and surrounding garden which comprise 21 acres were converted into one of the beauty spots of South Carolina."

Mary Cuttino Snyder published the following. "Bland was born in 1882 in Mayesville. He was a frail boy who spent most of his years between 7 and 17 in a wheelchair. He was able to attend Furman University in 1904-05. In 1901, Bland owned the third car in South Carolina

and the first in Sumter. He also built a car from scrap in 1910 with the help of Phineas Barno. His business career started in a corner of his father's store in Mayesville, where Hamilton made jewelry and repaired watches. In 1917, he moved to Sumter and started selling automobiles, first Hudson-Essex, the Oldsmobiles, Saxons, Kissel cars, Roamers and the Milburn Electric cars. In 1922, Bland obtained the Ford franchise. He purchased a fish pond three miles from Sumter on the Pinewood-Wedgefield highway known as First Mill. Bland had in mind not only fishing, but also development of the pond as a garden and

bird sanctuary. Unable to grow some Japanese iris at a garden near his home on Hampton Avenue, he threw the bulbs away near the pond as trash, and they flourished ever since. Bland also bought two black swans and had them shipped from their native Australia. After this, he purchased two white swans from New York. The gardens were believed to be first opened to the public in 1936, with visitors coming from five foreign countries that year. A.T. Heath (of Carolina Coca Cola) gave the city of Sumter the lands south of Bland's original 38-acre garden, and Bland supervised the design and planting of this acreage. Bland left his gardens to the city for the enjoyment of all. In 1995, Sumter businessman Jimmy Duffie donated the access bridge. Mr. Bland died in 1967."



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS



SAMMY WAY / THE SUMTER ITEM

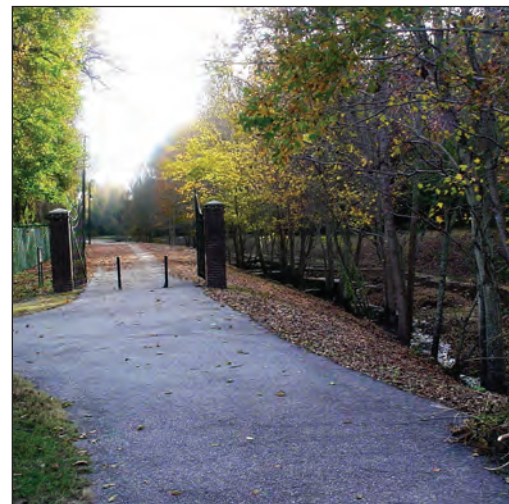
Shot Pouch crossing under Guignard Drive

LEFT: Hamilton Carr Bland, developer of Swan Lake Iris Gardens, is seen in the center in May 1949 next to Edwin Boyle, former Sumter mayor, left, and his successor in the office, W. E. Bynum.



SAMMY WAY / THE SUMTER ITEM

Bland's Pond



SAMMY WAY / THE SUMTER ITEM

Shot Pouch near walking trail at YMCA



Clearing Shot Pouch Creek, 1969

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS
1. State further
4. Halt, to a horse
8. Bear's home
12. Misfortune
13. Beard material
14. Sad sigh
15. Long, skinny fish
16. Out of action
17. Cozy places
18. Float aimlessly
20. Eroded
22. Confederates, for short
25. Articles
29. Tooth trouble
32. Body of knowledge
34. Vote for
35. Certain fast-food orders
38. Serving of corn
39. Was in the red
40. Grape drinks
41. _____ rehearsal
43. You _____ what you sow
45. Huck's friend
47. Fellows
51. Skillfully
54. "_____ the Woods"
57. Period of time
58. Amtrak travel
59. Part of speech
60. Feel ill
61. One of a pair
62. Fidgety
63. Youngster

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					62					63		

- DOWN
1. Deeply impressed
2. Busy person
3. Sandwich spot
4. "The _____ Shadow"
5. Once held
6. Black gold
7. Field of study
8. Academy student
9. Beerlike brew
10. Family vehicle
11. Curvy shape
19. Provided at no charge
21. Stadium part
23. Huffed and puffed
24. Grave
26. Black- _____ Susan
27. Insignificant
28. Back talk
29. Served perfectly
30. Scorch
31. This place
33. Unmannered
36. Mediocre: hyph.
37. Ogle
42. Method
44. Pain
46. Quarry
48. Shipshape
49. The Stooges, e.g.
50. Season
51. Chair part
52. Sheep sound
53. Kindled
55. Agree wordlessly
56. Yank

SOLUTION

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

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SUDOKU

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

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

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

Religion

Let us not forget the plight of our brothers and sisters at home, abroad

I had the privilege of participating with a mission group from Shandon Presbyterian Church in Columbia to Zambia in southern Africa. We had an eye surgeon with us, and so we set up an eye



Pastor Stewart Rawson

clinic in the rural village of Mwandi in Zambia. There is a hospital there called Mwandi Mission Hospital, and it is run by the United Church of Zambia. The hospital was built almost 35 years ago; most of the construction was completed by mission

groups from South Carolina. Throughout the hospital there are plaques acknowledging the contributions of churches from Columbia and Orangeburg and Chapin. The faithful work of those who had come

before us helped to create a hospital that now has more than 150 beds and provides services for the Southern region of this very poor country. We had the humbling experience of seeing more than 650 people in the six days we were in the clinic; some folks walked two days to "see the American doctor." Zambia is below the equator and is in the Kalahari Desert, so as you might imagine, it is hot, dusty and windy. The people do not have the luxury of sunglasses, nor do many have corrective eyeglasses, so most have no relief from the bright sun and the dusty conditions. We take so many things for granted, the conveniences we ignore and the comforts that we feel entitled to. The things we complain about, the people of Zambia would find puzzling.

We fitted 300 adults and children for eyeglasses, allowing them to see clearly and with a clarity that they

did not imagine possible. We distributed as many pairs of sunglasses as we could, wishing that we had brought a thousand more pairs. The people of Zambia are joyous and kind and tenderhearted; their gratitude for our presence in their midst was overwhelming.

When I returned to my comfortable home here in Sumter, I got sick. I spiked a fever and found myself in the Emergency Room at Tuomey. Being sick forces you to confront the things you are grateful for. I was thankful that I had a loving wife that would take me to the ER. It was Friday evening at 5 p.m., and I was grateful for a hospital nearby with seasoned professionals and wonderful facilities. I could not have been more impressed with the care I received at our local hospital. The receptionists and the nurses, the nurse practitioners and the techs that helped them and the doctors

were all attentive and thorough, kind and professional. They made sure I was hydrated and isolated the source of my illness. I realize that my privilege extends to the fact that I have health insurance, and I am conscious that not everyone has access to these resources.

Hopefully the experience of traveling literally to the other side of the globe has given me a more profound appreciation for the work that we must do. One of the great sicknesses of our modern predicament is that we are selfish and turned inward. We are conscious of our needs and the needs of our family, but we easily forget the plight of our brothers and sisters in need at home and abroad. May we all be inspired to focus beyond the walls of our homes.

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

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Social Security Matters

Reader asks if he and wife can get spouse benefits from each other

BY RUSSELL GLOOR

National Social Security advisor at the Association of Mature American Citizens

DEAR RUSTY — My wife and I are currently collecting Social Security. We both started receiving SS at 62 years old. That said, we get by on a tight budget.



GLOOR

A retired friend told us about an option which allows a spouse to collect half (1/2) of the other spouse's SS monthly income. My question has two parts: 1. Can we both collect on each other's SS? And 2. Are there any pitfalls? — *Seeking an Increase*

DEAR SEEKING — Well, I'm afraid spousal benefits aren't quite that simple. One spouse may be eligible for ad-

ditional benefits from the other, but only if that spouse's personal Social Security retirement benefit at their full retirement age (FRA) is less than half (50%) of the other spouse's FRA entitlement. Note that for spouse benefits, FRA amounts are used regardless of when you actually claim benefits. Full retirement age for both you and your wife is 66, so that means that if you both claimed at 62 your FRA entitlements were higher — about 25% more — than you are both currently receiving.

Since you applied for benefits some time ago at about the same age, one way to estimate if one of you may be entitled to an additional amount as a spouse is to evaluate your current monthly amounts. If either of you are getting a benefit which is less than half of the other's amount, it's possible that the one with the lower benefit may be

entitled to more as a spouse. And note, only one spouse is eligible for benefits — you cannot both get spouse benefits from each other.

Another way to explore this is for the spouse with the lowest monthly Social Security benefit to contact Social Security at 1.800.772.1213 to ask if spouse benefits are available. Noting that contacting SS these days can be a time-consuming process, yet another way is for you to provide us (the AMAC Foundation's SS Advisory Service) with both of your current monthly SS benefit amounts (before any deductions) and the exact ages when each of you claimed. Using that information, we can do the math to see if either of you might be entitled to more as a spouse. But, in the end, only the spouse with the lower benefit may be eligible, and then, only if their FRA entitlement (not their actual current amount) is less than 50% of the other spouse's FRA entitlement.

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 ss-advisor@amacfoundation.org.

ABOUT AMAC

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens [AMAC] www.amac.us is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation (www.AmacFoundation.org) is the Association's non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's Seniors. Together, we act and speak on the Association members' behalf, protecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at www.amac.us/join-amac.



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