

Celebrating 10 Years!

DIVERSITY WORKS

JANUARY 2021 VOLUME 11 ISSUE 1

"For All of Us"



PG. 17

Vera Herbert
Carolina Bank



PG. 23

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DCSD



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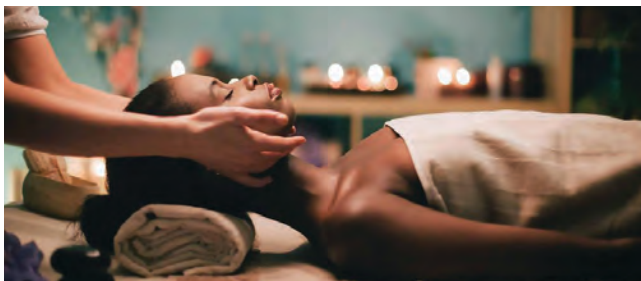
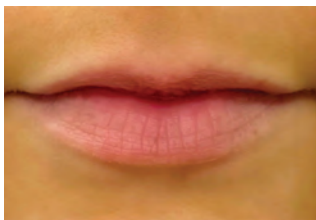
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MISSION AND VISION

OUR MISSION

Diversity Works® is a magazine for the socially conscious and responsible worker at any level. The magazine has a commitment to be a showcase for organizations and their individuals that represent best practices in diversity of the workforce and supplier choices. We feature articles on those displaying inclusionary vision in and for the marketplace and who can both encourage and provide role models to others. Diversity Works®, via its editorial content and other signature promotions, will be a vessel to inform the world about appreciating and accepting the physical, social, cultural and other differences in one another and promote better outcomes through interacting with those unlike ourselves. Our mission is to promote the concept "community" in the workplace, to stimulate literacy and save the planet via recycling printed matter.

OUR VISION

To create a more collaborative world wherein we practice diversity on a more balanced basis, to experience a return to reading and to reuse the ink and paper products that our reading materials are printed with.

Spanish Version - *Translated by: Yadira Santiago, MA*

NUESTRA MISIÓN

Diversity Works® es una revista dirigida a trabajadores, de cualquier nivel, socialmente conscientes y responsables. La revista tiene el compromiso de ser una vitrina para las organizaciones y sus individuos que representan las mejores prácticas en cuanto a diversidad de las opciones de plantilla laboral y proveedores.

Nuestros artículos muestran una visión inclusiva en y para el mercado; que a su vez estimulen y promuevan un modelo de conducta para los demás. Diversity Works®, a través de su contenido editorial y sus promociones de firma, será una fuente que informará al mundo sobre la apreciación y aceptación de diferencias físicas, sociales, culturales que promuevan mejores resultados a través de la interacción con los que son distintos a nosotros. Nuestra misión es promover el concepto de "comunidad" en el lugar de trabajo para estimular el conocimiento y salvar al planeta a través del reciclaje de material impreso.

NUESTRA VISIÓN

Crear un mundo más colaborativo en el que se practique la diversidad de una manera más equilibrada; experimentar un regreso a la lectura, así como la reutilización de los productos de tinta y papel con los que se imprimen nuestros materiales.

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FORWARD, MARCH!



*Dawn "D.A." Goodwin
Editor*

Happy New Year to you and your families, and thank you for tuning in to Diversity Works© as we celebrate our 10-year anniversary this year. The Florence Downtown Development staff couldn't have summed up what's ahead of us any better in stating that "2021 promises to be a year of recovery, a year of growth and a year of prioritization." The COVID-19 vaccination is out, stimulus checks are being distributed and 2020 is finally over. While we've gone through trying times, let's do our best

to remain hopeful about the future as we march onward into 2021.

Going into this new year, do you feel like you need a do-over in some aspect of your life? Certified life coach Robin Lewis addresses the idea of trusting God for a do-over, whether it's for a new start in a new city or for a new job. In this issue, you'll get tips on finding a mentor and making it count in your life. Then, we have questions every manager should ask his or her direct reports, and find out who has been named Businessperson of the Year. Learn how to land a job during this new COVID-19 era, but if you'll be working remotely, listen up for cybersecurity predictions for 2021. You definitely don't want to miss them. We caught up with Ruiz Foods, and Dr. Nika White discusses how a culture of conformity can diminish organizations. Attorney Charlie J. Blake Jr. shares important factors to consider when thinking about representing yourself when you have an auto accident. Read on for details.

As you read, you will be in awe of the organizations and educational institutions teaming up for the betterment of our students. Francis Marion University's (FMU) School of Business has partnered with HopeHealth to provide hands-on learning opportunities for FMU students. Claflin University and the University of South Carolina established a five-year dual degree program. And find out which university received a game-changing \$20 million investment. On the other hand, thanks to Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC), which awarded more than \$2.6 million in grants in 2020. Kandace Bethea of MCS D thanks those who answered the call to be teachers in Marion County. In other education-related stories, we have HGTC, Lee County School District, Darlington High School and Trinity Collegiate School. We also tell the story of a Claflin student named the Black College Quiz 2020 National Champion. You may have caught the competition when it aired on Bounce TV.

On the big screen nationwide, you may have also seen the movie "Christmas in Carolina," which premiered last year. We are so pleased to bring the stories of actor DJ Rowell, one of its stars, and Stacie Davis, the local screenwriter who wrote and directed the movie. It feels so good to be a Carolinian when you see these types of inspirational stories that prove how you, too, can make it if you follow your dreams and don't lose hope.

In terms of setting new precedents, this year is sure to be a historic, unforgettable year, just like last year. The City of Florence reveals how the election "was a strong example of the community embracing its diversity through the choice of its leadership." For

instance, Councilman Chaquez T. McCall became the youngest individual elected to serve, and our first African American and first woman was elected to serve as mayor. In 2020, we were especially excited about the country's first female vice president-elect, which was right on time as Women's History Month is just around the corner. Locally, we celebrate powerful, inspiring women, including Lethonia "Peaches" Barnes, Dr. Lucia Huang, Miko Pickett and Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin. For Black History Month, we share with you the work of Mayor Woodbury, Allie Brooks, Melanie ColClough and others. In honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., meet individuals who are bringing unity to the community, even through their businesses. Read the stories of Cynthia Ford, EJ Newby, Shelia Maria and Brittney Jefferson, the owner of PLC who had made huge sacrifices to keep learning going despite COVID-19 challenges.

Moving forward, it's vital that you prioritize local living, from shopping and voting to serving others, giving back and practicing diversity and inclusion. This idea of giving and helping the local community is one in which United Way of Florence and Florence County First Steps are all too familiar. Read all about it in this edition, and pay close attention as we recognize selfless individuals like Cindy Halcombe and Tamika Melette in celebration of Social Work Month. The organization gracing our cover is one that strives to have "One Carolina." Therefore, Thermo Fisher puts diversity and inclusion principles into practice. In fact, it recently partnered with HBCUs to help address the coronavirus crisis, which has disproportionately impacted communities of color. See what else Thermo Fisher has on the horizon as it moves forward in 2021.

This year, being in the know about your finances is more important than ever, and we see to it that you stay informed. Anderson Brothers Bank demonstrates its continued growth and announces its new brand ambassador and its newest location. New York Life offers business solutions. Then we have financial tips to help you take advantage of all the benefits and tools from your credit cards. We break down the financial advantages of moving to a retirement community and teach you how to help your loved ones cut high out-of-pocket medical costs.

You'll be thrilled to see the advances in health care services that allow residents to get the treatment they need without having to leave the area. Learn from MUSC about abdominal wall hernia repairs and options for stroke care. MUSC's Dr. Rahman informs us of cardiovascular complications associated with COVID-19 while Dr. Temujin Chavez tells us why we should get a flu shot. Rubicon Family Counseling Services shatters myths about drug and alcohol use. HopeHealth announces its newest providers and the winners of the Veterans with Hope Art Contest.

This is truly a time to honor and thank health care providers for their service. Just to name a few, we congratulate McLeod Health for its designation as a Care Continuum Center of Excellence, and we congratulate one of the hospital's research nurses on receiving the inaugural Patient Advocacy Award. Find out which McLeod physicians were honored with the Pillars of Professionalism Awards, and let's join CareSouth Carolina in the celebration of its 40th anniversary.

It is my desire that this edition of Diversity Works© brings you hope and much joy as you move forward into 2021. As always, thank you for being such a dedicated reader. Be safe, and enjoy.

HOW A CULTURE OF CONFORMITY CAN DIMINISH DEI GOALS

by Dr. Nika White, President and CEO, Nika White Consulting, Best Selling Author of “The Intentional Inclusionist®” and “Next-Level Inclusionist: Transform Your Work and Yourself for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Success”



Dr. Nika White

GREENVILLE - “If everyone jumped off a cliff, would you jump too?” This priceless advice our parents gave us about staying committed to what is right and authentically true to ourselves somehow gets lost in workplace culture. If an organization conditions its employees to believe success is only capable by behaving and thinking like the majority dominant culture, then diversity, equity and inclusion are diminished. Organizations must work hard to undo this “culture of conformity.”

What is this “culture of conformity”?

Conformity is action per some specified standard or authority. Examples of conformity in today’s workplace look like: working hours expectations, dress codes, compensation guidelines, code of ethics and timely communication. Such performance standards are essential to core values that determine hiring decisions and help to shape culture. They build continuity, avoid misunderstandings and reduce legal issues.

Like many words, “conformity” can take on positive and negative connotations. Conformity can also be defined as “yielding to group pressures.” How easily we forget that precious advice our parents once gave us when we stopped taking a skeptical point of view and disengaged our personal value system to fit in or be perceived as “correct” by the majority.

The dangers of a conformist culture

When companies explicitly define standards or implicitly embed them in the culture, there are implications to an environment’s inclusivity that may be overlooked. More so, it is about how organizations arrive at those decisions, which often occurs in the absence of the consideration of the potential to compromise inclusion. Expecting people to conform to the mainstream, dominant culture is different from laying out performance expectations and company values that employees need to adhere to. Conformity can diminish the value and benefits of diversity, equity and inclusion:

- **Diminished Diversity:** When organizations fail to consistently re-evaluate and re-assess their standards, deindividuation (or a form of group thinking where a loss of self-awareness manifests in those groups; no more self-evaluation and only conforming to the group) can occur. Various studies have proven that diversity of thought is a tremendous asset for establishing a competitive advantage and realizing successful team and organizational performance outcomes.
- **Diminished Equity:** It is dis-empowering and can cause employees (particularly those in underrepresented populations) to feel that success is not in reach unless they diminish portions of their whole self/identity. Any individual who perceives group opportunities and outcomes as biased against himself is likely to become disillusioned and leave the group. Standards can certainly be tailored to unique employee needs, ensuring that everyone achieves a level playing field.
- **Diminished Inclusion:** If standards in place condition employees to think that success is only achieved by behaving and thinking like the majority dominant culture, this can lead to a lack of authenticity. When employees have to conceal their true selves, it can feel demeaning, exhausting and lead to low self-esteem and

disengagement. Values and standards are crucial to the efficiency of an organization. Still, they must be questioned and examined to ensure employees feel authentic, creative and a sense of belongingness, which will lead to creativity, retention and ultimately drive the business forward.

It is important for organizations that wish to be exemplary in their efforts to foster a culture of authenticity and belonging to be aware of these implications. Organizations should exercise intentionality to avoid organizational values and standards from unintentionally jeopardizing employees’ psychological safety of showing up authentically.

How to reverse a culture of conformity

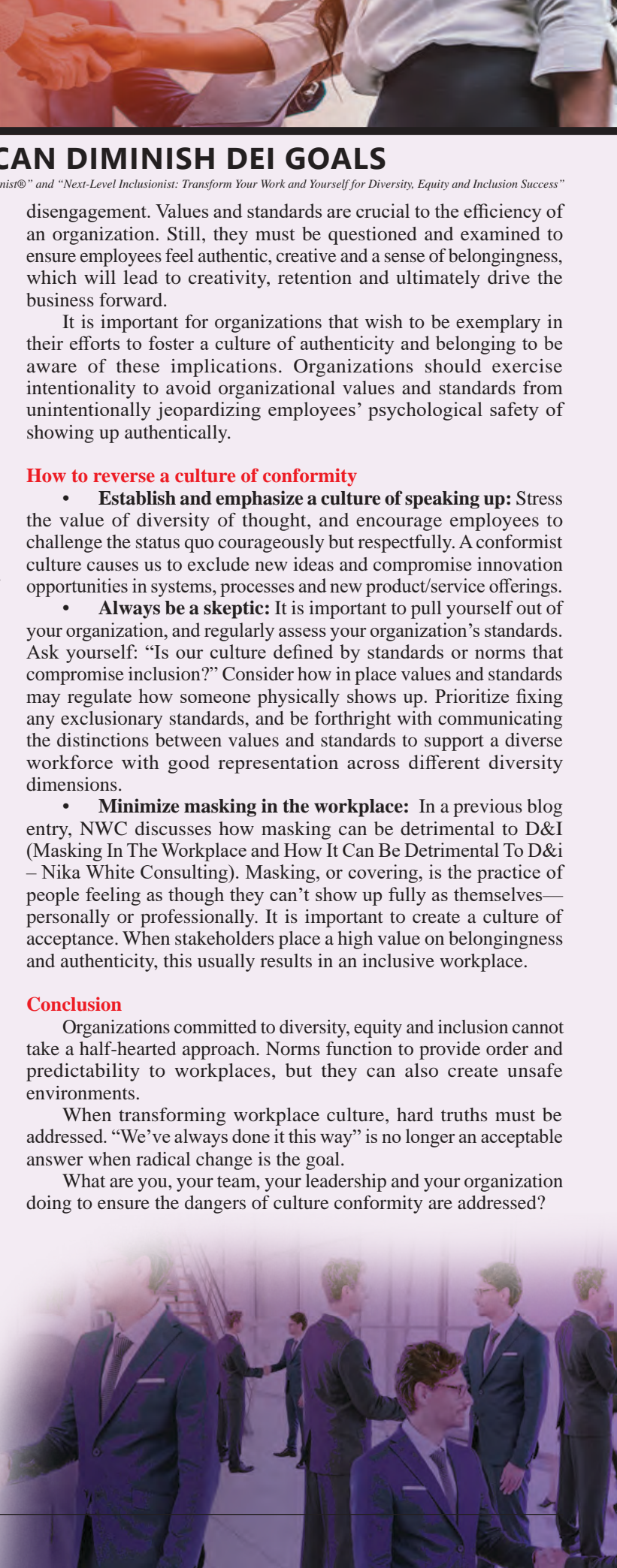
- **Establish and emphasize a culture of speaking up:** Stress the value of diversity of thought, and encourage employees to challenge the status quo courageously but respectfully. A conformist culture causes us to exclude new ideas and compromise innovation opportunities in systems, processes and new product/service offerings.
- **Always be a skeptic:** It is important to pull yourself out of your organization, and regularly assess your organization’s standards. Ask yourself: “Is our culture defined by standards or norms that compromise inclusion?” Consider how in place values and standards may regulate how someone physically shows up. Prioritize fixing any exclusionary standards, and be forthright with communicating the distinctions between values and standards to support a diverse workforce with good representation across different diversity dimensions.
- **Minimize masking in the workplace:** In a previous blog entry, NWC discusses how masking can be detrimental to D&I (Masking In The Workplace and How It Can Be Detrimental To D&I – Nika White Consulting). Masking, or covering, is the practice of people feeling as though they can’t show up fully as themselves—personally or professionally. It is important to create a culture of acceptance. When stakeholders place a high value on belongingness and authenticity, this usually results in an inclusive workplace.

Conclusion

Organizations committed to diversity, equity and inclusion cannot take a half-hearted approach. Norms function to provide order and predictability to workplaces, but they can also create unsafe environments.

When transforming workplace culture, hard truths must be addressed. “We’ve always done it this way” is no longer an acceptable answer when radical change is the goal.

What are you, your team, your leadership and your organization doing to ensure the dangers of culture conformity are addressed?





PRIORITIZE LOCAL LIVING IN 2021

Submitted by Florence Downtown Development Staff

To say this year has been a whirlwind of ups—and let’s admit, mostly downs—is an understatement. Despite unprecedented obstacles, challenges and state-mandated shutdowns, the small business community in Downtown Florence has managed to hold steadfast and even thrive. The creativity and resilience of small business owners in our community cannot be matched, and they have pivoted to offer new services, make their spaces safe and inviting to welcome back customers after several months of uncertainty and even expanded their offerings, added new locations and grown to need larger spaces. We especially applaud the brave new entrepreneurs who seized the moment during the pandemic to pursue their dream of opening their own business.

This New Year, 2021, promises to be a year of recovery, a year of growth and a year of prioritization. If we’ve learned anything from 2020, it has been that as a community, we need to come together to support each other, and for the purposes of this article, that means supporting our locally owned small businesses. The people who own these shops, restaurants and service-based businesses are our neighbors, people who go to our churches and people whose kids

play with our kids on the playground. When you support local by shopping, dining or even helping to promote a favorite local place through a positive review, you become part of the ripple effect ultimately realized in the American Dream.

When you shop local, you benefit from the authenticity of human-to-human interaction and glean insight from experts in their chosen field, whether it be the perfect outfit for a job interview or a bouquet of flowers for a loved one, maybe even a way to prepare a new dish. From there, you are connecting with your community in a very direct way. Locally owned businesses are the heartbeat of any town, and local business owners are more likely to put dollars that you spend back into the community through local charitable giving and community investment. When you shop local, you are strengthening our local economy—locally-owned businesses hire local people for better wages, pay local taxes increasing the tax base and typically source goods locally, helping to preserve our community’s identity and supporting other locally-owned businesses. Did you know that compared to Amazon, independent retailers create two times as many jobs for the same amount of revenue? Finally, when you support local small businesses, you are casting a vote for the American Dream. Owning your own business has long-been a pathway toward the middle class, and by supporting these new entrepreneurs, you are helping to secure a future that works for everyone in the community.

In a time when we are all making our New Year’s resolutions, we challenge our community to prioritize local: shop from our locally-owned retailers, visit the City Center Farmers Market on Saturdays and buy produce and meats from local farmers, and break the chain and dine in independently-owned restaurants (to-go from your favorite local spot counts too). Consider utilizing local service providers and community banks. Local living with a true focus on making our community better starts with you.



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ANYTHING BUT QUIET-2020 TAX SEASON

Submitted by Dr. C. Vicki Dixon, CEO



Dr. C. Vicki Dixon

DARLINGTON-The coronavirus pandemic, a shaky economy and more, has brought new and added challenges to the 2020 tax season which facilitated new rules or adjustments, in addition to the existing tax rules. While there are many, I am only going to address a few of those changes.

Recovery Rebates

Under the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, most Americans received direct economic impact payment (EIP, stimulus) of \$1,200 (\$2,400 for couples filing jointly), plus \$500 more for each dependent child under age 17. The EIP is an advancement of a special tax credit and will be reconciled on the 2020 return. For most people, the rebate will equal the tax credit allowed. Taxpayers whose credits exceeded their rebates can claim the balance on their 2020 return. It is anticipated people won't have to repay the IRS if the payment received is more than the credit. Taxpayers who didn't get some or all of the EIP they were entitled to will be able to claim the difference as a Recovery Rebate Credit on their 2020 tax return. According to the IRS, there is no provision in the law that would require individuals who qualify for a payment based on their 2018 or 2019 tax returns to pay back all or part of the payment. If based on the information reported on their 2020 tax returns, they no longer qualify for that amount or would qualify for a lesser amount.

Retirement Accounts

Under the CARES Act and for 2020 distributions from IRAs and workplace retirement plans, if the taxpayer is impacted by COVID-19 they can take a distribution up to \$100,000 and not be subjected to the 10 percent early withdrawal penalty. The distribution can be included in income in equal installments over a three-year period unless the taxpayer elects otherwise. The taxpayer can also contribute the money back to his or her retirement plan within three years and treat the transaction as a direct rollover. Individuals who are eligible were allowed to borrow up to \$100,000 or 100 percent of the account balance from their workplace plans, such as 401K until Sep. 23, 2020. Repayments on retirement plan loans that were due in 2020 have been delayed one year. Check with your tax advisor for other changes to retirement accounts.

Charitable Contributions

New this season, for 2020 only, non-itemizers can write off up to \$300 of charitable cash contributions. It only applies to people who don't file Schedule A (Itemized Deductions). This write off is per return not per person (i.e., couples who file jointly can only deduct \$300, not \$600).

Student Loans

The CARES act allowed employers to pay down up to \$5,250 in workers' college loans. For federal tax purposes, the payments are excluded from the workers' wages. The \$5250 applies to both student loan repayments and other educational assistance (i.e., tuition, fees, books) offered by an employer under current law.

Paycheck Protection Program Loans

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) provided low-interest loans to eligible small business owners and other eligible businesses (including

nonprofits) to cover payroll and other expenses (mortgage interest, rent and utilities) for a 24-week period. The Small Business Administration may forgive these loans, in whole or in part, if PPP funds are spent on eligible expenses during the loan forgiveness covered period. For tax purposes, loan forgiveness amounts are excluded from gross income, and forgiven expenses will not be deductible as of this writing (but is being debated). Lenders will not file and report forgiven amounts on Form 1099-C, Cancellation of Debt.

Forms 1099-MISC and 1099-NEC

Form 1099-MISC (Miscellaneous income), which was originally used to report nonemployee compensation, has been redesigned. Nonemployee compensation was originally reported in box 7 of the 1099-MISC. Form 1099-NEC will now be used for reporting nonemployee compensation beginning in tax year 2020. Payments of more than \$600 in nonemployee compensation, including independent contractors, attorneys and golden parachute payments, will be reported on Form 1099-NEC, box 1.

Unemployment Compensation

As a reminder, Uncle Sam taxes unemployment benefits as if they were wages. When it comes to state income taxes, it depends on where you live. The majority of states follow the federal government and fully tax unemployment benefits. However, some states don't tax them at all (sometimes because the state doesn't have an income tax), and a couple of states will only tax part of your benefits.

There are many more changes for the 2020 tax-filing season, which can make preparing your taxes complex and confusing. Do not hesitate to contact the trusted professionals at Professional Business and Tax Services at 843-413-2826 for your tax preparation needs. Walk-ins are welcome.





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CHILDREN OF HOPE GIVE TRUE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS by Adalia Ellis



HopeHealth workroom

Christmas is a day of rejoicing, providing service to others, gift giving and spending time with family. For many Christians, it is the one holiday they look forward to as they get to reflect on the life of Christ and the many ways he brought light to

the world. HopeHealth has its own holiday “workshop,” which is a warehouse filled with activity. People are walking to and fro as they pack waiting cars with gifts for families. Hundreds of wrapped gifts that have sticky notes with specific names are stacked everywhere waiting for delivery.

Tiffany, the director of the Community Relations Department, aka “Chief Elf,” and Julia, communications coordinator, are the nerve center of all of this activity. The Children of Hope program started in 1996 as an employee gift drive and has grown over the years. 2019 was the first year they did a big campaign push. What started out as an employee fundraiser has grown by word of mouth to include donations from community members as well. That year, with just employees, they raised \$25,000. In 2020, employees donated \$35,000, and with community members also donating, they raised a total of \$57,000. With this funding they were able to buy gifts for over 400 children who may have gone without otherwise.

The Compassionate Care Fund, the fundraising arm of HopeHealth, accepts money year round for various needs of their patients for services they don’t provide like mammograms, colonoscopies and items such as glasses. A specialized program they offer is The Children of Hope program that uses donated funds and gift items to give to patients, specifically children, during the Christmas season.



Assembling Gifts for the Children of Hope

The big employee campaign is held in July in preparation for December and is called Christmas In July. As community members began to hear about the campaign, people started donating items and funds in October. In addition to giving

money or items, community members have also gifted time. Volunteers really bolster the ability of the team to sort, wrap, personalize, pack and deliver each gift in a timely manner. With over 400 children receiving gifts in addition to something for their parents, the help is greatly appreciated.

It means a lot to families who are experiencing financial challenges to know that people care. Parents are selected by staff members who know and work with them and know their situation. When The Children of Hope staff receives the application, they can then fill the need that is indicated. Tiffany explains, “The biggest way that we determine who is selected for The Children of Hope program is financial need, and the doctors and nursing staff make all the referrals so most of the families don’t even know about the program until they are contacted by the medical staff, saying that they were recommended for this year’s program. So it’s a complete surprise.” Another area that determines selection is compliance. Such as with pediatrics, they make sure the children are up-to-date with their well visits and vaccines. With the HIV program, which is called The Ryan White program, there are also compliance considerations during the selection



Helpers of Children of Hope

process. In 2019 they added 180 children to the program, and in 2020 they were able to add 220 more kids to the 180, so they were well over 400.

The year 2020 was hard for everyone, but the added stress of families who are experiencing financial hardship can create even more anxiety. The Children of Hope program inspired so much spontaneous giving and is a beautiful example of how, even in the most difficult of times, we can come together as a community to bring hope to others. This is the gift of

Christmas.

Some community members who helped tremendously this year, just to name a few were:

- The Toy Shop
- F3
- The Grove Luxury Townhomes
- The Rotary Club of Florence
- JeBailey Properties
- House of Hope
- The Aiken Foundation
- Abundant Life Church

For community members who want to get involved by either donating funds, items or time, please refer to the following information:

Donor Contact:

Scherrie Cogdill, development director

scogdill@hope-health.org

HopeHealth Venmo: @HopeHealth-CompassionateCare



TIPS FOR FINDING A MENTOR—AND MAKING IT COUNT

by Lisa Rabasca Roepe, a Freelance Writer

While most professionals agree that having a mentor is beneficial, few people—especially early in their careers—know how to find a mentor and make sure it’s a productive and meaningful relationship. Here are 7 tips to help you figure out what you’re looking for, identify the right mentor for you and set yourself up for a successful mentorship.

1. Understand What a Mentor Is—and Isn’t

A mentor is someone who can act as your cheerleader and guide, encourage you to apply for new opportunities and help you to navigate challenging situations such as transitioning to a new role or taking on a stretch assignment. Often your mentor will be someone working in the same industry as you and/or in a similar role—or someone working in an industry and/or type of role you want to transition to—who can help you figure out how to advance your career. While it’s possible to be mentored by a peer, most mentors will be at least a level or two ahead of you in their career track.

Keep in mind that a mentor is different from a sponsor. A mentor

TIPS FOR FINDING A MENTOR CONT'D

answers questions and offers advice, while a sponsor uses his or her connections to advocate for a younger or less experienced employee and to actively participate in his or her career growth.

2. Be Clear About Your Goals

Before you even consider asking someone to be your mentor, you need to reflect on what you hope to learn and get out of the relationship, Patterson says. The goal of most mentoring relationships is to help you overcome a transition or hurdle or to become better in an area of work that you need more support or guidance in.

Think about your purpose in seeking a mentor. Determine the gaps in your work performance and what you need to better understand about your industry or employer.

3. Find the Right People to Mentor You

Once you pinpoint what skills you're seeking help with or what questions have about your industry, look at the community around you, including coworkers, family friends and your college alumni network, to find a potential mentor. Your mentor doesn't need to be an executive. They can be just a few levels above you. In fact, someone three to five years ahead of you might have more practical and relevant advice than someone 20 or 30 years your senior who may be less in touch with the day-to-day realities of someone at your level.

Don't be surprised if you realize that one person is unable to help you in all the ways you're looking to learn about your industry and grow your career. That's OKAY. Remember that you can have multiple mentors at one time.

4. Make Sure to Look for Different Perspectives

A mentor with a different perspective will help you understand how to work with different people, adjust her communication styles and think more creatively.

It's important to find mentors with different worldviews. This could be someone in a different department or someone from a different background who experiences the workplace differently than you do.

5. Reach Out and Establish a Relationship

There is no one way to establish a mentoring relationship. If you're looking to ask someone you don't know to be your mentor, it's always best to ask a mutual contact to make an introduction for you. If you don't have a common friend to make an introduction, it's important to establish common ground when you reach out, such as mentioning that you graduated from the same university, work in the same industry or belong to the same professional organization. Tell them about yourself, your work and why you're reaching out to them. If you're asking someone you work with to be your mentor, you can say, "I really admire your work style, and I'd like to learn more about how you prepare for meetings. You always have an answer for every question, and you always appear calm."

It's important that you feel comfortable enough with your mentor to reveal doubts about yourself and your work. Testing the waters with an initial conversation can help you decide whether or not it feels right to keep moving forward.

6. Be Specific About What You Want

Starting with your initial outreach is sure to help your potential mentor understand what you're working toward or what you need support in and why you're turning to them rather than someone else. Being clear with what you're looking for and why you think this person is the right one will help them to say yes.

7. Make It Easy For Your Mentor

Be respectful of your mentor's time by taking care of logistics—whether that means finding a meeting place or setting up the Zoom call—so they can just show up and offer his or her advice. Consider sending an agenda or your questions the day before your meeting so your mentor has time to think about how best to help you, Merrell says. Be on time for your meeting and, if your mentor sets a 30-minute time limit, you should be the one watching the clock, she says. If you're meeting in person, pay for his or her coffee, she adds.



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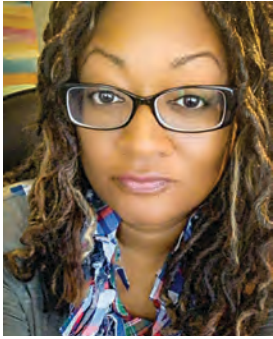
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HARKEY TO PRESENT AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Submitted by Savannah Wright, Director of Communications



Michelle Harkey

Michelle Harkey, Pee Dee Coalition Outreach and Training coordinator and Military Partnership Project coordinator for the Elizabeth Pettigrew Durant Children's Center, a program of Pee Dee Coalition, will present "Effective Victim Services and Advocacy Response for Military Families" at the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children 2021 San Diego International Conference in January.

A pre-conference will be on Jan. 23-24, and the main conference will take place on Jan. 25-28.

Harkey has provided numerous trainings on subjects pertaining to child abuse, domestic violence and sexual assault. Her presentation will address challenges, practices and lessons learned by children's advocacy centers (CACs) that serve military families impacted by domestic violence and child abuse.

The research will also be used to explain why it is necessary to implement CAC services in conjunction with victim services within the Department of Defense.

The lessons taken from this workshop will help professionals improve services for military families and children impacted by abuse, create long-term success and implement offender accountability. Participants will also learn how to better understand the status of children's advocacy centers-military partnerships and ways to enhance these partnerships.

The San Diego Conference is hosted by the Chadwick Center, one of the largest hospital-based child advocacy and trauma treatment centers in the nation and a fully accredited member of the National Children's Alliance. Visit www.chadwickcenter.com to learn more about the 2021 San Diego International Conference and the Chadwick Center.

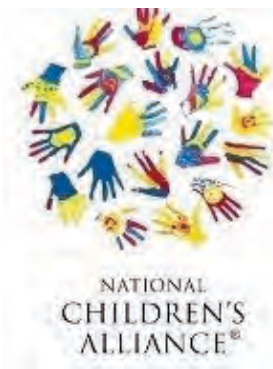
Durant Children's Centers, a multidisciplinary assessment and treatment center, is a program of Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic that serves Florence, Darlington, Marion, Chesterfield, Marlboro, Dillon, Sumter and Williamsburg counties. For more information on child abuse and how to refer a child or adolescent for services, call the Durant Center at 843-664-HELP, 843-664-4357.

Pee Dee Coalition is a non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to the reduction of sexual assault, family violence and child abuse and to the needs of its victims. If you or someone you know is in need of emergency shelter, please call the 24-hour crisis line at 843-669-4600 or toll free at 1-800-273-1820. If you are in immediate danger, please call 911. To learn more about Pee Dee Coalition, visit www.peedeecoalition.org.

Pee Dee Coalition is a member of the United Way.

"A series of studies, reports, interviews, and case reviews will be used to establish a general overview of Department of Defense procedures to assist in developing and maintaining collaborative relationships," says Harkey.

Additionally, the workshop will cover the unique challenges of military culture that sometimes complicate victim service delivery to families on military installations. The workshop will use quantitative research to explain how these challenges impact long-term development among children.



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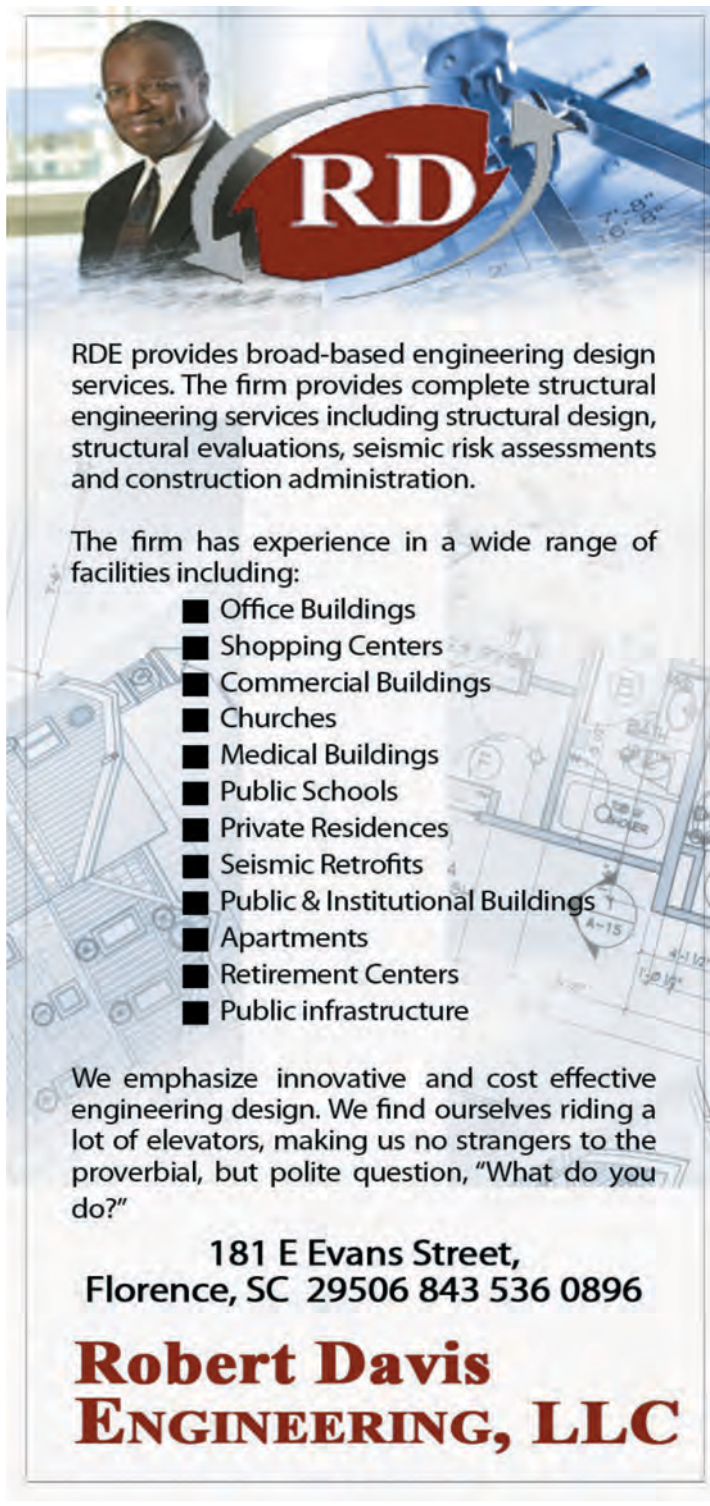
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8 QUESTIONS MANAGERS SHOULD ASK IN 1:1 MEETINGS

1. How Are You?

While you may be tempted to get right down to business—especially if you're under pressure to finish a project or in back-to-back meetings—take the time to pause and gauge how your direct report is feeling, both about work and outside of it. At the very start of a meeting, there should be a personal vibe. You want to know how he or she is doing as a person and what's going on in his or her life.

2. Do You Have Any Updates From Last Meeting?

Before diving into new topics, try tying up any loose ends from

the previous session. Get those updates out of the way so you can then focus on what's most pressing based on deadlines and urgency or the areas where the most support may be needed.

3. What Are You Focusing on Now?

Employees should be encouraged to share priorities and top projects in order to manage expectations on both sides. As a boss, you can also use this question to make sure someone's work is aligned with the goals you have set together (whether it's developing a new skill or contributing to a specific project) and that he or she is on track to achieve them. This way you're making sure he or she is growing and getting the skills needed so he or she is not in that role forever and can move on to something bigger and better.

4. How Are You Feeling About Your Workload?

Nowadays it's easy to get caught up in the work-from-home hustle and spend all day at the computer—so anything you can do as a boss to show compassion is recommended.

We're all burning the candle on both ends, and there are people who can perform at a high level but are essentially dying inside because the work is stressful or overwhelming. So it's important for managers to see whether their staff needs more support or a lighter workload.

5. How Are You Feeling in Your Role?

Although it may be tempting to leave this question for annual performance reviews, it's a critical one to ask on an ongoing basis because it may uncover problem areas earlier on. It's necessary to make sure you're getting a pulse on how employees are feeling about their role and the progress they're making so you can look out for opportunities that may be good for their development.

6. Where Do You See the Team Falling Short?

You should often direct reports to have a better line of vision into how their team is actually functioning whereas the manager may be more removed. Asking for the employee's perspective on how we can be more collaborative or what we can do to get better results for the organization enables them to give valuable input and feel empowered.

7. Do You Have Any Questions About [Insert Company News/Project/Etc. Here]?

A one-on-one meeting is a good opportunity to see if direct reports need more information about any big-picture issues relating to the company. Maybe someone on the team was recently laid off, or there's a new COO or other high-level executive, or perhaps HR has announced updated diversity initiatives. Regardless of the topic, the questions should be framed in an open-ended way coming from a place of curiosity.

8. Is This Format Working for You?

Even if you think your one-on-ones are successful, your direct report may be feeling otherwise—so it's crucial to occasionally check in and determine whether the current structure is mutually beneficial. And if not, you can follow up by asking, "What can we change about this to revitalize it?"





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WANT TO REPRESENT YOURSELF AFTER AN ACCIDENT?



Charlie J. Blake, Jr., Esquire

Do-It-Yourself has become a popular concept in our society. The widespread availability of information has allowed consumers to make repairs, develop and finish projects, and design new ideas without specialized training or the assistance of trained professionals. If consumers want to replace their kitchen tile, they can find a video online with instructions. When it is time to replace your brake pads, print the relevant manual, and avoid the car repair shop. The underlying theory is that individuals can produce quality results at a lower cost using their own skills. This mentality has even impacted the practice of law.

Potential clients are attempting to draft their own wills or are appearing in legal proceedings without lawyers. As an office that handles auto accidents, we are faced with the challenge of clients who simply want to do it themselves after being injured in a car wreck. Lack of quality representation in auto accident is risky, and there are several important factors to consider.

Experience Matters. The average person will be involved in a few wrecks in his or her lifetime. An insurance adjuster deals with several wrecks per month. In many instances, unrepresented claimants approach adjusters with a skewed understanding of their case value based on outdated information on the Internet. An experienced insurance adjuster will recognize unprepared or unrepresented claimants and negotiate with that advantage. Many unrepresented

claimants receive a low valuation on their case and then scramble to seek representation. This practice makes it a bigger challenge for an attorney since the insurance adjuster has committed to a lower value with his or her company and will fight against late attorney input.

You Have Done-It-Yourself Now. In many instances, errors made in do-it-yourself projects can be corrected. All that is required is a quick call to a trained professional or simply just restarting that project. Common mistakes in auto accident cases cannot be remedied in this manner. Unrepresented injured parties settle their claim for below value or without needed treatment, and the results are final. A good attorney will understand the process of case valuation and the necessity for clients to receive proper medical care before settling the claim. Aggressive negotiation or litigation can drive up your settlement amount. This attribute is extremely important because many claimants will not use an attorney in hopes of not paying for representation.

Time Is Money. Proper handling of an auto accident case takes time. A good lawyer will gather witness statements, medical records and bills, and evidence to support your claim. If a claimant does not seek counsel, the burden and time requirements shift to them to handle these important details. Even after the resolution of the claim, medicals bills will need to be paid, and liens will need to be resolved. Failure to address bills or liens can subject a claimant to a collection action or possibly losing their healthcare benefits. If you want to do it yourself, it is a time commitment to complete the entire process in the appropriate manner.

The office of Finklea, Hendrick & Blake, LLC is located at 814 West Evans Street, Florence, S.C. 29503. I represent injured parties in automobile accidents. If you have any questions or need a consultation, please feel free to call at 843-317-4900.



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CYBERSECURITY PREDICTIONS FOR



Contributed by Kyle Fiehler, Webroot

The cybersecurity industry and end-of-year predictions go together like fall and football or champagne and the New Year. But on the heels of an unprecedented year, where a viral outbreak changed the landscape of the global workforce practically overnight, portending what's in store for the year ahead is even trickier than usual.

One thing the cybersecurity experts at Webroot agree on is that work from home is here to stay for 2021, or at least it won't recede to pre-pandemic levels in even the medium-term. What is likely to change is how companies respond to their remote workforces. The security measures they take (or don't), the educational opportunities they provide (or fail to) and their commitment to innovation (or lack thereof) will likely separate the winners from the losers in the year ahead.

Yes, cybersecurity for remote workforces will likely be a prevailing concern throughout 2021, even following positive news on the vaccine development front, according to Webroot experts. Another prevailing theme from the professionals here, when asked to make their annual predictions for the new year, is that a cybersecurity skills gap will continue to haunt businesses and pose opportunities for those looking to start their careers in the field or make the switch

to it. As such, automation and the adoption of AI technologies will be critical to plugging the gap.

Read on for more details for complete cybersecurity predictions for 2021. Take heart because, whatever happens, 2020 won't be easily outdone (knock on wood).

- In 2021, many businesses will continue to operate remotely as a result of the pandemic, and there must be an emphasis on training employees on security best practices, how to identify modern threats, such as phishing, and where company data is being accessed and stored. Phishing is going to remain one of the most prominent ways to attack users and will become more sophisticated as it's tailored to take advantage of work-from-home setups and distractions.
- The biggest change for 2021 will be securing remote workforces and remote perimeters, which include home networks and home devices, particularly personal devices. These all add their own challenges. Home networks and their configurations are diverse. Many use out-of-date routers with insecure settings. Personal devices are often used for work and, as we saw in our 2020 Threat Report, are twice as likely as business devices to encounter infections. If not addressed, this could have a serious impact on businesses in the coming year.
- We shouldn't overlook the incredible societal and behavioral changes underway right now. These put all of us in new situations we've never encountered before. These new contexts create new opportunities for social engineering attacks like phishing and scare tactics to get us to open emails and click on fraudulent links.
- We predict that in 2021 vulnerable industries like hospitality, travel and retail will start to use even more remote access platforms like Square and others. This transfers a lot of control to a third-party, so it's essential companies make sure their data is protected on their end, that their vendors are trustworthy and that their reputation is safe from the damage an internal breach could cause.

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LANDING A JOB IN THE COVID-19 ERA

The job hunt after college is exhilarating and emotional while at the same time stressful and exhausting. Adding a global pandemic into the mix threatens to upend the process for the nearly 4 million 2020 graduates. For recent graduates, the disruption to the hiring and internship experience has brought unexpected challenges and adversity and tested their ability to persevere.

Some internships have been canceled or pushed back, and job offers have been rescinded as companies have frozen hiring to lessen the financial burden brought on by the pandemic. Travel bans are restricting graduates from taking jobs across borders, and graduates are faced with fewer job openings and increased competition for those jobs. These are just some of the added roadblocks new graduates are facing in 2020.

At the same time, many companies are pivoting to virtual interviews and networking events and, in some instances, entire internships have gone remote.

Here are a few tips for landing that first job in the COVID-19 era:

- Use the virtual tools at your disposal to network with recruiters. With in-person events off the table this fall, jobseekers need to seek alternative methods for making the connections that previously would have happened at career fairs. Reach out to your network on LinkedIn and other recruiting platforms. Email the professional contacts you've made through industry organizations or extracurricular activities. Pick up the phone, and call recruiters to learn more about an open position. It's all about taking the extra step to stand out from the crowd when first impressions are no longer face-to-face.

- Take advantage of virtual recruiting fairs and career prep sessions. Is your school hosting a virtual career fair? Is the student organization you're a member of bringing in a guest speaker for a virtual chat? Identify the many opportunities available to connect

with potential employers, and use them to make connections. To stand out from the crowd, you'll need to be an active participant. Ask questions. Share thoughts. Contribute to the conversation. Don't be afraid to speak up, but make sure you do your research on the company first.

- Try ways to connect with prospective employers. Ramp up virtual recruiting webinars and career prep sessions. Continue to facilitate personal introductions and industry mentoring opportunities and recruiting tools to better match your talent with relevant positions.

- And finally, practice your virtual personal sales pitch, and refine your digital professional presence to reflect all you have to offer. Make sure your LinkedIn and portfolio highlight your experiences and skills. Go beyond just sharing your degree information, and articulate your value proposition. This includes showcasing your out-of-the-classroom experiences, leadership training, previous internships, as well as describing times you overcame adversity.

Recruiters want problem solvers and critical thinkers. They want someone who will pick up a new skill quickly and learn fast. So, instead of looking at the pandemic as a setback on your job search journey, view it as an opportunity to demonstrate you possess these qualities and are right for the job.

Good luck!



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2021: A NEW BEGINNING Submitted by The City of Florence



Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin

“Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step” – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The City of Florence community stepped out in faith, breaking glass ceilings and tearing down racial barriers in the 2020 election of a new mayor and at-large Council members. Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin is not only the first woman to serve as mayor of the City of Florence, but also the first African American. Councilman Chaquez T. McCall is the youngest individual elected to serve as

a Council member, and he and Councilwoman Lethonia Barnes were chosen at large to represent the City of Florence. This election was a strong example of the community embracing its diversity through the choice of its leadership.

Myers Ervin served since 2010 on City Council as councilwoman for District #1. She is a Florence native who was born, raised and educated in Florence and loves the city she serves. As councilwoman, she has many times referenced “One Florence” when addressing the public. She promotes diversity and inclusion, working together as one community and ensuring equity across a multitude of platforms for all residents.

All residents, regardless of race or socio-economic status, possess similar desires. Most want for a safe community, job opportunities with

livable wages, a solid public education system and recreational activities. Myers Ervin shares these desires with the residents she serves while focusing on equity for all residents, thus, “One Florence.”

Myers Ervin, by her very nature, is a caregiver and nurturer. She and her husband, Lavon Ervin, are the proud parents of three children: Lavon C. Ervin II, Dr. Charlie I. Ervin II and Cacie C.A. Ervin. Myers Ervin has served in the medical field as a registered nurse for 39 years and 15 years in the ministerial field. She also has over 15 years of experience as a realtor. She is embracing her newest challenge as mayor of Florence and is pressing full forward in 2021 to continue the growth and development of the Florence community.

What’s on the horizon in this new beginning for Florence? A special election is slated for citizens in Districts #1 and #3 for the City of Florence. Several candidates are in the running for these City Council seats with a primary scheduled on Jan. 26 and a run-off primary (if necessary) on Feb. 9, and the special election will be held on March 30. Once the new Council is fully in place, it will represent the largest turnover on City Council that the Florence community has ever experienced. While changes can sometimes be uncomfortable, they also bring a sense of excitement looking forward with fresh perspectives and ideas for Florence.

Many projects for 2021 are already in motion, and the community will continue to experience growth and improvement throughout the



2021 CONT'D

city. The City's Streetscape Improvement project is well under way in the 300-400 Blocks of West Evans Street. Renovations at the Lawton-Chase Home (formerly Florence Museum) are nearing completion and will offer Florence a new event venue. An exciting addition in City Recreation will be the new sports complex, which will house local youth baseball a track & field programs as well as a new permanent home for the Florence RedWolves. Activity is also anticipated at the Urban Square Development on the corner of Evans/Coit, which includes a significant private investment for the downtown area as well as additional public parking.

The City's success in recent years is a direct result of key community partnerships and collaboration and will remain a top priority as we advance forward in 2021. While the leadership may have changed, the intent to continually work to improve the community will not. This same time last year, we had no foresight of the impact COVID-19 would create for our nation, state and here locally in Florence. However, as a community we have collaborated and come together to ensure the health and safety of our residents and the success of local Florence businesses. This year will no doubt have unknown challenges, but as "One Florence," we will find success paving the path to greatness through a sense of community and determination as we succeed in our endeavors to advance Florence Full Life. Full Forward.



2020 BUSINESSPERSON OF THE YEAR

Submitted by the Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce



Vera Herbert

Vera Herbert of Carolina Bank was named the Wells Fargo 2020 Businessperson of the Year during the Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce's Annual Membership Luncheon on Dec. 1 at the Florence Center. Ken Jackson, past chairman of the Florence Chamber made the presentation. The award is given annually to recognize a business owner who has made enduring and outstanding contributions in the field of business.

Florence Chamber President Michael Miller said, "Vera is one of those individuals that has community focus built into her daily work schedule. She is very deserving of this award, and we hope her work continues to inspire others to follow in her footsteps."

Herbert is a native of the Pee Dee and a graduate of West Florence High School. For the last 18 years she has held responsibilities that include interest rate risk, bond portfolio management and marketing for Carolina Bank where she serves as vice president. She is the first female elected as president of the Independent Bankers Association of South Carolina.

She has served on numerous boards and organizations including Florence County Development Partnership Board, Florence Kiwanis Club Board, Florence Chamber of Commerce Board, Junior League of Florence, Boys & Girls Club of the Pee Dee and All for Autism.

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A NEW WAY TO HELP YOUR NEIGHBORS

Submitted by Mary Grace McGee, Manager of Community Relations

KINGSTREE- For many years Santee Electric Cooperative has offered Operation Round Up as a way for members to help their friends and neighbors in need by

rounding up their bill to the nearest dollar. On average, fifty cents per month from each participant goes into the Operation Round Up fund. Now a new program called Round Up PLUS is being introduced.

Round Up PLUS allows members to go online and sign up to give a monthly gift in the amount of their choice or a one-time lump sum. All donations are tax-deductible and go directly into the Operation Round Up Fund.

Josephine Rush is just one of many members who has benefited from Operation Round Up. On April 6 of last year, an old microwave started a fire in Rush's mobile home, destroying most of it. Thanks to a \$500 gift from Operation Round Up, insurance, and a very

talented daughter, Angel Coles, Rush has returned to her newly renovated residence. "I never imagined being back in here," Rush declared as she looked around her new beautiful kitchen.

Vice president of Public Affairs explained, "The program was founded with the purpose of expanding the principle of neighbor-helping-neighbor. Electric Cooperatives were built on such principals. Operation Round Up and Round Up PLUS show that a small change can change lives."

If you would like to donate to Operation Round Up or Round Up PLUS, go to www.santee.org. A link for giving can be found on the homepage or under Community Programs. Click on the link, fill out the form and our billing department will make sure your gift is added into the monthly Operation Round Up total.



Josephine Rush shows off tiles her daughter made in her new kitchen, made possible in part because of Santee Electric's Round Up donors.

Together
we
make the
difference

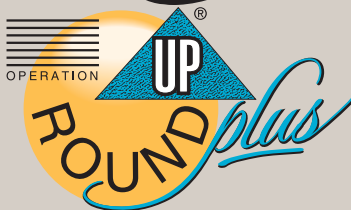
Helping your community is a

plus

Santee Electric Cooperative's members have helped the community through Operation Round Up®, donating more than \$5.5 million since 1993. Through this program, members' electric bills are rounded up to the next whole dollar. Money raised help in times of need with food, clothing, shelter, health needs and added support for worthy organizations.

We are now offering, Operation Round Up PLUS. Along with Operation Round Up, you can give more to help make a bigger difference in our community. You will be able to choose a one time gift or add a monthly gift in an amount of your choice.

For more information on how you can participate, visit santee.org or call 800-922-1604.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



LIVE, GIVE, AND HELP LOCAL: THE UNITED WAY Submitted by Staff, United Way of Florence County

When people think of United Way, they tend to think of a \$5 billion global enterprise. Although they are correct, many don't realize that United Way of Florence County is independently governed by a local volunteer board and operates on a community level in order to best meet the local needs of those in Florence County. As a local 501(c)(3) non-profit, United Way of Florence County has been the cornerstone of the social service sector in Florence County for over 65 years. By working together with a broad range of community partners, we are providing funding to 22 non-profits and 30 programs in our community that address the needs of over 19,000 people.

To fund these programs, we heavily fundraise through company campaigns, individual donations and local businesses. Last year, our fundraising efforts ensured that over \$850,000 worth of services were available in the health, income, education, youth, emergency and special services sectors of our community. Beyond our work in fundraising, United Way of Florence County provides opportunities and initiatives for all who need help or wish to impact others in a positive way.

Two United Way initiatives continually providing help in our community include "211" and Day of Caring. United Way's 211 service is a free, confidential, 24/7 service that connects individuals in need to resources in our area. Individuals looking for help can call/text 2-1-1, or visit sc211.org to reach resources such as rent/utilities assistance, food, shelter, healthcare, counseling, employment services, etc. In addition to providing support for those in need, 211 allows United Way to identify service gaps, unmet needs, under-served populations and common determinants that often lead to crisis. Although both 211 and Day of Caring are initiatives held by UWFC, both serve our community in a different light.

Our annual Day of Caring serves to fulfill the needs of our partner agencies while 211 serves individuals looking for resources. For over 28 years now, individuals and businesses have teamed up to give back



to our community by completing projects proposed by our partner agencies. Projects include but are not limited to cleaning, construction, landscaping, painting, etc. Completion of these projects allows our agencies to enhance the quality of services they provide and establishes a sense of pride and greater understanding on the importance of volunteerism, especially when we work together.

Without the support of our community through company campaigns, donations, volunteerism, etc., United Way of Florence County would not be able to fulfill our mission: To positively impact the needs of our community by strengthening relationships, programs and services that produce measurable results and improve the quality of life and to be recognized as the leading health and human services support agency in the Pee Dee through resource development and community impact initiatives. As we continue to carry out our mission, we encourage everyone to LIVE, GIVE, and HELP LOCAL through the United Way of Florence County. Together we can make a difference. If you or anyone you know is interested in learning more or getting involved, please contact us at 843-662-2407, or email us at uwfloinfo@uwflorence.org.

HONDA



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RUIZ FOODS: SUPPORTING COMMUNITY AND DIVERSITY Submitted by Ruiz Foods

As we look back at 2020, we remember a year filled with questions and uncertainty, but as we look to 2021 with hope and optimism, we must also take time to remember how we “made a difference,” caring about each other and caring about our community.

“I’m proud to say it’s who we are,” said Peter Mayadag, Ruiz Foods Florence director of operations. “This spirit of caring and giving is a commitment that goes back to our co-founders, Fred Ruiz, and his father, Louis Ruiz. And it’s something we do all year long.”

“Since Ruiz Florence last shared details of community support events, the annual Florence ‘Pink Out’ Day...held October 2020... raised over \$6,600,” said Matt Ruiz, director of Corporate & Community Relations, “which brings the Ruiz Florence total to over \$16,000 since the first ‘Pink Out’ Day held in 2015 – and all donated to the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research.”

The Ruiz 4 Kids Mini-Grants for Teachers Program, which also began in Ruiz Florence in 2015, has recently announced that it will award nearly \$16,000 to teachers for the 2020–2021 school year. “Team members really enjoy this program and look forward to it every year,” adds Mayadag.

To participate, a Team Member authorizes deductions directly from his or her payroll check, knowing that all the monies go directly to the educators in the community. Ruiz Team Members enjoy seeing the kids participate in unique programs created by the teachers, knowing the kids are benefitting from out-of-the-ordinary opportunities that are both fun and challenging, particularly during this time of COVID-19, with a mix of at-home and on-site classes.

“We’re so very proud of our Florence Team Members,” adds Ruiz. “Since Ruiz 4 Kids began the Mini-Grants for Teachers Program, our Florence Team Members alone have awarded nearly \$100,000 to Florence area teachers...and that spirit of giving is nothing short of amazing.”

Our “Angel Tree” program ... again partnering with the Salvation Army, is in its fifth year, helping children receive Christmas



Bicycles for Salvation Army’s “Angel Tree”

gifts on their “wish list.” Once again, Ruiz Florence Team Members helped 40 children and, once again, the Florence Maintenance Department dedicated their giving to bicycles.

In addition to the “Angel Tree” program during the 2020 holiday season, Ruiz Florence also supported Florence House of Hope with 50 turkeys. “We’ve been working with Florence House of Hope since 2018,” adds Mayadag, “and appreciate their offering shelter, food, education and training, ministry and fellowship to those facing homelessness.”

Additionally, Ruiz Florence donated 262 turkeys to Harvest Hope, the local food bank helping over 1 million people put food on their tables and find stability.

Last, but certainly not least, Ruiz Foods would like to congratulate Diversity Works® magazine celebrating their 10th Anniversary this January and thank them for their dedication to promoting diversity and inclusion in Florence and the surrounding communities.

And now, details about a new Ruiz Cares Grant: (1) the Ruiz Cares Community Grant (2) the application submitted by Diversity Works Initiatives (3) the reason for the selection and the event’s background information.

First of all, congratulations to Diversity Works Initiatives on receiving this first-ever Ruiz Cares Grant for \$5,000. “A non-profit, their application was selected based on the fact that they afford businesses like Ruiz Florence the opportunity to learn and come together with others in the community as we all work on improving inclusion and open communication within our own workplace,” explains Ruiz.

Because of COVID-19 protocols, the 2020 Diversity Focus Training and Luncheon was rescheduled to Nov. 4. This will be the fourth biennial event with a tentative theme: EDI 3.0 (Issues of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion). The event will be a conference concept and cover topics: Unconscious Bias; Allyship; Diversity and Profitability and Microaggression.

Ruiz Foods is excited to be a part of this event because, from the top down, Ruiz understands the importance of embracing diversity in the workplace. “What diversity brings to our workplace is invaluable,” adds Ruiz. “By giving our Team Members the opportunity to work with other Team Members from different backgrounds, different experience and with different working styles, they not only learn about but are exposed to other views. Diverse views make for better decisions that serve to fuel what we believe we have...a high-performance culture. What’s more,” continues Ruiz, “it is a pleasure to see how our diverse workforce reflects the diversity of each community in which we live and work. Geographically, each of our four



Turkeys for House of Hope

manufacturing facilities is located in smaller communities. Each is comprised of a diverse population. From Dinuba and Tulare, California to Denison, Texas to Florence, South Carolina – in all cases, we are proud to be a member of each community and are committed to giving back.”

As a food manufacturing company, it is always important to stay in touch with what our consumer likes and what he/she is looking for. With diversity in nearly every function of our organization, we find ourselves able to understand the consumers we serve. It makes our team better able to develop fresh ideas that will meet the needs of the market we serve. Diversity clearly promotes improved morale, outside-the-box thinking, greater teamwork and an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect.

In tandem with the commitment to a diverse workforce, the company is also pleased to share its commitment to vendor and supplier diversity. “We view our own Company’s beginning and subsequent success as an example of the American Dream come true,” adds Ruiz. “With that in mind, our commitment is to pay it forward whenever possible – providing opportunities for other family-owned or minority-owned companies to grow as we grow. And, as we and other companies continue to embrace diversity,” concludes Ruiz, “we must remember that we will need to continually shift our practices to reflect the new and ever-changing demographics. What we define as diversity today, and how we measure it, will constantly change because people and their expectations will continue to evolve and change. We are proud of our diverse workforce and their amazing accomplishments, and we are pleased to be able to celebrate what makes us different. We also thank my dad and grandfather for laying the groundwork for the culture we fully embrace. Together, we honor our past...and embrace our future...a future that is exciting and full of promise. As a family-owned business, our commitment is to grow and remain successful for many years to come.”

TRUSTING GOD FOR A DO-OVER by Robin Lewis



HEMINGWAY-How we deal with problems says a lot about us. Our attitude, perspective and response to problems or difficulties reveals the condition of our hearts and minds. We want to be like the wise who seem to know the right steps to take, who are patient to work things out and who learn from their mistakes. Unfortunately, many times, our response to hardship is to want out of it.



The Geographical Fix.

Have you ever had problems mounting up so badly that you just wanted to move to another city or state and try to start over? Maybe you've tried that yourself. We think, "If only I could move and get a fresh perspective or make a new start or get a new job," but it doesn't work.

It doesn't work because we bring more than our furniture and toothbrush. We bring our problems with us too.

I knew a friend years ago who just kept moving. She could never be happy and always thought the answer lay in some new location. I remember another friend who was always surrounded by difficulty in her business and sought to cast the blame on other people's choices and behavior. Neither of these people wanted to recognize that they were the common denominator. They just kept moving, protecting themselves from the real truth of the matter. They thought the right "do-over" would one day be the answer, but it's the truth that frees us.



The Time Fix.

At the time of this writing, it is December 2020. I hear so many people, Christians included, saying they can hardly wait for this year to be over. But what happens when we put up the new calendar for 2021? Will things be different, or will we still find ourselves deep in the same struggles that were rampant in 2020? Will we get a "do-over?"

There was a popular song in 1989 by Cher called "If I Could Turn Back Time." The song hit #3 on the Billboard charts in the U.S. and was a hit around the world going gold and selling more than half a million copies. Why? Because the idea of turning back time resonated with so many people who wanted a "do-over." They wanted to take back hurtful words spoken, release themselves from guilt, undo mistakes and make everything okay and normal again.

But even if we could turn back time, we would probably do the same things we did before unless we get the one fix that's actually needed.



The Heart Fix.

The only way to get a true "do-over" is to fix what's essentially wrong and distorted in our hearts. Unless we bring our broken places to God and surrender our hearts to his loving, healing

hands, our lives won't become anything more than they are now with the high probability that life will become worse.

Whether our problem is a personal one, an issue in our family or a global crisis like COVID-19 or the racial and political tension we've lived in since the early spring of 2020, to us, the world and 2021 will not improve. Without a heart "do-over" we will remain unchanged. Go back to normal? The idea of a "normal, care-free, get our way" kind of life isn't the life God wants for us.

God created us for joyful dependence on him in an intimate relationship, the kind where we know each other really well. We can start the process by trusting in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We can grow into that by submitting our lives to God and learning to walk with him daily.

Our problems are actually opportunities to know God better and experience his goodness and power in our lives. He longs to help us, to comfort us, to heal us – but he doesn't push his plan. He waits for us to ask. He's a gentleman, a loving father, who gave us free will and allows us to choose.

The Independent Heart.

Yes, we were created for complete dependence on God. This is hard for most people because each of us seek to be so independent especially in Western culture. We want our rights, our privilege, our life, our way, when we are actually created to enjoy the freedom that God offers.

So, what will your future hold? Will you get a "do-over?" No, but you can get a heart-fix, and that's even better. Pray this simple prayer with me now and let's make 2021 different, amazing and blessed in a whole new way.

Father God,

Forgive me for not trusting you with my whole life. Forgive me for the ungodly, selfish and fearful ways I have responded to life and circumstances in 2020 and before. Father God, I want your kind do-over, and I need for you to fix my heart. Come in and save me, heal me and make me whole. I ask for a new perspective and your help in building a strong relationship with you – the kind I was made for: I want to know your abundant life through Jesus. I want to become empowered in you, and I want to make a positive difference in this world. Thank you for loving me no matter what and for your promise to never leave me. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



God's Heart Is For You.

If you just prayed this prayer or one like from your heart, then 2021 will be different for you. While it may take some time before circumstances change, you've experienced the greatest and most important change there is: to come to know your Father God and his heart for you.

The changes and new life he can bring to our hearts and minds are the kind that set us free spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and even physically. Galatians 5:1 says, "It is for freedom that Christ came to set us free. Do not let yourselves become enslaved (to the wrong mindset) again."

With him, because all things are possible (Luke 1:37), our perspective becomes more positive. With Him, we have hope in our hearts. With him, we have a life purpose that he supernaturally empowers.

So, yes, I guess you could say, we do get a "do-over!" There's no more need to move to another city or turn back time because now our hearts are new in God and his heart is always for us.

Robin Lewis is a Christ-centered life coach. You can get a free eBook on her website at www.RobinLewisLife.com.

DCSD NAMES BROWN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY

Articles submitted by Christopher McKagen, Communications Specialist



Benjamin Brown, the new executive director of technology for the Darlington County School District

DARLINGTON-The Darlington County School District (DCSD) recently announced that Benjamin Brown will become the district's new executive director of technology. Brown brings an extensive professional background that spans two decades in education and technology services.

"We are pleased to welcome Mr. Brown and his diverse experiences to the Darlington County School District," said Dr. Tim Newman, DCSD superintendent. "I am confident he will continue to strengthen and build our capability to provide students and staff with

opportunities to learn and grow through the use of technology."

Brown most recently served as the executive director of information technology for Durham Public Schools in North Carolina, a school district of 53 schools and more than 31,500 students. In the DCSD, Brown taught networking and technology at the Darlington County Institute of Technology from 2006-2010. He has also served as a network technician in Williamsburg County School District and Guilford County Schools in North Carolina.

Prior to his time with Durham Public Schools, Brown was the chief technology officer for Northampton County Schools and an assistant principal in Cumberland County Schools in North Carolina.

"I am overjoyed about returning to DSCD and embarking on this new journey," Brown said. "Likewise, I am committed to working with the DCSD team to create an instructional environment that fosters and encompasses innovation as well as a sustainable IT infrastructure that supports personalized student learning and bolsters achievement. I look forward to working with DCSD educators, students, families and the Darlington County community."

Brown holds a Master of Education in school administration and an education specialist certification in curriculum and instruction from Cambridge College. He also holds a Bachelor of Science in liberal studies and an Associate of Science in computer science information technology from Limestone College. He completed the S.C. Department of Education's Developing Instruction Readiness for Educators of Career and Technical Education (DIRECT) Program and is certified as an educator and administrator in both South Carolina and North Carolina as well as a certified education technology leader through the Consortium for School Networking.

DCSD's executive director of technology provides leadership for the development, implementation, operation, monitoring and evaluation of DCSD's technology program. He also works collaboratively with other members of the school district's central office staff and school building staff to use technology and include technology applications as an integral part of the total program as well as to support the total instructional program.

Brown began his new role in DCSD in early December.

25 ACTS OF SERVICE CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY



DHS 25 Acts of Service - Darlington High School students and faculty recently began a courtyard beautification project as part of the school's "25 Acts of Service," which celebrates the school's 25th anniversary.

DARLINGTON-Darlington High School (DHS) celebrates its 25th anniversary this school year by treating the community who has supported the school so much over the years with dedicated acts of kindness.

The school deems the call to action "25 Acts of Service," and events are already underway, including fundraising, food drives and litter cleanup. DHS students, faculty, staff and alumni are finding creative ways to come

together to honor the school's Silver Anniversary despite the coronavirus pandemic.

"It has been incredible to watch the various groups embrace this project," said Cortney Gehrke, DHS principal. "During this pandemic, instead of lamenting the celebrations we couldn't hold for our 25th year, Falcons have chosen to focus on supporting one another and our town. Our students will learn the joy of giving back through these events, and it will bring us all closer together as a Falcon Family."

Various DHS groups have already identified the 25 Acts of Service and are committed to seeing them completed by the end of May.

The program kicked off in October with several organizations working together to initiate a courtyard beautification project at the school. Justin Means, an alumnus of DHS and a current staff member, said the project "allows the Falcons to give back while enhancing a sense of empathy for the needs of our community in our future leaders."

In October, other events included the DHS National Honor Society raising funds to donate to McLeod Regional Medical Center's Breast Health Center and the school's Anchor and Beta clubs working together to collect food donations for the Darlington County Humane Society. On Oct. 30, the DHS football team worked with the city of Darlington to complete a roadside litter pick-up project.

"As a football staff, we wanted the kids to have an opportunity to do something for their community and to experience service-learning and the impact it can have," said Raymond Jennings, DHS varsity football head coach. "We simply challenged the players to help for nothing and to see how it would make them feel."

The DHS Key Club kicked off the month of November with members composing nearly 90 "Thinking of You" letters for local nursing home residents. Safety restrictions due to the pandemic have limited visits to these facilities, and the Key Club wanted to make sure these Darlington community members received some special attention.

November also marked the beginning of the 41st Annual Darlington Food Drive, which supplies groceries to some elderly and disabled citizens and also helps restock The Lord Cares Food Bank.

To follow along with the 25 Acts of Service throughout the school year, please follow Darlington High School on Facebook and Twitter.

VIRTUS ACADEMY'S PBL PRE-HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

Submitted by Becca Hamilton, Marketing and Parent Involvement Coordinator



Virtus Academy of South Carolina had a very busy two weeks before it released for its Holiday Break.



Gifts for the children

The whole school participated in the Salvation Army's Angel Tree program. Classes, staff and Virtus families worked together to adopt over 40 Angels within our community. Gifts for the adopted children included

bicycles, Chromebooks, dollhouses, clothes, coats, shoes, video games, books and more.

Each adoptor was given a wish list for the child he or she adopted. These lists allowed them to get gifts based on needs and wants.

The second service project that Virtus Academy completed was our third-grade holiday canned food drive. The third-grade classes researched food insecurity in the country and, more specifically, our community.

They then planned a food drive with theme days related to the holiday season. For example, on Grinch day, they asked classes to bring in green food items. They created a competition between the classes in Virtus where the class that brought in the most items would get a holiday movie day complete with snacks.

The third grade collected the donated items daily. They graphed the items and used that as part of their project-based learning (PBL)



Canned Goods

for the semester in math. In total, Virtus students donated over 2,600 cans to House of Hope in Florence. This number exceeded the initial goal of 1,000 greatly.

Virtus Academy of SC is a free, public charter school that opened in 2018. With a focus on PBL integration in science and social studies, Virtus supports parent-choice for more personalized education for their children. The goal of Virtus Academy is to

advance student achievement by preparing students for civic and career success through rigorous academics, leadership development and project-based learning.

Currently, students are enrolled in grades kindergarten through seventh grade. Virtus Academy is adding eighth grade for the upcoming school year. Open Enrollment for grades kindergarten through eighth grade is presently taking place for the 2021/22 school.



Students with gifts



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Virtus Academy of South Carolina is a free, public charter school that opened in 2018. With a focus on PBL integration in science and social studies, Virtus supports parent-choice for more personalized education for their children. The goal of Virtus Academy is to advance student achievement by preparing students for civic and career success through rigorous academics, leadership development, and project-based learning.



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TCS REPORTS 90% BLACK GRADS ENROLLED IN COLLEGE

Submitted by April Munn, Director of Admissions and Promotions International Coordinator



Trinity Collegiate School

DARLINGTON - African American college enrollment remains consistently low nationally and in South Carolina. Black students currently comprise only 9.5 percent of undergraduate enrollment at South Carolina colleges and universities. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, of the 3.2 million high school graduates ages 16 to 24 in 2019, only 66.2 percent enrolled in college (four-year, two-year or armed forces). Only 50.7 percent of Black high school graduates in the U.S., however, actually enrolled in college.

“Success for African American students is more than just graduating high school,” says Trinity Collegiate School director of College Counseling Weston Nunn. “Success means not only being accepted to college but ultimately enrolling and graduating. At Trinity Collegiate School we are developing a database in order to better track our African American student success post-graduation.”

Over the last five years at Trinity Collegiate, 100 percent of its 31 African American seniors have graduated from high school. All of the African Americans have been accepted to four-year colleges or universities. Of these 31 students, 28 (90 percent) enrolled in college. The overall college enrollment rate for all Trinity Collegiate

graduates is 97 percent.

“We know our African American students will graduate from high school and be accepted to college if they come to Trinity,” says Mike Teasley, director of the Trinity Collegiate School Office of Diversity and Cultural Affairs. “But what interests us now is what level of success are they having in college.”

Of the 90 percent of students who enrolled in college, reports Nunn, 79 percent currently remain in college, have graduated or have entered the military (three graduates) but with a plan to return to college. Of those students who did withdraw from college, all are currently employed (the school has follow-up data).

“African American families invest in a Trinity education,” Teasley says, “because they want their sons and daughters to go to college.”

“The success of our African American graduates is a reflection of the strong academic programs at Trinity Collegiate School,” says head of school Ed Hoffman. “With 21 AP courses and one of only a few schools in South Carolina to offer a pre-AP program,” Hoffman continues, “we are well equipped to meet our school’s mission of preparing our students to lead productive lives in a global society.”

For more information about Trinity Collegiate School, contact April Munn, director of Admissions.

Trinity Collegiate School is currently accepting applications for students entering grades 6-12. Please contact April Munn at amunn@trinitybyrnes.org or 843-395-9124 for more information.

Trinity Collegiate School is a coeducational, non-discriminatory day school in Darlington, S.C. The school’s mission is to operate exclusively as a college preparatory school of academic excellence; graduating well-rounded students of intellectual, social, and moral character ready to lead productive lives in a global society.



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Horry-Georgetown Technical College prohibits discrimination against students and employees. Please direct discrimination and accessibility issues to the Office of Student Affairs at 843-349-5228.

www.HGTC.edu/HR

HGTC APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS ABOUND

Submitted by Nicole Hyman, Public Relations Director



CONWAY– Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) is proud to announce that numerous apprenticeship opportunities are available with several on the horizon just in time for the celebration of South Carolina Apprenticeship Month. The College is very excited to announce that another Horry County company, bFIVE40, has been officially registered as an apprenticeship site with the Department of Labor and Apprenticeship Carolina. The manufacturing company is the Southeast's premier designer and innovator of printed signage, quality swag and custom apparel. HGTC will be offering seamstress classes on location starting this month.

The Charleston Defense Contractors Association (CDCA) is also now a registered apprenticeship program sponsor. The CDCA will provide cybersecurity specialist 1 apprenticeships through HGTC and Trident Tech.

HGTC encourages companies to become involved in the SC Apprenticeship program. The benefits of sponsoring apprenticeships include a higher skills level, decreased turnover, structured and consistent training, reliable plan for the future and a possible state tax credit per apprentice for up to four years.

“Apprenticeships have proven success, proven methods, higher wages, growth potential and valuable skills credential,” said Julie Golden, HGTC Training & Development director, assistant provost of the Georgetown Campus Workforce Development and Continuing Education. “Each apprenticeship contains job-related education, supervised on-the-job learning and a scalable wage.”

“We believe in organically growing our sewing and graphic design talent at bFIVE40 and achieve this through HGTC and Apprenticeship Carolina. HGTC’s apprenticeship program is a vital component in the success of our business,” said Donna Brin, founder of bFIVE40. “We are developing employees who are committed to learning a trade and growing with us. We don’t want our people to think they are working at a job; we want them to know that this is their career. Our apprentices see the investment we are making in them, and it shows in their work from day one. We are very impressed with the program and results.”

For referrals of individuals interested in apprenticeship opportunities or more information for employers to host apprentices, please contact Julie Golden by calling 843-520-1476 or emailing julie.golden@hgtc.edu.

Registration for the spring semester is underway. Tuition assistance and scholarships are available. Visit www.hgtc.edu, or call 843-347-3186 for more information.

About HGTC

HGTC offers college transfer and skilled associate degree programs in more than 65 fields of study, and many with online class options. Nearly all programs feature internships that lead to jobs. Ninety-five percent of students either transfer to earn advanced degrees or start careers in their respective fields of study. Horry-Georgetown Technical College prohibits discrimination against students and employees. Please direct discrimination and accessibility issues to the Office of Student Affairs at 843-349-5228.

FMU PARTNERS WITH HOPEHEALTH FOR STUDENTS Submitted by FMU

Francis Marion University's (FMU) School of Business has partnered with employees from Florence-based HopeHealth on a unique project that provides hands-on learning opportunities for FMU students.

FMU students enrolled in the Supply Chain Management 356 Quality Control and Process Improvement class will be able to observe, learn and even participate as a group of HopeHealth employees begin applying Six Sigma techniques and strategies to HopeHealth's business model this spring.

Six Sigma is a world-renowned 12-session workshop that uses a set of tools and techniques designed to improve business processes by removing variations and defects. The HopeHealth employees were taught Six Sigma this fall by Dr. Hubert Setzler, FMU associate professor of management, and Nellie Cooke Sparrow, professor of business, as part of an ongoing series of workshops provided to local businesses and executives by FMU's School of Business.

"We're excited to apply what we have learned to real-world projects at HopeHealth," said Andrea Mozingo, director of financial strategy at the HopeHealth Medical Plaza. "The Six Sigma strategies will help us make our processes more efficient so we can improve patient access to services."

As HopeHealth employees continue to develop the Six Sigma techniques within HopeHealth, they'll be joined by FMU students from Setzler's supply chain management class, who have also studied Six Sigma. The students will observe and interact with the HopeHealth employees implementing the techniques.

"This is yet another way for our undergraduate students to have a skill development opportunity outside of the classroom," Setzler says. "It's great to have a partner like HopeHealth in this process for our students to understand

what it's like to implement their skills in an actual workplace."

HopeHealth is a nonprofit leader in providing affordable, expert health care and infectious diseases services for all ages in Aiken, Florence, Clarendon, Orangeburg and Williamsburg counties. The federally-qualified health centers are the primary care providers of choice for more than 50,000 patients.

The FMU School of Business, accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International—the world's premier accrediting agency for college and university business programs—offers multiple undergraduate degrees in an array of business disciplines. It also offers a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Business Administration in healthcare executive management. And, as noted, it offers a variety of certificate courses to local business people.

For more on the school of business and its degree programs, visit <https://www.fmarion.edu/business/>.



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MOSES AND ANDREWS BID FAREWELL by Dawn "D.A." Goodwin

LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT



A LEARNING COMMUNITY
WHERE STUDENTS COME FIRST

what she said was never "a dull moment." During the meeting, she described several of the district's achievements, one of which was having the highest 2019 graduation rate in the state with the district at 96 percent. In addition, Moses spoke high praises of Andrews for her leadership. She acknowledged how Andrews had rebranded the district into "a learning community where students come first" and how "total expulsions" of students were eliminated. Now, when Lee County students are expelled, they are able to continue learning but in a virtual environment. Another area in which LCSD improved under Andrews is in its finances, as the district moved from a deficit of \$1.9 million to "operating in the black," said Moses.

Although LCSD has progressed so well through the years, to "reach even greater heights," Moses encouraged the Lee County community and its board of education to continue to collaborate. She

BISHOPVILLE -On Nov. 24 at Lee County's board of education meeting, its chairperson, Sanya Moses, and the county's superintendent, Dr. Wanda Andrews, both bid farewell. During the meeting, which was delivered via Zoom video conferencing, the two offered thanks to the board and the community and reflected upon the Lee County School District's (LCSD) progress.

Moses sat as the very first chair of the county's school board for 12 years, serving a total 16 years on it in

closed her remarks by stating it was "a pleasure, privilege, and honor to serve the Lee County School District."

Serving as LCSD's superintendent for over seven years was bittersweet for Andrews, who had announced earlier in the year that she would be retiring. She said, "We've shared some great times and some times that weren't so great... This has been a great opportunity and a great experience." In her message she took a moment to thank Lee County parents for supporting their children, the board for the opportunity to be of service, its members for their "leadership, vision and dedication to students." She pointed out how the district has progressed in all areas, including athletics and now having a chorus and band as well as students being able to graduate with two years of college studies. On the other hand, with regards to finances, Andrews said that although the district is stable and has brought in over \$15 million in grant money, LCSD is still underfunded. She said, "The education of students is a state responsibility, but there's been no change in the equity funding for students. Those are big issues we deal with." However, Andrews also expressed confidence that Bernard McDaniel "will do a great job as interim (superintendent). He has worked with me for about six and a half years and is devoted to the children of Lee County," she said.

The board welcomed Echo Belvin and Lucretia Mack after their November general election victories and swore in the incumbents Johnny McDuffie and Queenie Boyd, both of whom were re-elected. Vice Chairperson Sylvia Scott and board members thanked Andrews and Moses, whose positive imprints will forever remain on the Lee County School District as it continues its upward progression in education.

Best Wishes

We bid you farewell and appreciation for all your great work and support. Your contributions and dedication to this district and board have been immense and tremendous. This will be a prime example for others. Wishing you both the best in your future endeavors!!!



Dr. Wanda L. Andrews



Sanya Moses



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GENERAL ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATES
LOTTERY FUNDS EACH YEAR.

FDTC GRANTS PROVIDE SERVICES TO STUDENTS Submitted by FDTC



RUSH program coordinator, Dr. Andre Boyd, works with FDTC students during the interactive event, RUSH Hour.

Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) was awarded more than \$2.6 million in grant funding throughout 2020.

The largest of the grants was \$1,375,525 awarded by the U.S. Department of Education to benefit FDTC's Student Support Services (SSS) program. The grant will fund individualized counseling and tutoring, assist

students with preparing and submitting financial aid forms and acquaint students with career options and academic programs. Students will be exposed to cultural events as well. Eligible students must be U.S. citizens, have a need for academic support and be disadvantaged (low-income, a first-generation college student or an individual with disabilities).

The FDTC Removing Underserved Student Hurdles (RUSH) program was awarded \$599,993 from the U.S. Department of Education to fund the 2020-2021 Academic Year. The RUSH Program serves first-time freshmen enrolled in STEM and Healthcare programs. Students must apply and be accepted into the program. Services include personalized tutoring in specialized hubs (biology, English/reading, math), academic advisement, career counseling, job shadowing, workshops, book/laptop loan program, STEM Lab/Mixed Reality Center, cultural enrichment and student leadership development.

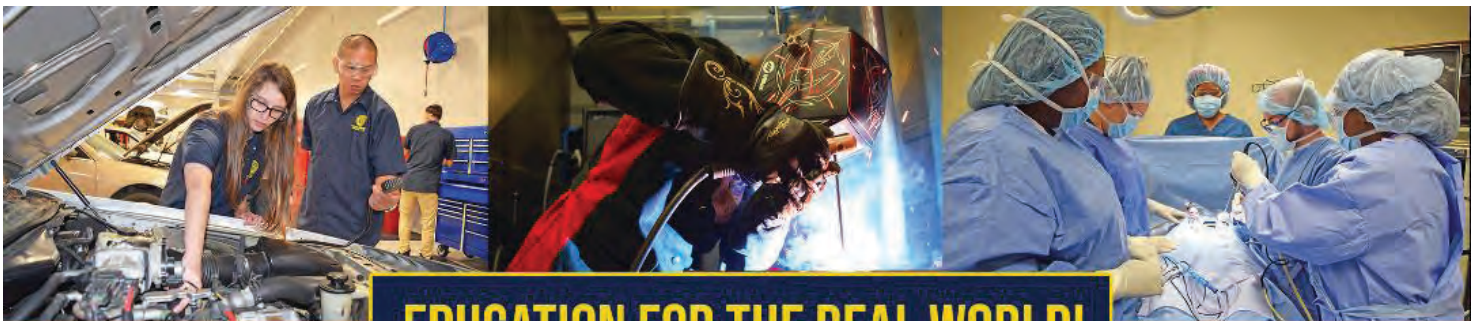
FDTC's Carl D. Perkins \$337,000 grant will be used to provide mentoring, tutoring, coaching, career exploration and work-based learning opportunities for students in career and technical programs. Other services

include assistance on resumes, interviewing skills, job search strategies and community engagement and assistance to students in developing self-awareness of how values, strengths and passion relates to chosen careers.

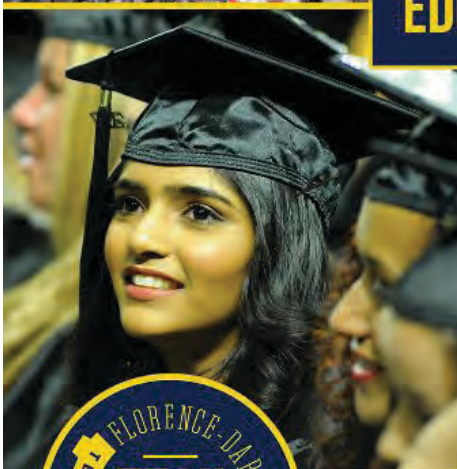
FDTC's Corporate and Workforce Development division received a \$90,500 Apprenticeships Carolina Expansion Grant that features flow through funds, which were awarded to the South Carolina Technical College System from the U.S. Department of Labor. Funds will be used to pay tuition and fees for students in Registered Apprenticeships that combine coursework with paid on the job training. For example, funds from the grant trained and placed 14 students through McLeod Health's registered Medical Surgical Technician (MST) program. The MST students earned their national certified nursing assistant (CNA) credential, along with 20 hours of advanced skills training. Upon completion, students immediately went to work at McLeod Health, as medical surgical technicians, caring for patients.

FDTC recently became a participant in the U.S. Department of Education's Project Success. The purpose of Project Success is to help students stay in college and earn credentials leading to jobs. Project Success services will be available to all students at FDTC starting in the Spring 2021 semester. Services include an online platform where students can use money management tools and resources. Another resource for students is a career exploration tool, which helps students understand their interests and capabilities and choose college majors based on that knowledge.

For more information on grant funding at FDTC, please contact the Office of Institutional Grants by emailing Jennifer. Mabry@fdtc.edu or calling 843-661-8129.



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CAP YOUR CAREER Submitted by Dr. Kandace Bethea



Dr. Kandace Bethea, Superintendent

MARION—Are you feeling lost in your current career? Are your career expectations not being met? Do you feel the need for a change?

Careers and career choices often present challenges to many individuals. At the same time, recruiting qualified teachers to fill classrooms is often a challenge for school districts. But, what if there was a way to meet the needs of both groups?

Challenges often become opportunities. The Carolina Collaborative for Alternative

Preparation or CarolinaCAP is an innovative partnership between the University Of South Carolina College Of Education, the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) and rural school districts in South Carolina. South Carolina's first comprehensive, university-based alternative preparation program leverages the power of micro-credentials to promote job-embedded professional learning, provides localized coaching inspired by the Carolina Coaching model developed through the Carolina Teacher

Induction Program and includes graduate credit that can be used toward an advanced degree.

Marion County School District is excited to have two caring and compassionate individuals who have decided to accept the challenge of changing careers and taking the opportunity to become licensed teachers through this unique partnership. Both candidates were working with preschool programs.

Lekecia Murray said, "I had prior



Lekecia Murray



Gary Stagers

teaching experience working as a lead teacher with Head Start for eight years, but I just felt like something was missing. I wasn't growing where I was, and I knew there was something greater for me."

Likewise, Gary Stagers explained, "I was already in early education teaching 4K under SC First Steps. I knew that there was a need for educators in my district so I felt that making the transition would benefit my community by filling that void."

The average person will change careers five to seven times during their working life. Many people discover their gift for teaching well past the years of being a college student. Providing career changers with a pathway to education helps school districts fill classrooms with qualified professionals who have discovered their passion for teaching. "Everyone wins with this situation," comments Human Resource director Paul Grant. "People have an avenue to change to a desired career, school districts have a new pool potential teachers to hire teachers and the students have qualified teachers in their classrooms."

According to their website, CarolinaCAP is designed to recruit individuals from local rural communities who are most likely to remain in those communities throughout their teaching careers. By identifying and preparing teachers within rural communities, without the need to travel to a university, teacher candidates are able to live, learn and work within their communities (<https://ed.sc.gov/educators/alternative-certification/ccap/>).

So if you are feeling the need for a change, you have a love for children and the passion to see them succeed, then consider becoming a teacher. The rewards are endless.

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Looking to join **an amazing community of educators** who are transforming students' lives?

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REGISTER ONLINE AT WWW.CLAFLIN.EDU OR CALL 803-535-5573 FOR MORE INFORMATION.

THE WORLD NEEDS VISIONARIES!

CLAFLIN AND USC TO LAUNCH DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM

Submitted by Joseph C. Cotton, Director of Public Relations, Office of Communications & Marketing



Claflin-USC MOA Signing: University of South Carolina President Robert (Bob) Caslen (left) and Claflin University President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack (right)

ORANGEBURG—Claflin University's commitment to student success and offering academic programs that prepare graduates for the 21st Century workforce provided the impetus for a partnership with the University South Carolina (USC) that will expand academic and career opportunities for students aspiring careers in journalism, mass communications and information science.

Claflin and USC signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) on Oct. 28 to establish a five-year dual degree program that allows undergraduate students from Claflin to earn a Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Mass Communications degree with a concentration in either strategic communications or multimedia journalism in the College of Information and Communications at the University of South Carolina. Claflin students can also earn a Master of Library and Information Science degree through the partnership.

"We are extremely excited to have this 4+1 Dual Degree Program for our mass communications and journalism students," said Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack, president at Claflin University. "This relationship with the University of South Carolina—the flagship university in the

state—provides tremendous access and opportunities for our students. Another advantage of the program is that it will eliminate a year of tuition and that creates a reduction in student debt. That's also very important."

Students who plan to participate in the 4+1 program will declare their intent by the end of the fall semester of their junior year. During spring of the junior year (or the following summer), Claflin students must apply for non-degree graduate admission to the USC Graduate School. Students who apply should have an undergraduate GPA of at least 3.0.

Claflin earned the distinction of becoming the first historically black college/university (HBCU) to sign such an agreement with USC since Robert Caslen's appointment as the university's 29th president in July 2019. The partnership aligns with his strategic plan to increase minority enrollment and diversity on the campus.

"Claflin was ranked the top HBCU in the state of South Carolina and ninth nationally among the nation's top HBCUs," Warmack said, referencing the 2021 US News and World Report College Rankings. "USC is the state's flagship institution. This will be a transformational academic experience for our students. They will have an opportunity to earn degrees from two outstanding institutions."

An overarching goal of the partnership is to develop well-trained journalism, mass communications and library and information science professionals from racial and ethnic minority populations. This will be achieved by expanding access to academic programs, experiential learning opportunities and resources critical to preparing talented, minority scholars for careers in journalism and other professions in the communications industry.

"We are the state's flagship university, and we should have

DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM CONT'D

students and faculty that look like the people of South Carolina,” President Caslen said. “Our students and faculty should be representative of our state. Partnering with HBCUs will create pathways for students to take advantage of opportunities not only to earn a degree at Claflin but to earn a graduate degree at the state’s flagship institution. We are very eager to partner with Claflin and other HBCUs to make the university accessible—especially to first-generation college students.” According to Caslen, each of USC’s colleges and academic departments are required to create similar agreements with HBCUs. “I also want to create more diversity within our faculty. We need to find highly qualified students who have completed graduate school and put them on the pathway to professorships. We could establish partnerships to do this here in the state as well. It would be a win-win for everyone.”

CLAFLIN RECEIVES UNPRECEDENTED \$20 MILLION INVESTMENT

Submitted by Joseph C. Cotton, Director of Public Relations, Office of Communications & Marketing



Clafin University President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack shows gratitude to Scott for her generous recognition.

ORANGEBURG-Clafin University has received a game-changing \$20 million investment, the largest in school history, from philanthropist and author MacKenzie Scott. The gift will accelerate Clafin’s mission to develop visionary leaders that advance social change regionally, nationally and globally.

The historic donation will be used to bolster Clafin’s teaching and learning; expand access to scholarships; increase the endowment to foster long-term sustainability; and support workforce and economic development throughout the Orangeburg community. As the campus lays the foundation for a capital campaign to drive infrastructure improvements, including a state-of-the-art student center, this gift will be a cornerstone in building a cutting-edge living and learning community.

“We are grateful to Ms. Scott for her generous recognition of Clafin’s exemplary leadership and record of innovation in producing stellar academic outcomes,” said Clafin University President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack. “This gift will have an immediate, transformational impact, not only on the university but on the greater Orangeburg, S.C., community and the state. We are also inspired by the long-term impact it will have in preparing students to champion and shape the nation and world we all need—one that is more just, fair and equitable.”

Founded in 1869, Clafin University was the first HBCU established in the state of South Carolina and was the first institution of higher education to admit all students regardless of gender, ethnic origin, race or religion. Located in Orangeburg, 50 miles southeast of Columbia, the state capital, Clafin University’s rigorous, student-focused academic programs and top-tier faculty have earned it a Top 10 HBCU ranking in U.S. News & World Report for 10 consecutive years. It is also ranked a Best National Liberal Arts Institution and is No. 1 among HBCUs for annual alumni giving at approximately 40 percent, which is more than six times the national average.

Clafin University’s legacy of excellence has produced a number of distinguished academic scholarship recipients, including a J. William Fulbright Scholar, a General George C. Marshall Scholar, a Harry S. Truman Scholar and, in 2019, a Luard Morse Scholar.

The gift to Clafin is part of a larger \$4.2 billion gift to 384 mission-driven institutions selected because of their “strong leadership teams and results,” according to Scott’s announcement via Medium.

About

Founded in 1869, Clafin University is recognized by national publications such as U.S. News and World Report, Forbes.com and Washington Monthly as one of America’s best liberal arts colleges. The University proudly serves the state of South Carolina, the nation and the world. Its beautiful historic campus is home for approximately 2,000 students from every region of the United States and more than 20 international countries. Clafin students demonstrate extraordinary achievement, distinctive confidence and a lifelong desire to transform society through visionary leadership. Its academic programs prepare students to compete and succeed in a global and technological society.

Outstanding alumni include Chief Justice of South Carolina Supreme Court (Ret) Ernest A. Finney, Jr.; renowned photographer, author and publisher Cecil Williams; internationally recognized artist Leo Twiggs; Vela McClam-Mitchell, president/CEO and owner, Georgia International Travel; and the eighth president of Clafin University, Dr. Henry N. Tisdale. For more information, visit clafin.edu or GoToClafin.com.

CLAFLIN STUDENT WINS TV’S BCQ COMPETITION



Otiana Thompson and Thomas Miles, aka “Nephew Tommy”

ORANGEBURG-Sophomore Otiana Thompson was recently crowned the Black College Quiz (BCQ) national champion. The national quiz show series, hosted by actor and radio and television personality Thomas Miles, aka “Nephew Tommy,” is televised each week on Bounce TV. The show features students from the nation’s historically black colleges/universities (HBCUs) who showcase their knowledge and skill of African American history.

“Otiana was an energetic and fierce competitor who elevated the game during each round of her competition,” said Jennifer J. Jackson, executive vice president of Central City Productions, Inc. “We are proud to have her represent the Black College Quiz brand as our 2020 National Champion. We expect nothing but greatness in her future.”

Thompson, a sophomore history major from Columbia, received an \$8,500 scholarship as the BCQ’s national champion. “We are extremely proud of Otiana’s impressive performance and becoming the Black College Quiz national champion,” said Clafin President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack. “Her poise, extensive knowledge of African American history, and ‘Clafin Confidence’ were on full display during the broadcast. She exemplifies the globally engaged visionary scholars we produce at Clafin University.”

Warmack also praised Dr. Wheeler for her contributions to Thompson’s triumphant performance. “We are also grateful for Dr. Wheeler who coached, counseled and prepared Otiana for the competition. They were a formidable team.”

Thompson said that she is happy about winning the BCQ. However, her biggest thrill was competing against some of the best and brightest students at other HBCUs. “I’m so thankful for this win but most importantly, HBCUs are one of the central pillars in our community, and the scholarship and fellowship between our institutions continues to inspire me,” she said. “Although I was crowned the winner, I must acknowledge the support and help of my family, friends and Dr. Wheeler. Not only did they believe in my talents, but they pushed me to take full advantage of this opportunity.”

Wheeler, who also appeared on the show, said she was also very proud of Thompson’s accomplishment and her commitment to preparing for the show. “Otiana was a fearless competitor, and it shows on the screen,” Wheeler said. “She went up against some of the nation’s brightest students, and she emerged as the champion. I am tremendously proud of her.”

AMPLIFIERS OF “I,” EMBRACERS OF “ALL” Submitted by Travis Palmer, Operations Support Manager



Breast Cancer Event

GREENVILLE-The world around us is changing rapidly, and organizations face disruptors every day. In this increasingly competitive environment, we understand our only sustainable competitive advantage is our colleagues. The unequivocal fact is diverse teams deliver

higher performance and create better solutions. At Thermo Fisher Scientific, **Diversity & Inclusion** is vital to the future success of our organization.

To meet our 2030 Vision, we need “an incredibly talented global team that brings diverse perspectives, collaborative energy and a passion to excel every day.” Our customers value diversity and inclusion. At Thermo Fisher Scientific, it’s not just something we do. It’s who we are. It enables our colleagues to openly share the wide range of perspectives they represent, creating an environment where differences are truly valued, authenticity is a state of being and everyone feels they belong and can do their best work. To achieve our Diversity & Inclusion goals, we concentrate in three areas:

- 1. Fostering organizational culture**, creating the environment where employees are empowered to collaborate, innovate and be heard.
- 2. Reinforcing infrastructure**, de-biasing processes and eliminating artificial barriers so anyone with passion, potential and capability can grow his or her career in our organization.
- 3. Creating personal accountability**, understanding and living inclusive behaviors by every colleague.

Our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are key partners in attracting, developing and retaining diverse talent to bring an essential variety of experiences and perspectives into our organization. ERGs are company-



Florence Chapter Leads

supported groups of employees drawn together by common characteristics who want to positively impact the company’s growth and development by providing a voice of diverse thinking through four strategic pillars:

- **Recruiting** and retaining diverse talent
- **Community Support** and outreach through volunteering and local partnerships
- **Career Development** for our diverse talent population to have long and fulfilling careers at Thermo Fisher
- **Communication** and education to bring awareness to unconscious bias and improve our culture of inclusion

Each of these pivotal pillars has a mission statement with specific measurable metrics. Thermo Fisher Scientific currently has 10 ERGs:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. African Heritage ERG (AHERG) | 6. Millennials ERG |
| 2. Asian ERG | 7. PossAbilities ERG |
| 3. Data Science Innovation Lab (DSIL) | 8. Veterans ERG |
| 4. Latino Hispanic Heritage ERG | 9. Women’s ERG |
| 5. LGBTA ERG | 10. Working Parents ERG |

The Greenville Thermo Fisher Scientific location currently has an African Heritage ERG, LGBTA ERG and a Women’s ERG. The African Heritage Employee Resource Group (commonly referred to as AHERG) was the first ERG for the Greenville site back in August 2019. The organization’s chapter was founded by Vincent McCullough (chapter lead) and Lokia Williams and Tracie Watkins (co-lead). The site sponsor

for the chapter is Travis Palmer.

Since the Greenville AHERG chapter was formed in 2019, the chapter’s leaders have actively taken the necessary steps to become visibly active in the Upstate and surrounding areas by looking to get involved with local organizations whose ideals and missions are similar to our own, including the Greenville Chamber of Commerce. At its 2019 Diversity and Inclusion Summit, AHERG members assisted hundreds of attendees with everything from registration to issuing credentials, providing programs, assisting



Harvest Hope Event

with seating arrangements for signature keynote events and providing directions to the various workshops that were being hosted on various floor locations. For the chamber’s 2020 summit, “Amplify the I,” AHERG members attended the

virtual session.


AHERG leadership understands that embracing our differences, sharing our stories and being able to express our authentic selves are vital to obtaining the very best each of us has to offer. Therefore, the team decided to host a site social event to recognize and honor the memories of those impacted by breast cancer or domestic violence. In 2019 AHERG members volunteered monthly at the Harvest Hope Food Bank located on Whitehorse Road. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic greatly changed the way in which employees could volunteer at the organization in our traditional face-to-face forum. To minimize the risk, the AHERG started a virtual food drive in October 2020 (lasting until the end of December 2020). Currently, the AHERG is working with Greenville County Schools to distribute 400 STEM Kits to schools. Deliveries are scheduled to arrive at the schools by the end of January 2021. From December 2019 to February 2020, the AHERG packaged and distributed 600 STEM kits to Greenville County Schools.

In December of 2019, an AHERG member brought forward a circumstance where a mother and her children were displaced from their home and had moved into an apartment (thanks to the pastor and his congregation’s support of the family). The AHERG sponsored a secret Santa toy drive at the site for the family, and members attended the church service to present the gift to the family. For 2020, AHERG decided to host a Toys for Tots drive to support families and children in need.



LGBTA Group

Thermo Fisher Scientific has embarked on an ambitious and historic partnership with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) called the Just Project. The name is inspired by the eminent African American scientist Dr. Ernest Everett Just. This initiative is a multipronged effort to help address the coronavirus crisis, which has disproportionately impacted communities of color. Thermo Fisher will provide the instruments, kits and testing infrastructure to bring COVID-19 testing programs to all member schools, at no cost to the institution. This program will help ensure that students, faculty and staff at HBCUs can access testing so they can continue their important work during this pandemic. Our Greenville and Florence site AHERGs are collaborating on this effort as part of our “One Carolina” infrastructure. This will be one of the signature events for servicing our communities in 2021.



Yoonhee Ko
*Senior Business
Development Manager,
Pharma Services,
South Korea*

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HOW A MINORITY BUSINESS OWNER FOUND SUCCESS DURING A PANDEMIC

Submitted by Teowonna Clifton, Marketing Communications Manager, South Carolina MBDA Business Center



Darrin Thomas

COLUMBIA— Darrin Thomas started South Carolina Black Pages 29 years ago. Over the years, the annual publication became the go-to source to find and support Black and minority-owned businesses. Everything from restaurants to physicians, lawyers, financial services and beyond could be found within Black Pages.

During the growth and expansion of Black Pages, it spawned Black Expo, an annual economic empowerment summit that takes place in Columbia, Charleston, Greenville, and Jacksonville, Fla. But as technology advanced and print publications became less prominent, it became clear that a decision had to be made.

A Time to Change

“After 29 years, Black Pages has closed its operations. It no longer exists,” Thomas said, with a palpable hesitation, as if admitting it for publication makes it real.

At the end of 2019, Thomas could no longer deny that the print industry had taken such a turn that publishing the directory no longer made business sense. The cost to go fully digital would take more of a commitment and vigor than Thomas was willing to dedicate. So, he made the tough decision to cease operations. “I went away for a weekend and thought and prayed. By the time I returned home, the decision had been made. It was clear in my head.”

Thomas’ path forward was to no longer publish Black Pages. He would, however,

continue with Black Expo and Greek Traditions, an eCommerce business that provides paraphernalia to the nine Black Greek-letter organizations within the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC).

“I saw my greatest opportunity as the business I started in 1988 as my side hustle. This was clearly a case where my side hustle had become my dominant opportunity,” Thomas said.

Thomas had worked hard establishing Greek Traditions over the years, building solid relationships and goodwill. He started realizing great success before making the decision to discontinue Black Pages. In fact, it was a Greek Traditions opportunity that brought Thomas face-to-face with the coronavirus pandemic, its damage and opportunities.

In February 2020, Thomas had a contract with an NPHC sorority. He was to supply them with paraphernalia for their national legislative day in Washington, D.C. When it was nearing time for the order to be delivered, his suppliers in China made him aware that they were not able to do so because of the novel coronavirus. He thought, “Coronavirus? What is this? What’s going on here?”

Thomas lost that deal with the sorority because everything coming from China had been halted as the supply chain, and logistics had been frozen. He soon would have to cancel the Charleston Black Expo because the same virus would eventually make its way to the United States.

A Time to Grow

Over the years, Thomas had become such a force in the Greek paraphernalia industry that officials from Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated, the organization to which he belonged, approached him with the concept of the Alpha Ice Box. The monthly subscription box would contain custom-made fraternity paraphernalia and gear unavailable anywhere else. Thinking that was an interesting opportunity, Thomas started playing with numbers to see what a deal would look like. When he was satisfied that he could yield a modest profit from each sale, he signed the contract, thus starting a new entity to operate his subscription box business.

“When I started the subscription service, my goal was to have a thousand subscribers by the end of the year. But when COVID hit,

and people had to quarantine, we exceeded that goal within a few months. We started with 400 subscribers when we launched in June. Now, we are at more than 2100 subscribers.”

Thomas passed his goal by making sure that the first box launched with great fanfare. He included gear that was made especially for the organization and packed the box with gifts valued at four times the subscription price. When social media influencers opened their Ice Box live online, they were blown away by the contents, and other members rushed to subscribe.

The success of the Alpha Ice Box took Thomas by surprise. He had planned for his staff to assemble the boxes in his office and ship them monthly. When the orders increased beyond his management, he partnered with Babcock Center, which empowers people with lifelong disabilities by providing employment opportunities and independent living and life skills. Participants of the Babcock Center program began assembling the boxes monthly.

“That is, perhaps, the best part of this story,” said Thomas. Through this operation, we’ve been able to help about 10 of our neighbors with disabilities earn money and utilize their skills. They are truly providing a valuable service for us.”

A Time to Pivot

In March, Thomas finally canceled the Charleston Black Expo, one day before it was to occur. It became clear that COVID-19 was too much of a risk to continue the event. Around that same time, Thomas’s suppliers in China began contacting him, offering to supply him with masks. He declined, not yet recognizing their demand and importance.

It wasn’t until Diane Sumpter, operator of South Carolina MBDA Business Center, reached out to Thomas seeking minority manufacturers in the state. He gave her the information she requested and asked why. When she mentioned the need to produce masks for local municipalities and other entities, he remembered the offer from his Chinese suppliers.

To gauge the need, Thomas reached out to a local hospital official and asked, “If I can get N95 masks, how many would you need? He said, ‘All you can get.’ I said, ‘5000?’ He said, ‘ALL YOU CAN GET!’”

Honoring the Late Dr. Martin Luther King

SUCCESS DURING A PANDEMIC CONT'D

That demonstrated the desperate need for the masks, so Thomas reconnected with his suppliers in China and began working to import masks.

While Thomas was able to get the masks, the supply chain had been disrupted, and everything coming from China was being delayed, especially items flying on commercial airplanes. Thomas was able to get through customs because he had been using FedEx and UPS international logistics for years. He knew many of the station managers in regions in China. Therefore, he was accustomed to getting products through customs. As a result, Thomas was able to skirt the commercial plane logistical breakdown and have products delivered while others stalled.

Adjusting to the new COVID-19 logistics was not without its problems. Thomas has had his products confiscated by U.S. Customs to make sure they met CDC or FDA guidelines. "So, it was very much a learning process for me," he says.

After a few successful PPE deliveries, Thomas was thrust into the supply business. As word traveled about this access, he used his newly established company, GT Supply, to begin supplying PPE to municipalities, hospitals and school districts across the state. He supplied hundreds of thousands of masks to the City of Charleston, City of Columbia and City of Spartanburg. He offered masks, gloves, hand sanitizer and thermometers. When schools began using partitions to separate student desks, he located and supplied 50,000 clips to Richland County School District One to hold the plastic partitions in place.

Expanding his company beyond South Carolina borders, Thomas answered a bid for the State of Ohio to supply PPE. His status as a minority-owned firm was advantageous to Ohio, but they required the masks be produced in the state. Thomas worked with an Ohio partner to find a company that could manufacture the masks. Thomas purchased the masks from the company and sold them to Ohio. Originally, the bid was for four million masks. It later grew to 13 million reusable masks that GT Supply delivered within several months.

A Time to VOTE

As the Alpha Ice Box subscription service grew, so did the Greek Traditions website. During the quarantine, consumers were not

able to leave home, but they were still able to shop. As Greek organizations began looking for ways to engage their members in voting, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity again approached Thomas about creating a special VOTE shirt. Thomas worked with his embroiderer to create a high-quality VOTE shirt in each of the nine NPHC Greek organization's colors. In place of the "O" in "VOTE," he added the organization's seal. The shirt proved to be a hit as the presidential election season took off and many organizations launched voter registration and Get Out the Vote efforts.

Using the same concept, Thomas also made a VOTE t-shirt in honor of his mother-in-law, a South Carolina State University graduate, who had worked the polls for many years. When U.S. Congressman Jim Clyburn was photographed in one of the shirts, the VOTE T-shirts took on a life of their own. Thomas developed the VOTE Collection representing 50 HBCUs and the nine NPHC organizations. From June to Voting Day, Greek Traditions sold more than 3,500 VOTE shirts.

A Time to Bless and Be Blessed

To what does Thomas owe his good fortune? He emphatically says, "Hard work, years of dedication, establishing and nurturing relationships, and ultimately, sowing good seed."

For example, when there was a PPE shortage, he posted in a Facebook group of about 12,000 Alphas to inbox him if they needed masks. He ended up shipping about 5,000 masks to members and their families.

"I got my son and some other students to spend the day putting 10 masks in brown envelopes and mailing them to brothers all over the country. We even shipped to their elderly parents who couldn't get masks. The national president called me thanking me for being my brother's keeper. That meant to world to me."

Thomas said he had no expectations of this effort. It was 100 percent pure of heart. "I had masks, and I wanted to share them." Later, many of his Alpha brothers became customers by ordering the Ice Box. Thomas stated again, "That was not my intention. But the goodwill came back me many times over."

A Time to Hope and Plan

Thomas has had a whirlwind of a year. He ended Black Pages after 29 years and started GT Supply in about 29 days. For him, COVID-19 opened far more doors than it

closed. But he knows, with the grace of God and the impending vaccines, COVID-19, as we know it today, will come to an end.

"We hope to put COVID-19 behind us and pick back up with Black Expo," he said.

He hopes to bring it back in Spring 2021. However, after surveying his exhibitors and sponsors, he realized that only a few would be ready in March. Also, the City of Charleston says they should plan on only 30 percent capacity. So, he hasn't decided whether to move forward or postpone Black Expo again. But he fully anticipates being able to resume it sometime in the future.

Regarding GT Supplies, he will supply PPE as long as it is in demand. He eventually will begin sourcing other products for customers, maintaining the relationships he established and nurtured through the pandemic.

For Alpha Ice Box, it is in its infancy and is an opportunity ripe with potential. But overall, Thomas says he will continue to follow his heart, put his faith front and center and sow good seed.

About the MBDA Business Center

The mission of the MBDA Business Center – Columbia, S.C. is to assist Minority Business Enterprises to compete in the global economy and to stimulate the national and local economy through job creation. To fulfill this mission, we assist MBEs with access to contracts and capital, strategic business counseling and becoming export-ready. For more information on the MBDA Business Center and its services, visit ColumbiaMBDACenter.com, or call 803-743-1152.



Darrin Thomas

NEW PLACE IN FLORENCE TO DIY, BUT TOGETHER by Les Echols



Aimee and Cornelio Monjarrez.

With social distancing and strict COVID-19 protocols in place, the year 2020 was particularly trying on small businesses all across the nation and world. Family entertainment had been losing momentum, with theaters and live event venues having to close their doors for months. One couple in Florence has tapped into an innovative way to entertain individuals, families and groups.

Aimee and Cornelio Monjarrez opened the DIY Place Florence in November of 2020 to positive reviews

and feedback. Cornelio opened up about how they started. “The DIY Place Florence came to life when my wife, Aimee Monjarrez, decided to combine her passion for crafts and this vision she has had for a while to bring this experience to Florence County. She won’t admit this, but she is a master crafter. I am still amazed every time she creates something new. Her brain is just full of creativity, and she is always learning new skills. Aimee wanted a place in Florence where people could come and share their love for crafts, creativity and for some to ‘discover their inner craftiness.’ We also wanted to build something of our own, for our family. We wanted a legacy that we could leave for our kids,” explained Cornelio.

The DIY Place Florence offers an array of craft projects for all ages and creative skills. Customers are able to pick out the project of their choice and customize it as they want to. DIY Place has everything from wooden signs that make great home decor, metal projects, combinations of both and even dream catchers for kids. The projects can take between 30 minutes to an hour and a half, with the average time around one hour,

depending on the skill level. Prices are per project, and they range from \$5 to \$69, with the average being \$30.

While DIY Place Florence is a “bring your own beverage establishment,” customers get one complimentary beverage with valid ID. The goal is to provide a place where couples, families, friends, coworkers and all can enjoy some fellowship and create memories together. “We will host group events like birthday parties, team building sessions and girls/boys night, among other things.”

When Aimee and Cornelio decided to embark in this adventure, we were in the middle of the pandemic and right in the middle of a lockdown. “We were originally going to open virtually, offering kits online. However, God had different plans for us. We believed that Florence had been ready to have a place where people can do something, especially Downtown. We already had some great bars and restaurants, but it was missing something. We knew that after the lockdown people were going to need a safe place where they could come together, relax, laugh and unwind,” concluded Aimee.

The DIY Place provides the opportunity for families, friends and co-workers to strengthen their relationships by making fun memories together, working on their communication and sharing the success of finishing a project.

Aimee Monjarrez is a Coker University graduate. She worked at the Florence Little Theater for 11 years, where she mastered her crafting skills. Later on she worked in the corporate world before deciding to stay at home for a year. She is originally from Chicago but has lived in Florence most of her life.

Cornelio Monjarrez, or “CJ” as he is known by some, was born in Managua, Nicaragua, and called Florence home since 2003. He is a Francis Marion graduate and works in the tax incentives industry.

MILADIES BOUTIQUE SURVIVES DESPITE CHALLENGES by Mallory Brayboy



L-R: Starlee Alexander, Charlene Lowery and Doris Lockhart

You’ll find Miladies 182 boutique nestled in the heart of Downtown Florence. It offers fashionable, quality apparel and accessories for women. Its doors opened in March of 2015 and have since gained a diverse clientele of locals, locals and visitors from an array of states and countries. However, with COVID-19, those doors were brought to a temporary halt. I spoke with the owners of Miladies 182, Charlene Lowery, Starlee Alexander and Doris Lockhart, about the changes and challenges they’ve faced and how they are continuing to move forward in spite of adversity.

What inspired you all to open a women’s boutique?

Charlene: From my standpoint, I had my children’s shop for 17 years. When I retired, I wanted to do something to keep myself busy.

I have a love for fashion, be it little people or adults. I thought about a women’s boutique, but I didn’t want another sole proprietorship. If I could find two other businesswomen who shared those same admirations like I do, then that might be worth approaching. That’s what inspired me to do it.

Also, with Downtown, we were helping to be a part of its growth. I found a location, Doris and Star were on board, and we just kept it moving.

Starlee: I didn’t have a business in mind, but I wanted to own something Downtown. I wanted to be a part of Florence moving forward. When Charlene presented the idea, it was good, and I went along with that.

Doris: I’ve always had an entrepreneurial spirit as a child and as an adult. I am interested wherever I can contribute to something that is positive and has an impact on the community and making things happen, not for myself, but for others. I was appreciative for being invited to partner with Charlene and Star. We have contributed to the economic growth of Downtown Florence.

What sets Miladies apart from other businesses in the retail industry?

Doris: We are the mindset that we can show women and men that they, too, can be a part of Florence, and our boutique itself is unique in that you will not find yourself everywhere, and our lines are very fashionable.

Charlene: Also, our store sets us apart by being a boutique. It takes you away from the hustle and bustle in malls and department stores.

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MILADIES CONT'D

With our boutique, our customers really get special attention because it's not a lot of people shopping at one time, and we can really learn what they like and provide that for them. We greet them with a smile, and when they've made their purchases, we thank them with a personal note.

What were your initial steps when the pandemic began?

Starlee: The first step was to have everyone safe. We had to close down for a little bit and regroup. Covid just really took us by surprise. We were, in my opinion, about to do leaps and bounds. Then, it cut our customers and traffic down from coming out. We have started a website to create a safe place to shop.

Charlene: I didn't really like it, but to keep us safe and to keep our customers safe, we posted on the door that masks were required. We provided masks to customers if they didn't have a mask and required customers to sanitize their hands. If a customer tries on a garment, we steam that item and keep it in the back for 24 hours. Also, once a customer purchases, the items are non-refundable during this time. We do allow our customers to try on because, from the research I've done, it is safe to steam the garment and let it hang overnight. We also social distance in the store, while still giving the customers the attention they need.

How have you managed to keep moving forward in spite of all the challenges the nation's faced this year?

Doris: One of the things we've been blessed with is having a landlord that was understanding and receptive to the conditions, as well as our vendors and suppliers. They've worked with us and have helped us to survive at this point.

Charlene: I certainly agree. If it were not from the understanding of our vendors, our CPAs, our landlord...we just could not have survived. We have not been able to go to shows, even though they've had some. As far as spring and summer, we're behind in ordering, but we will take care of that.

Doris: We've been working with the city of Florence. They've helped us to gain some exposure.

Even the Morning News--they've looked to see what they can do to support the merchants downtown. It's been a community effort to help us survive thus far.

Starlee: In the light of moving forward, we're still applying for different grants. Prayerfully, that will help us with our spring and summer inventory. One is under the CARES Act, and we're looking to hear from the HartBeat of Main Street Grant Program as well.

Though the future is unpredictable, what are you looking forward to for your business in 2021?

Charlene: My prayer is with the new vaccine, once the frontline workers are taken care of and more people are vaccinated, people will start coming out again. They'll be happy! I can see them so ready to get out. I think that in 2021, it may not come early spring, but I do believe it will start to flourish again for the businesses downtown. We are going to do everything we can to do our part and make it even more inviting.

With much prayer and support, 2021 is looking optimistic for Miladies 182. Its owners would like to extend a special "thank you" to the Morning News, Downtown Development and Diversity Works© for their gracious efforts in helping to sustain the business.

Miladies 182 is currently open Thursday through Friday from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m.-4 p.m., and online at www.Miladies182.com.

WHEN MOVING FORWARD IS THE CHOSEN ACTION by Jennifer Robinson



Sheila Marie

The year 2020 was the 100th Anniversary of Voter's Rights for Women. 2020 was also a major election year for the United States. Several women who made history in their areas were on ballots, whether they were Democrat or Republican. Even as we celebrate the women who continue to be change agents by breaking barriers, there are some women who want to not just be known for being the first but for being amazing as people. One such amazing person is Sheila Marie, a woman who works hard to keep moving forward.

Marie was raised on the West Coast in a prominent family. The women in her family, her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, were strong and independent with business backgrounds that included owning hotels and restaurants. "It was from them," she stated, "I learned goal setting and meeting those goals." She said she has met most, if not all, the goals she's set for herself, including her current position as building official for the City of Darlington Code Enforcement and Building Department.

She is the first woman and first person of color to hold this position. For some women working in a male-driven industry such as building constructions, it may be intimidating and cumbersome, but Marie maintains she is most proud of the connection she makes with her coworkers and with the people in the community.

The road to meeting her goals was not easy. She knew the position she wanted as building official, so she went back to school for the trainings and certifications to meet the qualifications for the job. "We have to work for the things that we want," she said. This is also the value she instilled in her son, who had a business at a young age mowing yards. He still holds onto these values, she stated. And she continues to set physical, mental and spiritual goals such as entering and completing Iron Man competitions.

In keeping with the theme of "moving forward," Marie believes in reaching for the stars. You cannot deviate from the goals you set for yourself. She said she told her son, "You can't reach for medium" and repeats to herself the scripture Philippians 4:13 (NIV), "I can do all things through Christ." It is important to stay in the word, and go for it.

Marie wants her legacy to be for all people to reach their dreams with their character intact. She loves encouraging, supporting, loving and lifting people up, and she has a special place in her heart for the homeless and wounded veterans and reaches out to assist those who are in need. She is the South Carolina State ambassador for Operation Enduring Warrior (enduringwarrior.org). It's a 100 percent volunteer organization helping wounded vets and law enforcement officers reach their goals.

Shelia Marie's belief is that we can't forget our roots, and we have to bring those along with us who many not otherwise have opportunities. She said her job is a platform for her to love people along the way.

Honoring the Late Dr. Martin Luther King



E. Lorraine Holmes

THE GRATIFICATION OF SPEECH-LANGUAGE THERAPY by Anna Bowman

KINGSTREE – E. Lorraine Holmes, MA, CCC-SLP, has been a licensed speech-language pathologist for 21 years, and she is the owner of Williamsburg Speech-Language Therapy Services in Kingstree. She is a graduate of Columbia College, where she obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in public affairs and political science. She earned a Master of Arts in speech pathology and audiology at South Carolina State University in

Orangeburg.

Her Williamsburg speech-language therapy practice, which employees a professional staff of three, serves individuals from birth to 18 years old. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs), or speech therapists, treat and diagnose speaking disabilities. SLPs help patients with articulation, stuttering, fluency, language and various other related issues. “When a parent/school has confidence in our practice with developing the speech and language of a child/adolescent, it’s an awarding experience,” said Holmes. Her practice accepts referrals from physicians, agencies, schools or individuals.

Research has indicated that infants start learning in the womb, where they hear and respond to familiar voices. The fastest learning occurs from ages two to five years, and sometimes there is a reason that a child has a speech and/or language problem. For instance, a child may have a language delay because of trouble hearing or because of a developmental disorder such as autism. On the other end of the spectrum, adolescents not being able to communicate their basic desires or to express themselves can bring about frustration as well as unwanted behaviors that can require other intervention specialists. “As an SLP, I have worked with behavioral specialists, psychologists and counselors to implement plans to deter the unwanted behaviors.”

Holmes spends an average of 45 minutes to an hour with each of her clients, and appointments can vary from once or twice a week, depending on the severity of the speech-language impairment. Each person’s journey to obtaining their goals is unique, and there is not an average time that can be set for that attainment.

COVID-19 has changed the way Holmes and her staff interact with clients. “We had followed safety precautions before COVID-19 by washing hands and sanitizing surfaces and manipulatives used during therapy. However, we now include social distancing, conducting COVID-19 screening, wearing masks and temperature checks. Parent coaching has always been our model for carryover therapy, but parents must really take the lead in therapy to decrease therapist client physical contact. Due to COVID-19, our service delivery has expanded from all in-person visits to having the option of teletherapy. The frequency of visits and time is the same whether the visits are in-person or on the teletherapy platform. Teletherapy visits allow the parents and caregivers more accessibility to the therapists and more flexibility with scheduling.”

Holmes, who is board certified by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), obtained her certificate of Clinical Competence from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and is licensed by the South Carolina Labor, Licensing, and Regulations. Throughout her career, there’s always one gratifying experience that delights her heart every time: “There is no better feeling than when a child says his or her first word or signs for the first time. It can be emotional when they say my name for the first time. Each goal, no matter how big or small, is celebrated!”

Holmes and her daughter, Camryn, who is the joy of her life, reside in Kingstree. In Holmes’ spare time, she enjoys refurbishing old furniture, collecting multicultural porcelain dolls, decorating and traveling. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and enjoys helping children reach their highest functional communication ability. For further information about her practice, she can be reached via phone at 843-372-4275 or via email, WSLTS@yahoo.com.



Cynthia O. Ford

BEYOND EMPOWERMENT

by De’Angela Haynes

MARION—According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “beyond” has three definitions: 1) on or to the farther side of 2) out of the reach or sphere 3) in a degree or amount surpassing. This is what has taken place in the life of Cynthia O. Ford. Her passion for the youth of the Pee Dee region has brought forth this great movement and revolution called Beyond Empowerment.

Transformation is taking place in the lives of those who have experienced its impact thus far. Ford is causing youth to go to the farther side of their current environments, situations and family status. This experience is allowing them to get out of the reach of negativity and stereotypes and has given them hope beyond the streets with the use of and merging of education with strategies, resources and tools for real-life applications. The youth are being empowered.

Beyond Empowerment was born out of the desire to help young people strive to their highest potential and go “beyond” our standard form of teaching. The Youth Leadership Workshop provides an interactive opportunity for youth to share and grow with their peers. The curriculum was designed specifically for our young aspiring leaders. There are eight core components to the program: Leadership/Stewardship, Communication, The Art of Self Care, Career Exploration, Job Readiness, Financial Literacy, Digital Literacy and Entrepreneurship. At the culmination of the program, students are eligible to participate in a youth business pitch competition. Beyond Empowerment believes in planting positive seeds and investing in our youth.

Ford was able to successfully implement an eight-week version of Beyond Empowerment in the fall of 2019 and was scheduled to have a Youth Leadership Camp at Coastal Carolina University in the summer of 2020. However, due to COVID-19, the camp is postponed until the summer of 2021. A virtual camp was offered last summer, which included awesome presenters throughout the Pee Dee area, but she was unable to conduct an in-person spring workshop. Ford quickly made adjustments to the program in order to offer it virtually in the fall of 2020. With these additions, the program added to the self-care component, giving students to opportunity to be certified in first aid CPR. The entrepreneurship and business pitch competition portion was added at that time also.

It is Ford’s desire to see our youth excel. Her intent in developing Beyond Empowerment was to establish a platform of knowledge and experiences so that the youth would not make the same mistakes that were made by those before them. It’s certainly time to end the negative cycles. The program is geared towards pre-teens and teens. Some of the unique highlights of it are the opportunity to explore public speaking, homebuyer’s workshops, first aid CPR certification and the business pitch competition. Beyond Empowerment may be offered in the 12-week format or semester format.

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BEYOND EMPOWERMENT CONT'D

A part of Ford's desire is to also reach as many young people as she can through Beyond Empowerment. Going virtual has allowed exposure to youth throughout the Pee Dee, South Carolina and across the United States.

One unique component of Beyond Empowerment is Tips for Teens, which get shared on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Cynthia interviews various individuals to share tips with teenagers. Tips have poured in from various locations around the United States and from Canada.

We are currently seeking funding sources to go towards the business pitch competition and the end of the year scholarship. We may be followed on Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube. The Website is <https://beyond-empowerment.com/>. The email address is Cynthiao@beyond-empowerment.com or beyondempowerment10@gmail.com. We may be contacted by phone at 843-561-0210.

Ford is a graduate of Lake View High School. She obtained a bachelor's in psychology from Coastal Carolina University and a master's in psychology from the University of Phoenix. She also obtained an associate degree in criminal justice and practical nursing technology from the Community College of the Air Force. She also serves part-time in the Air Force. Cynthia is certified to teach first aid/CPR. She published her first book, "Free As An Uncaged Bird," in 2020 and was selected as WBTW'S Remarkable Woman Award. She received an award for Women of Distinction in Marion County. Her community involvement includes: event coordinator for Extra Mile for Victims, member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, volunteer income tax assistance, Marion County Coordinator Council and Friends of the Library Board member. She is the founder/CEO of Beyond Empowerment and Cynthia O, which is her platform as an author and facilitator. Cynthia O may be followed on Facebook and Instagram. The website is <https://www.cynthia-o.com>.

This young lady is making great strides in the Pee Dee region, and it is certainly obvious that what she's doing is "beyond empowerment."

NEWBY AND ASSOCIATES, LLC CONTINUES MOVING FORWARD



EJ Newby

LEXINGTON - In his "Keep Moving From this Mountain" speech from 1960, Martin Luther King Jr. talked about the slaves being led from Egyptian rule by Moses. King stated the slaves had three different attitudes toward being led out of Egypt. The slaves either wanted to go back to Egypt due to fear. They were divided in thought, and some wanted to stay while some wanted to go, or the third group wanted to face what was ahead and move forward. EJ Newby's years of experience and leadership are reminiscent of

what King describes in his speech, as he addresses the next generation of entrepreneurs with the second attitude as the "group that abhorred the idea of going back to Egypt and yet could not quite attain the discipline and the sacrifice to go on to Canaan."

Newby is the president and CEO of Newby and Associates, LLC, a nonprofit consulting business that provides resources for individuals and organizations by building strategic plans and training to help them achieve their goals and objectives. Board development and governance, team building, effective meetings and strategic planning are some of the services his firm offers. Newby & Associates, LLC is a small business of five

employees that has not let the pandemic or anything else keep them from moving forward. Newby said they have even expanded their business since the pandemic began to offer products, and they continue to grow. Their expansion includes health and wellness products, CBD products, foreign exchange, cryptocurrency and the travel industry.

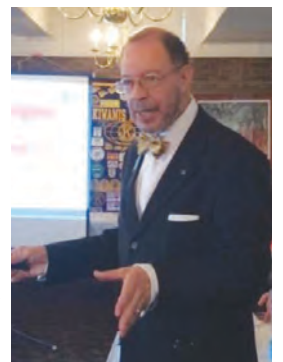
To Newby, "moving forward" is about having an attitude of flexibility. Businesses change, and we have to change with them. He has not been afraid to market his ability and his experiences. He states he is a member of various social groups in his community: the Lexington and Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Capital Rotary Club of Columbia, Alignable, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter for maximum networking opportunities. Because the pandemic does not allow for meeting in person with his social groups, they meet virtually during their regular meeting days and time.

Newby calls situations such as changes for the pandemic "a pivot." His use of the analogy of the "pivot" is a basketball term that allows a player to change direction to achieve a better position for making a shot. His ability to pivot has led to various successes in his business and professional life. Newby states one of his proudest moments was his first contract with Midlands Technical College in Columbia. A six-month consulting contract grew to an 18-month contract that allowed him to engage in fundraising activities, proposal writing, and creating scholarships and endowments. He's worked with the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, Florence Darlington Technical College and the United Way of Florence County. These opportunities led to where Newby would meet young would-be entrepreneurs looking for guidance to start their businesses. Millennials (the age cohort born between 1981-1994), are the group that Martin Luther King Jr., could have addressed in his "Keep Moving From This Mountain" speech when he spoke about the second attitude of fear of going forward but also afraid to go backward. Newby believes in reaching back to assist those who need a helping hand because it is important to expose young people to conversations about money, power, convictions and networking.

Taking risks is also important, Newby states, but it is important to be accessible if we want access to the resources to build businesses and generational wealth. He also shared some of the obstacles of having a Black-owned business. He stated he grew up in a family that believed in getting an education and becoming a teacher or another type of professional. He did not learn of entrepreneurship until he was older. Therefore, his exposure to understanding of generational wealth was asking for credit to obtain the things he needed such as houses and cars. What he has learned since becoming a businessman is invaluable, and now he is willing to offer mentorship to others who are seeking the same opportunities.

He believes Black businesses now have a greater chance or growing due to the social climate of the nation. In the wake of the George Floyd murder and the brutal murders of other innocent Black men and women, the nation is beginning to awaken to these horrible inequities that have been occurring in Black communities for generations. He is hopeful that the summer of social justice, which produced not just protests but also overwhelming support for Black businesses, will benefit us all. Newby states we must remain in tune to what is happening around us.

For more information and job opportunities, please contact Newby & Associates, LLC via email at enewby.newby@gmail.com; cell, 803-730-9757; or text, 803-730-9757. We also can be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.



Newby giving a presentation

Honoring the Late Dr. Martin Luther King

PLC STAFF SACRIFICES FOR THE BENEFIT OF LEARNING Articles by Ta'Meeka Epps



Brittney Jefferson

TIMMONSVILLE - "Keep moving, for it may well be that the greatest song has not yet been sung, the greatest book has not yet been written, the highest mountain has not been climbed. This is your challenge!" "Keep Moving Forward," from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is the theme borrowed to celebrate his life during January 2021. King believed the function of education was to teach one to think intensively, to think critically. Intelligence plus character

is the goal of true education.

Brittney Jefferson, a native of Timmons ville, is an educator through and through. She understands and values the educational process and knows how important it is to introduce curriculum in the formative stages of development. Upon graduating from Francis Marion University, Jefferson became a teacher at Brockington Elementary in her hometown.

In July of 2018 her passion to educate and her desire to serve led her to open the doors of the first learning center. Primary Learning Center (PLC) was established to cater to the "working mom." "Having given birth to both of my daughters early, during my junior and senior years of college, I experienced the struggle of finding balance with work and ensuring there was appropriate help with my daughters. I wanted to create a space which would aid in being a part of the village that it takes to raise a child," Jefferson explained.

The Primary Learning Center offers childcare, after school care, targeted tutoring and virtual learning assistance. Primary Learning Center offers age-specific models to fit each child's individual needs with lessons in fine and gross motor skill, STEM, phonics and more.

PLC serves children of all ages, across all socioeconomic backgrounds and abilities. Jefferson is the founder of Primary Learning Center, and she serves as director of one of the four locations. The center has a 14-member staff, which includes three certified teachers and six teachers who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

The center experienced growing pains in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. "We originally saw a huge decline in enrollment due to layoffs from jobs or parents being forced to take leave. To avoid laying off employees or cutting hours, I removed myself from payroll and found a few other expenses we could sacrifice. The staff and I took on tasks to help save the business money. There is a teacher who serves as food service coordinator when needed, and there are teachers who deep clean the building each week to cut the cost of janitorial services."

All these acts of kindness are just a testament to how amazing the team really is. The theme "Keep Moving Forward" serves as a testament that it is doing something right. As an entrepreneur, you don't always have everything figured out. You hit obstacles that sometimes seem impossible to overcome, but you must keep moving.

Primary Learning Center will open the doors to its fourth center in January in Darlington. For more information about Primary Learning Center or to find out how you can sow a seed, reach out to Brittney Jefferson at bjefferson@primarylearningcenter.com.

MIOWNED BRINGS EQUITY FOR MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES



Jessica Cohen

HARTSVILLE-Imagine an online service or free mobile app where you are able to locate ethnic minority-owned, founded and operated businesses and nonprofit organizations all in one place, by any industry and in any location. Imagine no more. Jessica Cohen brings you MiOWNED!

Cohen hails from Charleston and has been an advocate her entire life. "My calling became clearer to

me recently after much reflection and maturation. I am absolutely and unwaveringly adamant about equity, justice and the advancement of the social sector. I believe it is my calling to provide services and tools to both support those efforts and the organizations pioneering them."

As the creator and founder of MiOwned, Cohen brought her vision to life in August of 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Her vision was fueled by how minorities and minority owned businesses are disproportionately marketed and promoted as opposed to the ones with purchasing power.

Through MiOwned, Cohen hopes to create a community of advocates who bridge societal gaps. She explained, "There is a social climate that demands this equity tool, and MiOWNED answers the



Ryanna Julia Esplana

call. This platform consolidates all minority-owned and founded entities using social impact technology. MiOWNED will be a platform which will be a gateway to celebrate diversity and dreams for all minority races."

MiOwned partners with local, state and federal agencies missioned to support and enhance minority-owned, founded and operated businesses and nonprofit organizations.

As a product of the Parent Company, Tech20Eight Corporation, MiOwned strives to create an impact for public advancement. Tech20Eight leverages public sector, nonprofit and social enterprise efforts. MiOwned arms its partners with data to increase lobbying power, and economic equality and the leveling of the economic playing field comprise the fuel driving the team at MiOwned to "Keep Moving Forward."

The staff of MiOwned (Jessica Cohen, creator and owner; Ryanna Julia Esplana, marketing director; and Stephen Klava, project manager and developer) knows the importance of standing out. "There are many apps and directories which service different ethnic groups as an equity tool. It was important for me to progress forward with birthing this concept and being obedient to what the Lord has instructed. We have grown the platform and steadily issue an impact with our

Honoring the Late Dr. Martin Luther King

MIOWNED CONT'D



Stephen Klava

partners and the listings we onboard. Even in the first phase of this concept, value and connectivity have been transferred from the partners to the consumers seeking to connect with the businesses utilizing the service,” Cohen explained.

The app can be downloaded for free by visiting the Apple or Google play store and searching for MiOwned. If you desire to be listed on the directory, please visit miowned.com. MiOwned can be found on social media using the following handles:

[Twitter.com/Miownedbusiness](https://twitter.com/Miownedbusiness), [instagram.com/Miownedbusiness](https://www.instagram.com/Miownedbusiness) and [facebook.com/MiOwnedbusiness](https://www.facebook.com/MiOwnedbusiness). If your organization serves minority owned or founded entities and would like to partner with MiOwned, please email accounts@miowned.com for details. For additional information, inquiries or concerns, the company can be reached through email at info@miowned.com.

OPENING LAKE CITY'S SOLE WINE AND BEER RETAILER



Emmett and his bartender Robin Bonham

LAKE CITY-Opening a new store during a global pandemic is not on most people's list of things to do. Yet, it is exactly what Emmett Kerr was faced with in 2020. Kerr is the owner of Sip Co, Lake City's first and only wine and beer retail store.

His interest in the industry began during his high school years when he secured a job bagging ice at Mickey Finn's. There, Kerr says he developed a particular fondness for beer because of its designs and logos. He continued to progress within the company and gained a true love for the industry.

Kerr's then girlfriend now wife, Jamison Kerr, worked as an intern with the major art competition ArtFields held in Lake City. The two shared many of their first dates attending the city's art shows and exploring the town. They relocated to Lake City in 2017, during a time when the city was flourishing with new opportunities. "The Darla Moore Foundation was doing business grants. You could write a business plan and turn it in and see what they thought. We wanted to be a part of building this town," shared Kerr.

His idea for opening a wine and beer store emerged from a place of necessity, as he did not find many options for purchasing quality drinks in the area. Although he did face some skepticism for opening a specialty store in the small town, Kerr says the community response has been substantial. He also finds many similarities between Lake City and his hometown of Bishopville, adding that it's easy to fit right in.

The COVID-19 outbreak was confirmed to have reached South Carolina in March of 2020, and by April 1 Governor McMaster had ordered all non-essential businesses to close temporarily. Alcohol stores, however, were deemed essential businesses partly because of how

dangerous it could be for alcohol-dependent individuals to undergo withdrawal at a time when hospitals were stretched thin. Thus, Kerr continued with his plans and opened for business on May 1 with special accommodations. "I opened up an online store overnight so you could order online, and I could just bring it out to your car without contact. I immediately had to switch my business model within two or three days," he shared. "For the most part, it was just retail to-go stuff early on. Building a website definitely helped. It kinda got me through uncertain times." In addition, he allowed only two customers inside at a time, and he kept the garage doors on the building open for more airflow. As time passed, he introduced limited indoor and outdoor seating as well as began hosting food trucks every Saturday.

Customers of Sip Co can shop from a varied selection of 40 beers and 120 wines on the retail side of the business. They may also "sip" from 40 different beers and 10 wines, including a featured wine of the week from the bar portion. "Whatever beer I have on the retail side, I put a six-pack of it on the bar side so you can try it. If you like it, you can get more," explained Kerr. "Ages 25-40 are the young group that's drinking all the fun stuff. Then, there's ages 55 and up, drinking true French burgundy's and real Italian wine--very fine wine and very fun wine."

The global pandemic has delivered many unexpected challenges, but has also brought with it a hidden blessing: his bartender Robin Bonham. Bonham, of Myrtle Beach, relocated to the area due to COVID-19. She and Kerr spoke during a visit she made to the bar and realized they shared many similar interests. "She's the best bartender I've ever seen in my life. This is her world when she's back here. She can handle anything," shared Kerr.

He believes their knowledge of beer and wine sets Sip Co apart from the competition. "Robin and I are studying constantly. Our goal is to sell great beer and wine in an environment free from intimidation. Wine used to scare me until I had a great wine. I want people to experience what I've experienced with great wine and beer." He also adds that Sip Co's unique architecture helps them to stand out as well. Its large garage doors allow for easy transition in and out. "Being able to have food trucks and outdoor events is substantial. I can have outdoor events, and it still feels like you're inside," says Kerr. Sip Co plans to implement wine shipping this February. "The wine club is going to move over to shipping format, so that wine just shows up to your doorsteps. The wine crowd is a little more at risk for COVID, so they'll be able to enjoy what we sell in a safer environment."

Working in the wine and beer business couldn't be any more fitting for him. He sees it as his high school job that he fell in love with. He loves the community and says everyone in the industry is easy going. "Things are definitely looking up. As a business owner, I'm starting to feel secure with everything going on. And I have confidence in us that we can adapt. If anything were to happen in the future we'd be ready to go for it."



Image of SIP CO.



Bill Nelson

CONNECTING TO THE CULTURE by Jennifer Robinson

MULLINS- From slavery until today, the arts have been used to express the narratives of the struggles and joys of Black life. Bill Nelson's passion for cultural awareness has led him to teach his findings around the country. Born in the small town called Fork, but raised in New Jersey, Nelson has taught people that Black culture was, is, and always will be the foundation of this country.

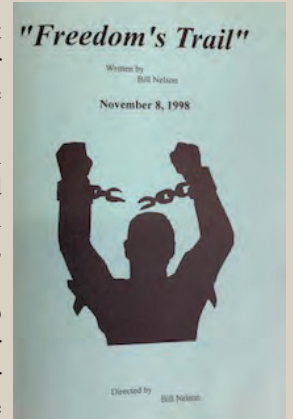
Nelson has been singing gospel music since he was 12 years old, captivating audiences, performing with major gospel groups and individuals. He also sang with the major recording group The O'Kasions' "Of I'm A Girl Watcher From SC." His love of gospel music led him to study its history. In his studies, he learned what gospel songs were about and what each of the words meant. "There were messages in the songs they were singing on the plantations that were coded," Nelson stated. "They had their own language in the spirituals so slave owners could not understand what they were discussing amongst each other." Finding this rich information coupled with his gospel singing formulated a performance group called the Performing Arts Academy Players in the late 1990s. As an artist-in-residence for South Carolina, he wrote several plays. "A Joyful Sound" is a musical production chronicles our musical history from the twenties to the middle 80s. "Freedom Trail" is a reflection of us from Africa through slavery and the Roaring Twenties, and it gave you the church experience without the audience having to go to church. Nelson was later approached to begin performing at the House of Blues for the Gospel Brunch segment. There, he entertained the masses for 21 years until one of his band mates, Herbert Sulaman, passed away. Nelson says he appreciates all he learned from Sulaman and his other colleague, Tamir Mubarak.

"My audience was predominately white. The reason being is that many of them made going to the House of Blues Gospel Sunday Brunch part of their vacation times and getaways," Nelson said. They came to the shows by the busloads. The shows were very expensive (not his decision), and though there were some blacks that attended, he appreciated educating Caucasians about the Black experience. He taught these predominant audiences the history of Black songs, such as "I Will Trust in the Lord," his grandma's favorite. "Those songs told stories of the hardships of Black people," he said. In the unofficial church service experience, he would perform during Gospel Sunday Brunch, and he would share with the audience about the feelings Blacks would experience while in church--from the singing, to the dressy clothes, the positions of leadership they held in the church. It was not only a part of church, but it was also about community building. Nelson used the stage as a platform for awareness and to teach the effects of slavery and cultural identity.

He believes the Black family has some work to do in maintaining the arts. Most of Black art is hip hop influenced. Therefore, there are some negative overtones. Nelson said he wished they used better language to convey messages in the newer art to gain more acceptance. "But," he said, "what has not changed is the beat of the music." Dating back to before the African diaspora, Black music and beats are rooted in African DNA. Nelson continues to teach music and cultural awareness to children from kindergarten to high school. He currently works in the Marion County School District. The Gospel Sunday Brunch missed him, and it followed him to Mullins, where he resides.

Nelson says he has a few concerns about the Black family and how young people will receive art in the future. He said the church has lost some of its significance in Black communities. He stated, "If I asked a child in my class 25 years ago on a Monday, 'How many of you attended church this past Sunday?' the entire class would raise their hands." Children were taken to church where they learned to honor and do the right thing. Nelson said if he asked that same question of children today, very few children would raise their hands for fear of being made fun of because people do not attend church as they once did.

Today Nelson works diligently to keep gospel music alive. He has worked with other young artists to pass the stories to other generations. "We must train and prepare the younger generation. We cannot stop."



LESSENING ECONOMIC & POLITICAL GAPS IN SC

by Mallory Brayboy



Jason Belton

BLYTHEWOOD- America has been blessed with innumerable contributions from Black Americans. Jason Belton, co-founder of the grassroots organization Vision Walkers, has made it his mission to show Black Americans the power they have to not sit idly in the background, but to stand up and create impactful change within their communities.

Belton, a native of Blythewood, considers himself "country raised, city certified." He spent his prior years working as an entertainment promoter and gained great influence in doing so. He noticed discriminatory gentrification processes taking place in Columbia affecting several elderly individuals and was moved to do something about it. Belton connected with business consultant Craig Khanwell, who saw the greater potential in Belton's groundwork as a promoter. "He showed me that the organizing I was doing on the entertainment front can be used to organize the same guys to show a political force and stop gentrification in those areas," said Belton. "We realized that when we bridge my influence with the streets and his influence with the suites together, that political force was enough to get these elected officials' attention and hold them accountable."

After achieving success in that endeavor, Belton and Khanwell decided to form a full-fledged movement that would mirror this same process. Thus, Vision Walkers was born. The two began organizing Vision Walkers in 2013 with a focus on educating marginalized and disenfranchised communities on how their skills can transfer into the political and business arenas. Vision Walkers is comprised of about 67 percent males to 33 percent females, as the group sees a greater need for aid amongst males. Its efforts stretch across the state of South Carolina, servicing individuals in 34 of the 46 counties. "We go to the projects first and rural areas that don't get to see this side of the business world," said Belton. The group prides itself in

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

LESSENING ECONOMIC CONT'D

“bridging the gap between the streets and the suites.”

Belton says the group aims to push voter education before voter registration, and its main initiatives include educating individuals on local elections and creating a space for them to be heard. One of the group’s most successful initiatives was held in Orangeburg, where 150 young men gathered to learn about local elections. The men became so involved that they organized and ran one of their colleagues for mayor. Though the campaign wasn’t a success, Belton still saw a profound accomplishment in enlightening the group on the political process and the power they hold.

Belton encourages young people to not try to join someone else’s table--to create your own instead. “We teach our young Black brothers and sisters to create your own momentum, so much that it holds these elites accountable...” he shared.

In addition, Vision Walkers partnered with the Democratic Black Caucus of South Carolina and began holding listening sessions. “Typically, many elected officials and political strategists go to communities and do all the talking. So, we came up with the concept of going to these communities and getting people you don’t typically see to come out--guys with dreads and grills--and having them speak,” said Belton. At these sessions, elected officials then give their response and solutions to the issues at hand.

One of Belton’s many roles within Vision Walkers includes business training that covers business planning, obtaining an LLC, budgeting for a small staff and more. The group invests in those who succeed in its training. Thus far, it has assisted in developing a call center, three lawn care services, two pest control services, a security service and an event staffing service. Also, Dior’s Palace Restaurant & Lounge, powered by Chef Fat Mack, is currently in the process of opening in Columbia.

From business to politics, the impact being made on communities across the state truly warms Belton’s heart. “The most success I’ve felt was when I was able to pay over 100 guys from marginalized communities--these projects. They didn’t have to go out and sell drugs. They were able to actually go out and do something righteous,” shared Belton while pointing out that politicians come to their neighborhoods and expect them to door-knock for free, yet they pay individuals in elite neighborhoods. Vision Walkers has also assisted many young Black officials in gaining their positions, including Representative Shedron Williams and Mullins’ Mayor Robert Woodbury.

Belton understands the power that diversity and inclusion have in society and works continuously to lessen economic and political gaps in South Carolina. He also understands the magnitude that he, himself, brings through his role in Vision Walkers. “One thing I’ve learned is a lot of times we don’t reach our guys because we don’t find liaisons like me who’ve been in these communities. Typically, business leaders figure they can just find a millennial who’s Black. But, you have to find somebody who has actually been through what these guys have been through.”

The organization has recently secured a new headquarters location that will house a call center, training room and office. It is planning additional outreach programs to provide outlets for members, which will include a Vision Walkers choir. For more information, visit the group online at www.visionwalkers.org and on Facebook under Vision Walkers 2020.

Celebrating History Arthur W. “Man” Stanley



Darlington native Arthur Whitfield Stanley served the Darlington chapter of the NAACP as its president, a post he held for 40 years, and led the effort to desegregate the public school system in Darlington County through legal action. In addition, Stanley initiated a legal challenge to the discriminatory polling practices of the City of Darlington municipal elections. His efforts led to the adoption of three single-member electoral districts and three at-large districts. He holds the distinction of being the first African American elected to a seat on Darlington City Council. Stanley received the Order of the Palmetto from S.C. Governor David Beasley, and the Arthur W. “Man” Stanley Gymnasium in Darlington was named in his honor.

Sites of Interest

**Darlington Memorial Cemetery,
c. 1890, Avenue D and Friendship St**

Edmund H. Deas House, c. 1915, Avenue E

**West Broad Street Historic District,
featuring many late-19th to early 20th
century residences designed and built
by Lawrence Reese**

**St. James United Methodist Church,
c. 1866, 400 S. Main St.**

**Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church,
c. 1866/1935, 312 Pearl St.**

**Historical Museum of Ethnic Culture,
114 Coker St.**

**Henry “Dad” Brown Memorial Marker,
U.S. 52 and Brockington Road**



www.CityofDarlington.com

Pastor Robert Woodbury

WHEN A MESSAGE BECOMES A MOVEMENT by De'Angela Haynes



MULLINS—There's a song by Doc Makenzie and the Hi-Lites entitled "I'll Be Alright." This song is certainly one of the most favorite quartet songs within the Pee Dee region, especially around Marion and Mullins. One of the highlights of this song is given in the vamp "Every day, will be like Sunday..." It is certainly a day that has been looked forward to for hundreds of years. It's a day that's been set aside to give to the Lord in praise, in fellowship with family and other believers, as well as to share resources. It's a day of rest for many, so as believers look forward to heaven, this is the narrative of that hope that every day there will be like Sunday.

However, the question should be proposed concerning this statement, "Will every day be like Sunday?" What about the other days of the week that God created and made? What are we to do with those days? Glad you asked. We are supposed to use what we receive on Sundays to empower, influence, change and make an impact on and in the rest of those days.

This is what the newly elected mayor of Mullins is doing. As mayor, Pastor Robert Woodbury is taking God's message from the pulpit to the citizens of Mullins to bring unity into the communities. Arriving at this place in history has been a journey, to say the least. For the last 10 years, Woodbury has been serving as the senior pastor of the House of God Church located in Mullins. It's a growing congregation that is passionate about empowering men and women in their communities. Even as a young boy, Woodbury was always committed to seeing people's lives impacted for the better, and he has always wanted to see people's situations change through the words and power of Jesus Christ.

About four years ago, Woodbury was led by God to run for City Council and serve people in a different way. It was then that Woodbury was quickly able to see that it was still the same mission, but by different means. He was able to learn how to not only teach the love of God from the pulpit, but also be a better example of his love in everyday life. He discovered that his pulpit was no longer found just in a church,

but in the marketplace, the neighborhoods and the communities. He was now in a position to serve the people by being present and a consistent voice for them.

While on this journey, what he already knew became clearer: that being a servant of God meant serving him and representing him wholeheartedly, no matter the assignment. Even when your assignment is to meet the needs of the people from the influence of the political arena, God wants you to still represent him. Woodbury has always been a firm believer that if God puts us in a place or position, it's because he intends for us to be his voice there. That is exactly what Woodbury set out to do these last four years. He set out to take the message of Christ, his love, compassion and nature to his community as a councilman. He set out to be a voice for his community, for the ones that were overlooked and not heard. This is an extension of his calling.

Woodbury loves the city of Mullins. Mullins is a strong city that is full of culture and history. The people are amazing, but they have seen and endured some dark times. However, what seems to be constant is their ability to come together when it counts the most. Woodbury's witnessed the downturn of the local economy, jobs closing, 100-year floods and now a global pandemic. Through it all, the differences of opinions, the amount of money in one's pocket, nor the color of one's skin, can stop us from coming together and proving to be resilient. This is part of the message of Jesus Christ—part of his mission.

It was God's desire that even in the roughest times that we learn how to unite our trust in him and each other. It's Christ's teachings that call us to reflect on no greater love than one sacrificing himself for his friend. Woodbury feels as though this is what the city needed to be reminded of. We are all created by God and in need of someone's help.

Being a pastor was a major influence throughout the transition from councilman to mayor. There are so many similarities. Both require you to learn to work with and for others. You have to be a servant at heart. There is definitely no room for selfishness and egos. Oftentimes, you are overworked and underappreciated. However, you are called to do what you do, so that makes the difference. When Woodbury was led by God to run for mayor, he knew it would not be easy, but he was willing to be used by God to be the change that he wanted to see, and he was willing to be an agent of change for his community in this capacity. He was willing to be an example of God's kingdom within the earth.

We will do great things. We will blaze trails. More importantly, we will do it together. Miracles are still taking place in the marketplace. This is a great example and demonstration of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ becoming a movement.





Stacie Davis

FROM THE DIARY TO THE BIG SCREEN

by Anna Bowman

MARION— Stacie Davis would begin to hone her craft for writing as a youngster with a simple gift from her beloved mother, Christine Davis. “My mother knew that I loved to write, and she presented me with a Tweety Bird Diary with a cute little lock and key to write down my dreams and keep them safely locked away from the world,” she said. But in 2020 the little girl who hid her dreams away from the world unlocked her dreams and shared one of her dreams with the entire world.

Davis, a first-time screenwriter and producer, is over the top with excitement about her renowned success with her made-for-television movie, “Christmas in Carolina,” which aired Nov. 1 on ROKU and is available On Demand, iTunes, Google Play, Amazon Prime and WalMart. The film, a holiday romance-comedy, follows the lives of character Elle, a career-driven investment banker who has given up on love (and Christmas) until she meets Wesley, a former NBA player and CEO of a small marketing firm. On a whim, Wesley invites Elle home for Christmas in South Carolina with Wesley’s mom and uncle, who are portrayed by veteran actors Kellie Shanygne Williams and Darius McCrary of the beloved ‘90s sitcom “Family Matters” fame. With some trepidation, Elle accepts and is given a much bigger gift than



she could have imagined.

The idea for the movie script came to Davis while she and her mother were inundated with love stories with the same formula: boy meets girl, fall in love, conflict separates the two, and then the two reunite and fall in love for eternity. Upon seeing this scenario played out endlessly, Davis announced to her mother that she felt she could write her own love story. Without hesitation, her mother agreed with her, and the rest is an hour-long movie with a unique love story made for the world to enjoy.

Davis can thank her current success due to an assignment by one of her professors at Claflin University, who invited students to write an essay about a well-known person from their hometown. Davis decided to interview legendary coach Taft Watson, who coached boys and girls basketball for 47 years, 38 years of them coming at Terrell’s Bay High School in Marion County. One of those young basketball stars he coached was none other than Davis’ mother, Christine Deloris White-Davis. Upon completion of the documentary about the late Taft (1921-2018), Davis’ passion for interviewing and producing documentaries was ignited, and her career plans of becoming a news anchor upon graduating from Claflin in 2011 with a mass communication degree was promptly replaced with her true love. “I realized I wanted to make writing more than just a hobby when I worked on the Coach Taft Watson’s documentary. I realized I discovered my niche!” she said proudly.

After the success of the documentary, Davis soon found herself interviewing and producing for her church, The Door of Hope Christian Church in Marion with Bishop Michael A. Blue and Pastor Malinda Blue. “With each social media video that I completed, I became more and more in love with the art of creating high quality short films.” Her family, faith, and community became the catalyst for fulfilling her dreams of writing and producing a full-length film.

When Davis had moments of self-doubt, her parents, Harris and Christine Davis, along with her sister, Christina Davis (who produced original music for the soundtrack), were always encouraging her with positive reinforcement. Davis often leaned on the wisdom of Blue, who encourages every church member to “use the gift God bestowed upon our lives,” and when she was faced with finding a way to produce the film, she trusted her faith to guide through the maze of writing, producing and funding the film.

She entrusted her mother’s wisdom to give her honest critics while writing the script. “I knew while I was writing the script that I wanted

to make it into a movie,” she added. And to make this a reality, she reached out to former child star turned businesswoman Kellie Shanygne Williams to be her guide through the filming process. “I reached out to Kellie Williams via email, and to my amazement, her father, Ervin Williams, showed interest in the script after reading a synopsis of the story. The Williams’ family (Kellie; her father, Ervin; and her stepmother, Peggy) have been a beacon of light throughout this entire experience by not only becoming mentors, but executive producing the film through their company, Dream Merchant Media Entertainment, LLC. I am truly grateful and honored to have collaborated with them,” Davis said. Bishop Blue is an executive producer of the film as well.

To make her film a reality, Davis had to wear many hats. She joked, “I was the production assistant, locations scout, writer, with catering and cleaning duties, and I did whatever it took to complete the film, and under budget!”

You marvel at the ways in which her hometown of Marion played a key role in making everyone on the film crew feel at home. The part about Davis becoming a part in bringing jobs to the community was a bonus that she never thought about while writing the script. “I had the opportunity to provide acting roles to local and create job opportunities for local businesses,” she said.

Davis was happy to see how her characters came to life during the filming, especially watching Blue and the church’s children’s choir perform in the film. “Having the opportunity to be on set during filming, watching all the actors breathe life into my love story, was a surreal experience,” she acknowledged.

Stacie Davis, a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Inc., resides in Marion and has ventured into her own production company, Stacie Davis Films. She can be contacted via Facebook at Stacie Davis Films, or visit her website staciedavisfilms.com.

Currently, Davis is happily writing her greatest love story ever with her fiancé, Kevin Hamilton.





Allie Brooks

HONORING ALLIE BROOKS FOR HIS WORK IN EDUCATION

by Jennifer Robinson

If you have lived in Florence for the past 40 years, there is a name that is synonymous with the black family: Allie Brooks. He and his work in the educational system and in the community are what make the theme of this History Month's so appropriate: "The Black Family- Faith, Hope, Love and the Backbone of Strength and Survival." If you, the reader, think about it, you will realize that there are only a few degrees between you and your friends or family and knowing Allie Brooks. He was either your middle teacher, your assistant principal, your principal, your college

professor or your superintendent. He is known today as what millennials call an influencer, and there are very few who could speak about the plight of the Black family in the Pee Dee.

Brooks chuckled at his known reputation for being stern while he was an educator from 1970-2007, but he spoke about being fair and creating an environment of respect for others. He is a champion for the Black family, and he believes it to be the first institution--both formally and informally--that we encounter in which we should learn positive examples of healthy relationships, faith and good work ethic.

He stated parents should share household responsibilities so children can learn there aren't specific gender roles in the home. Brooks said over the years, he and his wife, Barbara Brooks, shared household duties. This was especially necessary when they were raising their children: Allie Eugene, III, Dr. Deanna Fredrica Brooks Davis and Thelma Susanna Eaddy Brooks, JD. Brooks stated at home and at school he was creating environments of stability to anchor young people. If they were able to deal with challenges within the home in the appropriate way, then when they were in society, there would be better outcomes.

Brooks' accomplishments in our community show his commitment to reaching people beyond the school. He has been achieved numerous honors over the past 40 years that should encourage people to live beyond themselves and to serve others. Just within the past ten years, he has received the following awards: Recipient, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity "Omega Man of the Year" Award, November 2010; Recipient, South Carolina Retired Educators Association, Educator of the Year, 2011; Recipient, United Way of Florence County's Ashby P. Lowrimore Award for Community Service, 2011; Wallace-Gregg Elementary School Award for Dedication and Service, 2011; Pee Dee Electric Cooperative's Citizen of the Month, May 2014; South Carolina Athletic Administrators' Association Appreciation Award, 2014; Florence School District One, Honors & Awards, Dedication Award, 2014.

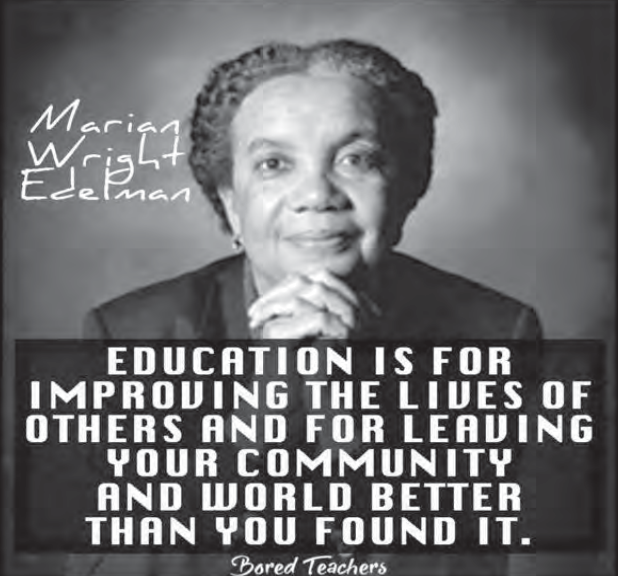
Unfortunately, in 2020 we saw major threats to the Black family with the killings of Black men and women by the hands of law enforcement and racist vigilantes. The Black family is the nucleus to the core of the community, and the institution must be protected at all costs. Respect for the Black family has begun to be lost to societal and political changes that affect its dynamics. For instance, if a father or mother is killed, as we witnessed last year, there are emotional and financial strains placed on those who have to care for their children. The same is true of parents who were impacted by coronavirus.

"More than 36 million Americans are unemployed in the aftermath of nationwide pandemic shutdowns. Of those 36 million, 1.7 million Black women were left without a job. According to research from the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, working-age adults, children and Black Americans will fall below the poverty line at the highest rates as a result of the coronavirus pandemic's economic effects" (nytimes.com). This toxicity in the Black family may cause additional stress within families who have to cope with racism and other disparities.

Brooks reminisced on time when the church, school and community functions were where people knew each other and would share in the responsibility of caring for children. "When I was coming up," he said, "there was the essence of the village mentality. Parents knew the pastors, the teachers, the coaches and all the community leaders. So if a child misbehaved at one place, they were disciplined before they got home, and then they were disciplined again when the parents found out."

Because the village mentality has waned, the Black family may be in jeopardy of deteriorating. Brooks believes that upon the desegregation of schools, Blacks began to mimic the wrong things they saw in their non-black counterparts. What they wanted during that time period in the 1950s and 1960s was access, but it exposed a much deeper issues in the Black community. The access that Black people wanted may have caused them to forget their communities. Many received higher education and moved from the towns where they grew up to where they believed they could prosper economically. Working more led to a deficiency in raising their children. People began to attend church less and less. The church was viewed as the safe haven to receive guidance and strength. A person would learn how to be a Christian, develop a moral compass and help others. All of these connections--the family, the church and school--have been disrespected and are not honored as they were in the past. Therefore, the value that was lost on these institutions must be restored.

With voices like Brooks, the charge of the restoring families should be met with uplifting reception and strong mobilization. We honor Allie Brooks, not only for his contributions to these institutions, but we also salute that what he taught continues to live through each and every student he met and nurtured, who has now produced their own families.



CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH



David Rowell, Jr.

MORE THAN A DREAM

by De'Angela Haynes

MARION—When you ask children what they want to be when they grow up, many will begin to tell their dreams of becoming a firefighter, policeman, teacher, doctor or to play in the NFL or NBA. This was certainly a dream for David Rowell, Jr. Basketball was the dream. As a small boy watching the likings of the greats like Michael Jordan, Allen Iverson, Kevin Garnett and his personal favorite, Kobe “Bean” Bryant. He wanted to be them so much, that he caught himself trying to adorn his numbers on his jersey as well. Basketball was so much of the dream that growing up, he poured everything he had into it. Every ounce of energy he had went to basketball, just like the people who were cheering him on poured every ounce of their energy into basketball (him) as well.

Being raised in a single-parent household by a 12-hour shift nurse, Rowell’s support system included a number of strong African-American women. His mother, late grandmother and late aunt are the premise of everything he is today. In his mind, all the support they provided him was for basketball. It always seemed as if they were continuously pouring into Rowell and his basketball career. However, he was so stuck on basketball that he couldn’t even see that they weren’t pouring into basketball, but instead into him and everything that he never saw himself becoming.

With that being said, those women as well as Rowell’s very influential uncle, Chris, provided him with every opportunity to be a basketball star. As far as he knew, all these seeds being sown were leading him straight to the NBA. Basketball was taking off, and he found himself in gyms. He always wanted to be in, but as time passed, and as he got older, his basketball dreams started to fade and perspectives started to change. It hurt because he had to let go of basketball, which was what his support system

spent all this time pouring into. Rowell found himself slightly uncomfortable because it was then that he found himself sitting in rooms at tables that were never on his radar. He began to grow and realized that the members of his support system didn’t stop when basketball did. He realized they weren’t pouring into basketball but into him. It was then that he noticed his purpose was something different. Everyone should be living life intentionally with purpose and destiny in mind.

The selflessness of Rowell’s mother taught him to give his all to things/people who are important because the rewards from that alone might put you at the table with people like actors Kellie Williams or Darius McCrary. The prayers of his grandmother taught him that through all things, keep your faith, and that alone will grow you a harvest like no other. The tough love of Rowell’s auntie reminded him that you have to stay humble and grounded so that you don’t take for granted opportunities that are meant for you. The resilience that he’s gained from Uncle Chris showed him that things worth having are definitely worth the fight. So you see, Rowell’s support system led him from basketball to the movie “Christmas In Carolina,” not to being a mis-pick of the NBA draft.

That support system is the reason Rowell was able to transform from basketball to starring in the movie. They gave him tools that allowed him to shift and maintain his focus. Basketball was all about executing and performing, and acting doesn’t fall far behind. When asked to be Wesley Saxon, Rowell already had the role of basketball star down because his support system made sure he was just that, so gaining the skill as an actor was what he had to face. With the help of a new support system in star actors Kellie and Darius, Rowell was able to begin perfecting his career. The assistance provided him with new skills that he knows will help send his newfound purpose into new places.

“Christmas in Carolina” has been an opportunity like nothing Rowell’s ever imagined. He said, “I am so thankful and so humble to step into this new realm of my life and see just how far this takes me. I now have a new place where my energy is placed, and while it was never where I saw myself, I am so grateful to be placing ALL my energy in what was truly meant for me.”

Ten years ago, you could’ve asked Rowell what his wildest dreams were and what he wanted to be, not knowing then that what he already wanted and all he ever needed, he already had. The dream was in him. What he had been searching for was never afar. It just needed to

be recognized. All the investments others gave to him were merely helping him realize and perfect his dream. His dream today, he’s already living, which encourages others to realize their dreams while allowing him to share experiences from his journey to help them and pour into them as those before did, but even earlier than when he received it. Rowell said, “Being the idea of a possibility, even by chance, is enough for people to have something to believe in, hold on to or give the slightest of optimistic thinking. It’s what I stand for! My foundation, ‘DJ Rowell Foundation,’ a registered nonprofit and 501(c)(3), is my proudest piece of work to this day, with an aim on helping kids to identify and realize their dreams, and what better example of this is there to ‘practice what you preach’ and be a direct reflection of it?”

We all have great undeniable talent and potential. However, with that great gift comes a greater one: “RESPONSIBILITY.” The choices and decisions we all make have to be a mirror image of where our destiny directs us. Our gifts are what are meant for others, to serve others, to uplift us all and shed light onto great things we are capable of. Rowell looks at himself as not only as a role model, but also more vividly as an idea of possibility, hope and encouragement—an idea that someone can touch, feel, see, get immediate feedback from and understand that he’s real, and the youth can realize their dreams or goals as well. You can’t receive what you do not believe, and it’s his job to give you a reason to believe, empower and encourage you to continue forward helping someone else along the way.

Rowell demonstrates that his dream was transferred into a vision and proper perspective. As it relates to his life, you see that it’s “More Than A Dream!”



COLCLOUGH SPEARHEADS THE CHARGE FOR COMMUNITY ARTS by Les Echols



Melanie Colclough, executive director, Sumter County Cultural Center

SUMTER—Melanie Colclough is the executive director at the Sumter County Cultural Center/Patriot Hall. A connector and advocate, Colclough served as a nonprofit leader before taking over as executive director in 2017. She enjoys repositioning the arts in her community but is driven by the opportunity to bring people together through her work there. Diversity Works© caught up with her to hear her story of faith, service and perseverance.

DW: You have a strong reputation for community involvement and service. Tell us a little about Melanie the person.

God created me with a servant's heart. Throughout my life, I have always found time to volunteer, lend a listening ear, offer advice and serve others in any capacity. It is in these moments I feel most connected to God. This urging compelled me to leave corporate America 20 years ago for work in community-benefit organizations.

Since then, I have served in senior leadership positions for school districts, agencies and nonprofit organizations. I am often the one in meetings asking for evidence that we are making a visible difference in our organizations and for the people we serve. When I see a gap, I find myself actively trying to find a creative solution—often spearheading the charge. One of my most rewarding volunteer experiences was becoming a guardian ad litem, which was the catalyst to one of my greatest accomplishments yet: adoption. Shortly after losing our biological son and surviving a painful bout of grief, my husband and I adopted a sibling group of four—then later welcomed their two biological younger brothers. Rearing them is now one of the biggest joys of my life. It is challenging, but I cannot think of a better way to spend my life.

I graduated from the University of South Carolina in Columbia with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. I also earned a Master of Public Administration degree from the City University of New York (Baruch College) through the National Urban Fellows program. I serve on the Sumter County Gallery of Art board, two school STEAM advisory boards and Sumter's eSTEAM Festival committee. Since becoming executive director three years ago, I was honored by Gamma Iota Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. as Citizen of the Year (in partnership with my husband, David), awarded as a Woman of Excellence by the Social Justice Consortium and named Tribute to Women in Industry recipient by the local YWCA. The SC Arts Commission also asked me to serve on the Governor's Awards for the Arts selection committee, the highest award the state gives in the arts. I am also an active member of the Sumter Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. where I serve as chair for both the Arts & Letters and Strategic Planning committees.

DW: Tell us specifically about your career in nonprofits and how that has molded you.

When I worked in the for-profit world, I saw a huge gap in our corporate social responsibility. Therefore, in addition to my regular workload, I found myself creating opportunities for the company to give back. Among other projects, I started a large annual clothing drive for the Salvation Army, began a company mentoring program with the local YMCA, coordinated volunteer support for a local basketball initiative and served on the company's credit union board. After taking an inventory

of my behavior, I turned my true passion into a profession and started my career in the nonprofit world. This journey has taken me all around South Carolina—offering me the opportunity to actually serve people in every county. My time in nonprofit has taught me a great deal, but one of the most important lessons I learned is the art of collaboration. Oftentimes in the nonprofit world, we are called to wear multiple hats to overcome Herculean challenges and achieve significant goals. With so much to accomplish, I learned quickly that collaboration is the key to sustaining success. So much more can be achieved with diverse opinions, collective resources and reciprocal support. Helping people see common interests to reach mutually beneficial goals is my "superpower."

DW: What is the importance of the arts in a community?

Accessibility to the arts is key to developing and strengthening communities. Fostering cultural appreciation in our community increases the quality of life for our residents, boosts tourism and commerce and expands the capacity of future generations. Arts education prepares students for the workforce. It helps to develop social, problem solving and critical thinking skills. It encourages flexibility, adaptability, creativity and innovation—all skills that are crucial for successful careers in any field.



Melanie Colclough and Cynthia Hardy

The beauty, diversity and ambiguity of the arts give people a much-needed collective experience while offering space for individual ones—a philosophy I hope people will learn at the cultural center then transfer to other facets of life.

DW: You are known as a connector... someone who brings people together. Tell us the importance of that as it pertains to making communities more diverse and inclusive.

I love meeting people and learning all about them. I naturally hear their challenges and instinctively go through a mental Rolodex of people I know who might be able to help. I think this instinct pairs well with my propensity to serve and need to collaborate. Connecting people to each other is especially important in building diverse and inclusive spaces... and thriving communities. People naturally gravitate to people "like" them. Depending upon a circle of people who think (and look) exactly like you, makes one stagnant. We miss out on sage advice, understanding and expertise. It makes organizations lackluster and businesses mediocre. Different perspectives challenge mindsets and spark innovative thinking. A connector topples these paradigms by breaking through silos to bring needed perspectives to the table.

DW: Tell us about your selection to South Arts Emerging Leaders of Color.

People of color are under-represented in most industries, especially so in leadership roles. South Arts seeks to change that through its inaugural program, Emerging Leaders of Color. Diverse leaders throughout the South were chosen, through a competitive process, to participate in three days of coursework and activities designed to strengthen competencies and prepare participants for larger roles in the field. We are the first of many who will build networks to support careers, advocate for the cultural interests of the communities we represent and serve and help strengthen public support to sustain the vibrancy of the sector. It was an amazing experience! I am now connected to a network of brilliant art leaders who are willing to support each other for many years to come. I am so excited to see how this impacts all of us in the future.

Celebrating Women's History



Honorable Teresa Myers Ervin

VALIANT HUMILITY

by Jennifer Robinson

When the suffragists in the 1920s marched and fought for women's right to vote, they also were fighting for women to be included in the political process to elect women to offices. The ultimate outcry from those women was "Women's Votes Matter." What women can say today in that not only do women's votes matter, but having women in political positions of power also matters. From large states, such as New York and California, to smaller states like South Carolina and Georgia, over the past 50 years, women have been elected as representatives, to Congress, the Senate, and now as vice president.

In Florence, a Black woman now sits in the seat of mayor, and her name is the Honorable Teresa Myers Ervin. She was elected Nov. 3, 2020, the 100th anniversary year of women earning the right to vote. "On Aug. 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was finally ratified, enfranchising all American women and declaring for the first time that they, like men, deserve all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship," as cited by history.com. Mayor Myers Ervin loves the significance of this historical date because she was born in August.

But she is not new to what fighting for women's political rights brings forth. She has served on the Florence City Council for the past ten years, and her voice has made a difference in the city's growth. To date, she has been involved in projects, big and small, to benefit the community. In 2011, one of then Councilwoman Myers Ervin's first sponsored initiatives was to propose and secure the funding to get the Pearl Moore Basketball Center built. To date, it is the only government building in Florence named after a woman.

Myers Ervin has served on various

committees to include the ad hoc evaluation committee that was charged with choosing the bank that the City of Florence would do business with and currently the community development ad hoc committee for which she has chaired for seven years.

As a council member, Myers Ervin was able to secure \$3.5 million to begin community development projects in the City of Florence, which has never been done in the city's history. This led to her being appointed chair of the community development ad hoc committee, which oversees implementation of the community development plan. Under her chairmanship and working with the council, it placed the City of Florence in the position to receive the Municipal Association of South Carolina (MASC) Joseph P. Riley, Jr. Award for Economic Development for the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, which began in 2014 with the city's first development completed in March 2018.

As an original member of the 2010 Florence City Council Leadership Team, Myers Ervin played a vital role in downtown redevelopment. To ensure small downtown redevelopment was economically inclusive, the councilwoman introduced the provision to look out for small businesses by granting a maximum of \$30,000 to assist small businesses in getting up and running through the Business Redevelopment and Historic Building Grant. She was the only leadership team member to represent the city in Washington, D.C. to lobby for City of Florence to establish the new HopeHealth facility located at its present Irby Street location. More recently, after taking a leadership trip to Spartanburg, Myers Ervin brought back the commercial kitchen space concept at the City Center Farmers Market. She saw a need with the growth of small businesses in the retail and culinary space and the area being labeled a food desert. Having the foresight to add to the bottom line is most valuable to her.

Holding office of councilwoman, Myers Ervin worked with a local youth group to redevelop the skate park at McLeod Park. She led the initiative to create an athletic complex designed to manage baseball leagues for youth and adults in the City of Florence, bringing them together, unifying the fun. Currently, this is the expansion of the Florence Tennis Center to allow offerings such as track and field in addition to tennis and baseball, which will meet the recreational needs of the growing community.

Understanding Florence will need to work toward an economic recovery from the

pandemic, as councilwoman, Myers Ervin sponsored resolution COVID-19 CARES Act budget of \$161,263, which passed unanimously. This resolution will allow community block grant funds to be used to assist low- to moderate-income citizens whose jobs or income have been affected by COVID-19. The City of Florence has committed to matching funding up to \$150,000.

Myers Ervin credits God and family with her successes. She said remaining humble has helped her in serving the community. "The greatest leader [Jesus] was also the greatest servant," she stated. From that she has learned how important it is to be morally and ethically correct. She received her spiritual foundation from her mom, Isabella Myers, and her sister, Virginia Myers Brown. "They taught me," Myers Ervin explained, "about leading a godly life by being examples of godly women through their faith."

As mayor, Myers Ervin stated she is steadfast with consistent, honest, sound leadership. She said that being the first Black mayor or first woman mayor is not intimidating because we all are the first at something. The quality and skills one possesses to work effectively are important.

Myers Ervin said, "This is the year of the woman, and what is happening in our world will have much historical significance." She believes in the scripture Philippians 4:13, which says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

For young women looking to her for motivation, Myers Ervin shared they are created for a purpose: to make changes. They should not allow themselves to be boxed in or allow anyone to limit them. They must learn to love themselves so they will not worry about how others see them. Myers Ervin wants us all to ban together to continue to make Florence better because the potential amongst the people is for it to thrive.





Dr. Lucia Huang

MAINTAINING EXEMPLARY TEACHING DURING PANDEMIC by Anna Bowman

Dr. Lucia Huang, a native of Taiwan, received her Bachelor of Science degree in German from Fu-Jen Catholic University in Taipei, Taiwan. Upon graduation, she was offered a full scholarship to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tenn., where she received a MS degree in German and a PhD in education. While attending UTK, she met and married fellow

Taiwanese student, David Liu. In 1994, after

obtaining their degrees, the couple relocated to Lake City, where David accepted a job with Nan Ya Plastics.

Learning another language is not an easy task, and it takes discipline. Fortunate for Huang, as an adolescent, she was raised in a school system that encouraged and prioritized learning a second language. She fell in love with the German language/culture, primarily because she was a fan of classic music, especially opera and the German Lied, which is a term in the German vernacular to describe setting poetry to classical music to create a piece of polyphonic music.

Huang began teaching German on the collegiate level but quickly discovered her true calling was teaching German to high school students. In 1998 she accepted a teaching position with Wilson High School and has been teaching German at the school for the past 22 years, and she has had the pleasure of developing an award-winning career curriculum. "At Wilson, I currently teach German 2-5 in the International Baccalaureate Program (IB). Some years, I had students who knew nothing about German when they walked into my class as freshmen; three years later, they could hold a conversation with me about renewable energy in German. The consistency and the rigor in the learning environment at Wilson's IB program foster the students' success, and that is the pride I take as a teacher."

Being able to bring her students a new vision of life has been Huang's teaching philosophy for the past 22 years. And her desire to be the best in her field has opened doors for her students beyond their imagination. One minute her students are sitting in a class in Florence, and the next minute they are boarding a flight to Germany. "I have prepared students who have been awarded an all-expense trips to join a host family in Germany for a month-long stay," she said. The American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) along with the German government sponsors a study trip for top high school German students. The winner of the trip must score above the 90th percentile on the National German Exam and to submit an application, where they write essays in German.

Since 2011, six winners from South Carolina have been students of Huang. In fact, her student who won the trip in 2011 is now a German teacher in Virginia. "I also taught two other students who won awards and traveled to Germany, and now one of those former students works for a big business company in Hamburg. Additionally, three other former students travelled to Chicago as finalists for the USA round of the International German Olympiad. One of them won a bronze medal in the final round," Huang proudly acknowledged.

Huang's exemplary accomplishments as a teacher were recognized when she was selected in 2013-2014 as Florence School District One Teacher of the Year. "Being Teacher of the Year was a big honor for me and for the world language classroom. Learning a second language is the

core curriculum in many countries in Asia and Europe, but not here in America. I was thrilled that a spotlight was shining on a world language classroom."

The new normal due to the pandemic has forced teachers to adapt to technology via Zoom and Google Meet classes. "I miss seeing my students face to face," she said, "and Zoom classes cannot replace that human interaction. However, the quality of my teaching remains the same. With the advancement of technology, there are new possibilities in both teaching and learning. My students have had the opportunity to listen to guest speakers from German companies in the U.S. and talk with other German learners all over South Carolina. Learning possibilities are ubiquitous; one just has to look hard enough," she stated, adding, "COVID-19 did not take away this part of learning."

As a teacher, Huang enjoys being recognized for her teaching skills, but one of her greatest accomplishments she received was from a former student. "A student at Wilson once thanked me for teaching her 'an entire language.' That's when I realized what a difference I made in some students' life," she said enthusiastically.

Dr. Lucia Huang is married to Dr. David Liu, the R & D director at Nan Ya Plastics in Lake City. The couple has a son, Benjamin Liu, 24; a daughter, Rebecca Liu, 19; and a golden retriever named Sophie, 6. Her hobbies include listening to music, attending the theater and cooking. As the author of two academic books, she enjoys reading news stories in Mandarin Chinese, English and German.

ACTIVISM, ACTIVATION! by De'Angela Haynes



Stephanie Denise

MULLINS-Activism is the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change. It is the action or process of making something active or operative. Stephanie Denise, as an unrelentingly community activist and grassroots organizer, certainly depicts the definition of these two words.

For a lot of people, this will be a "little known fact," but Denise was born and raised in the Pee Dee region, specifically Marion County. Her roots run very deep throughout the region called Mullins, her hometown, but she lovingly considers all the Pee Dee to be home because family and friends are scattered throughout the entire area.

For Denise, activism began at an early age. She was blessed to have so many wonderful educators throughout her K-12 experience but specifically, it was the strong Black female educators who helped to drastically shape her mind while encouraging her to always speak up without hesitation. Denise has seen this phrase or a similar one on social media, and she always stops to read, or rather reread, it because it is in stark contrast to her childhood experiences. It goes a little like this, "Little girls who had 'talks too much' on their report cards grew up to be powerful."

Denise's grade school and high teachers encouraged her to talk more, raise her hand if she knew the answer every time and shine bright. Some would even pull her aside to reiterate the importance of always speaking up and speaking out. You see, the little girls who were encouraged to talk a lot and be their own advocates, grow up to be powerful advocates for others, continuously fighting for progress, and ways are found to amplify

Celebrating Women's History

ACTIVISM, ACTIVATION! CONT'D

their voices.

Most importantly, Denise's mother was a giver who would frequently remind her that you cannot live or survive in this world without others, especially if you are not willing to be of assistance to others.

Additionally, Denise's now deceased childhood pastor played a very key role in nurturing her activism, even during her college years. As a teenager, she frequently assisted Dr. Rev. Franklin Reeves with a myriad of community projects spanning across the Pee Dee. He was truly an active member of the clergy, but his works did not stop at the border of Marion County as he would constantly be traveling across state lines and within South Carolina to lend a helping hand. Denise was along for the ride. At the time, she did not realize the lessons being taught or even what she was truly doing while visiting these other churches or community hubs, but Reeves was helping to plant "grassroot seeds" in her life which continue to flourish many years later.

During college, there were opportunities for students to become involved in local, national or even worldwide community efforts. While some of those opportunities offered course credits, others were simply opportunities to volunteer within our communities. Looking back now, Denise often reflects and gives honor to the many college professors and instructors who were also "LOUD" activists, for they continued to unknowingly shift the trajectory of her life while continuing to mold her young mind to do more, to be more and to give more. She cannot imagine why or how she was so fortunate to have a wealth of strong-willed, compassionate, community oriented, feisty and dynamic educators throughout her entire academic career which all started in a mark speck

on the map.

Denise would be remiss for failing to acknowledge that some of the finest examples of community leadership were on display at Rains-Centenary Elementary through Terrell's Bay High School (now Creek Bridge High School). If you merge her childhood with her undergraduate and graduate experiences, she was surrounded by some of the nation's best professors who encouraged her wild ideas, enthusiasm, supported her activism and encouraged her to knock down the doors, shatter the ceilings, grab her seat at the table and never forget to invite others.

So, if anyone asks why Denise does what she does, her response will always direct them back to her hometown because she was raised in a family surrounded by strong individuals, especially the women who continue to serve as the backbones on many levels. However, the desire to live up to her grandfather's legacy has privately been her guiding light, which meant being the type of person whose name was the only necessary credit score, and your word is your bond because people will not remember the cars you drove or the fancy name brand labels you wore, but they will remember your character.

Stephanie Denise has shifted this Pee Dee region and made a great impact through her "activism" and "activation" during this season and the year of 2020.



FLORENCE'S NEW COUNCILWOMAN ON THE POWER OF VOTING

by Les Echols



Lethonia "Peaches" Barnes

The theme for 2021 National Women's History Month is "Valiant Women of the Vote (Showing Courage and Determination): Refusing to be Silenced." This powerful theme captures the spirit of these very challenging times. Florence City Council member Lethonia "Peaches" Barnes is an excellent embodiment of this theme and the success women continue to achieve on a local and national level.

Barnes was born and raised on the north side of Florence, and she is a graduate of Wilson High School and alumnus of South Carolina State College. After owning a beauty and barber salon for 25 years, she taught cosmetology at Chris Logan and became an administrator at Florence-Darlington Technical College and Virginia College. Along with numerous community service accolades, she now serves as the pastor of Fletcher Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Laurinburg, N.C. Barnes touched on a few of the influences in her life.

"I was blessed to have two wonderful parents, Edward and Sudie Bradley, who instilled the importance of hard work and servant hood in myself and my four siblings. All of us serve in the areas of education, entrepreneurship and/or politics. Respect and appreciation for the leadership qualities of women have reached a new pinnacle, which is true for all women, but particularly true for women of color. My entire life has been enriched by the influence of powerful women whom I have been blessed to know since my childhood--local women like my great aunt Dr. Iola Jones, my friend Dr. Vasthi Smith, Mrs. Barbara E. Brooks,

Dr. Maggie Glover (first black senator in South Carolina and church member)," she continued.

Barnes made it clear what a great honor it was for her to be nominated with the highest number of votes casted among nominees, then to be elected as a council member by her family, community and peers. "We must not allow the standards and patterns of the past to lure us into apathy and complacency. Instead, we must be pioneers and create and design policies and procedures and sponsor programs and initiatives that will make Florence a better city."

When asked about the power of the vote, Barnes was also very adamant about the relevance of voting. "Because of the power of the vote, I now serve as City Councilwoman of Florence, and we have a Black, female mayor. For us to continue our forward momentum, we must vote. The power of the vote can defeat corrupt power regimes and racist agendas, enrich lives and develop poverty-stricken areas into flourishing and productive communities. The complexity of today's political world also requires politicians to be able to adequately communicate. If we communicate effectively, relationships will be built, and those rapports can overcome any challenges we may face. We must all work together to ensure that every vote counts and voter intimidation and suppression is stopped."

She continued, "We must also regain the confidence of the voter to ensure for safe and fair elections. We must make voting easier and not more difficult for those who are faced with challenges to get to the voting precincts. With God's help, some hard work and the collaboration of our new mayor, council and staff, we are on our way to bigger and better things," concluded Barnes.

THE WOMAN BEHIND MOVING ARTFIELDS FROM IDEA TO REALITY by Les Echols

Diversity Works© magazine was thrilled to catch up with interior designer and antique specialist Karen Fowler. Fowler owns The Elegant Bee in Lake City and is well known for her design expertise and her service to the Lake City community.



Karen Fowler and husband, Marion

Tell us a little about yourself.

I was born and raised in Atlanta, Ga. I grew up in a wonderful home with very loving parents. I am probably most like my mother. She was a strong woman, quite the disciplinarian, very talented and did anything she put her mind to. She

loved all things beautiful, which led me to do the same.

My parents moved to Lake City to care for my grandmother when I went off to Georgia College. I later transferred to Francis Marion College where I met Marion Fowler. We married while he was in medical school and later had two sons, Stephen and Brett. Due to Marion's busy schedule, we decided I was going to be a stay-at-home parent for stability. I have never regretted being home with my children, and it is one of my greatest joys. Marion later became a lawyer while I stayed active in our church and civic organizations. During those years, my interior design business evolved. I designed several offices for Marion's law firm and the children's building at our church.

Marion and I were very involved in several national legal organizations with his law practice. I became active in a national legal auxiliary. I served as their president. This opportunity gave me experience in leadership, problem solving and networking.

ArtFields is a major project, not just for Lake City, but South Carolina overall. What was your involvement with the development of ArtFields?

I developed a friendship and business relationship with Lake City native and philanthropist Darla Moore. Darla was looking for a big idea that would help revitalize Lake City in a way that had never been done before. We recognized that the arts was a huge

economic engine for a number of cities like Charleston, Grand Rapids, Santa Fe and Asheville. We decided to start an art festival called ArtFields in Lake City. I was asked to lead that effort. My task was to take it from an idea to a reality, and I was named ArtFields's executive director. I assembled a very talented team. Together, we created a nine-day art festival in Lake City. It was a huge success. Over 20,000 people attended. ArtFields stimulated Lake City's economy and provided a platform for Southern artists. We were so successful that CNN in 2014 named ArtFields as the must attend event in South Carolina. ArtFields was also instrumental in Lake City being named the 2018 "Best small town cultural scene" by USA Today. Developing and leading ArtFields helped demonstrate to me the power of believing in yourself. We had many doubters. We encountered many challenges. In the end, we persevered with focus, a strong work ethic, resiliency and the important principle of making a difference. I later stepped down from ArtFields to pursue my interior design career. It brings me great joy to see ArtFields' continued success.



Karen, Marion and their two grandchildren

Tell us a little about The Elegant Bee. Where did the concept come from?

I would love to tell you I had a grand plan. My love for antiques and interior design led me to start The Elegant Bee in 2003. Annually, I traveled to Europe on

buying trips. For ten years, I had a major presence in Charleston.

The name originated from my travels on a trip to New Orleans when I spotted the Napoleon Bee on a logoed restaurant sign and was immediately inspired. I have always been fascinated with bees, from their nature, to their tenacity and their importance to our environment. My maiden name is Barbree. I was nicknamed KB by some of my closest friends. Also, I was often referred to as "busy as a bee" since I seem to never stop!

What are some of the biggest challenges you face?

Sometimes, today's events can be so depressing. I am perplexed by how some people fail to check basic facts. Often, they are so eager to believe the sound bites of misinformation, which can lead to anger. But I believe in humanity. I believe that most people are inherently good, and I believe in my faith. My faith allows me to conquer any challenges that I face. Sometimes you just shift your view elsewhere to get a better perspective.

What would you tell individuals looking to ascend to a leadership role in their respective communities?

Work hard. Find your strengths, find your passion and then go for it. I believe in always giving your best. If you give your best, you will usually achieve your goals. I love the maxim, "The harder you work, the luckier you get." If people underestimate you, take it as a challenge. Trust your instincts, and if they say you can't do it, laugh inside, and say, "Watch me!"





Miko Pickett

MARION—As we celebrate Women's History Month 2021, the theme captures the spirit of these challenging times. Since most of 2020 women's suffrage centennial celebrations were curtailed, the National Women's History Alliance is extending the annual theme for 2021 to "VALIANT WOMEN OF THE VOTE (Showing Courage and Determination): REFUSING TO BE SILENCED." The National Women's History Alliance is determined that the important roles of multicultural suffragists and voting rights activists continue to be recognized and honored. Miko Pickett is certainly a valiant woman, who not only is a registered voter herself but has also made herself available to ensure others are properly registered and encouraged to use their voter rights. From the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 until the ratification of the 19th Amendment, this timeline demonstrates the long battle for the American Women's right to vote. From the Seneca Falls Convention, this is was the first time that American Women were demanding a change. Even in the 21st Century, women such as Pickett are still standing for what's right.

Pickett is a volunteer director for a non-profit organization founded by her husband, Dominic "Cathcart," Pickett called Pick 42 Foundation. The two also run a couple of small businesses. She is a James E. Clyburn Fellow and a board member of the Marion County Coordinating Council. Pickett loves her family and has been married for 32 years. They have four children, two daughter-in-laws and two grandchildren. She enjoys southern living, traveling, line dancing and music.

In 2019, Pickett retired early from a successful 30-year career as an executive in the field of information technology to fully embrace her work in the community with Pick 42 Foundation, which runs programs such as Project Disaster Recovery, Annual Toy Drive, Free Stores and Mobile Food Pantry (see attached program brief). It was through her work and efforts with Project Disaster Recovery that Pickett felt compelled to dedicate her efforts to

A CELEBRATION OF VOTING by De'Angela Haynes

help her community recover from the disasters of 2015, 2016 and 2018. The tagline of Pick 42 Foundation is "Neighbors Helping Neighbors." To date, over 254 people have registered to volunteer. However, many more neighbors show up, help at events and lend a helping hand. In addition to the volunteers, Pick 42 Foundation has served 923 families in Marion County.

Marion County is a rural community in the Pee Dee of South Carolina. While Marion has a hometown feel, struggles lie just beneath the surface. In this county, one in four lives below poverty, and the school district is in the infamous S.C. "Corridor of Shame."

In 2020, Pickett ran for SC State House of Representatives for District 57 and garnered 38 percent of the vote. Although she lost her bid in the primary, she realized that her community was mainly uninformed about voting and why their votes matter. As a result, she began a grassroots initiative to register people in Marion County to vote. Out of this engagement, the Celebration of Voting program was created.

A Celebration of Voting

In partnership with the non-profit organization Black Voters Matter, Pick 42 Foundation began a program to involve the City of Mullins in a voter engagement and education campaign to motivate a disenfranchised community of 68 percent African-Americans. Below are the various events hosted by Pick 42 Foundation and sponsored by Black Voters Matter between Sep. 12 and Nov. 3.

• **BBQ Cook-off Oct. 7:** A BBQ cook-off competition was held at two locations. Six grill masters competed for trophies and fed people in the community. The events were held in Marion and Mullins at the same time and were attended by hundreds. During these events, the organizers registered community members to vote and also gathered information on their plan to vote. This information was then used to provide reminders to vote.

• **Community Action Saturdays (CAS) Sep. 12–Oct. 17:** Each Saturday, two neighborhoods were visited. They brought a caravan of volunteers, a free food truck for the neighborhood and Italian Ice. They provided swag bags containing hand sanitizer and facemasks, amongst other goodies, to any registered voter. This was a canvassing event in which they went door to door and engaged the community. Registered Voters Community Engagement (Housing Authority Communities, Seniors Citizen Communities, disenfranchised communities)

• **Sundays in the Park Sep. 27–Nov. 1:** Similar to CAS, with the addition of a DJ, community members brought chairs for social distancing and enjoyed the atmosphere while being reminded of the importance of voting. A free food truck and swag bags were provided to all who attended.

• **Souls 2 the Polls:** This initiative featured three days of action in which staging areas were established to transport voters to in-person absentee early voting on Oct. 24, Oct. 31 as well as on Nov. 3, Election Day. Canvassers were sent out to the community to remind folks that the polls were open and to offer to immediately take them to vote. The Souls 2 the Polls staging sites featured a grill master, beverages and music for the volunteers working the events and community members who dropped in for rides or material. The goal was to make Election Day a celebration of democracy in a similar fashion to July 4. Each event fed over 200 people and over 350 on Nov. 3, including delivering meals for poll workers/watchers.

• **Comfort at the Polls Oct. 24, Oct. 31 and Nov. 3:** We provided comfort care at the polls, such as water, meals and/or chairs. On Oct. 24 and Oct. 31, many were made aware that they could even vote early.

These activities demonstrate the passion and gratefulness for exercising the right to vote, but Pickett and her husband's foundation want to make sure that others are empowered in Marion County to know and exercise their right to vote. This much effort, work, volunteering and sacrifice are not in vain.

Aside from her non-profit work, Pickett continues to host a weekly political talk show on Mondays, "Mondays with Miko," in which she discusses current events and helpful community information. She hosts special guests on the show and has interviewed the Democratic candidates running for U.S. Senate (Jaime Harrison), U.S. House (Melissa Watson) and local candidates as well as key leaders in the community. Past episodes can be viewed online at <https://www.facebook.com/mikocares/videos>.



USING SOCIAL SERVICE AS MINISTRY by Ta'Meeka Epps



Sharon Black

HARTSVILLE—To choose a career in social work is to choose to work in a meaningful, diversified and purpose-driven field. Social work focuses on the person as well as the environment as workers deal with the external factors that impact a person's situation and his or her outlook on life. Social workers create opportunities for assessments and interventions to help clients and communities cope effectively with their reality and then change their reality as necessary. They assist clients with dealing

not only with how they feel about a situation but also with what they have the power to control and change within the situation.

Every March, Social Work Month is observed. This is a time to celebrate the great profession. This year's theme is "Social Workers Are Essential." Social workers are, indeed, essential to a community's well being because they take on many roles within communities or organizations.

They are the clinician, advocate, grant writer, case manager, organizer, facilitator or manager. Their duties may involve helping to advocate or change policies, promote social justice and social change, being involved in grassroots efforts, building relationships within the community, engaging clients to establish resources, providing clinical therapy, writing grants for new or existing programs or overseeing a program, etc.

One of these such heroes is Sharon Black, who serves as a social work manager. She is employed with HopeHealth, a federally-qualified health center in the Pee Dee region that provides integrated health services in Florence, Williamsburg, Clarendon, Orangeburg and Aiken counties. The services include infectious disease treatment and management, preventive and primary care, dental care, chiropractic care, rheumatology,

endocrinology, behavioral health and psychiatry, pain management, substance abuse treatment and women's health services.

Black joined HopeHealth as the social work manager in May 2020 during the global COVID-19 pandemic. In her role, she manages a team of 13 individuals (social workers, LPCs and a case manager) and provides technical support for an additional three other team members (social workers and an LPC). Her responsibilities and duties include, but are not limited to, providing oversight and supervision to behavioral health consultants located across the HopeHealth system and providing behavioral health consultation to children, adolescents, adults and families in order to improve psychosocial functioning and health outcomes.

Black believes service is a ministry. She has made a lifelong commitment and dedication to serving the most vulnerable of those within our communities. She said, "I want to make a difference in the lives of others and promote positive change. I aspire to be an intricate part of systemic change and lessen the burden of those who may be at a disadvantage or disproportionately impacted with basic needs of life. I serve because I have a passion and a love for people. I have a passion and love for social justice and equality. Serving as a social worker provides a broad scope to utilize many skills and connect with individuals/groups, communities and organizations." Those words were spoken by an innovator in the field of social work, one who has firsthand knowledge of how COVID-19 has created additional levels of complexities and avenues for creativeness to meet the current demands those affected by the pandemic face.

Sharon Black resides in Hartsville and is currently pursuing her PhD in leadership from Anderson University. She is an ordained minister who believes the sky is the limit, so be all that you can be. Take time for self and others and moments of reflection, and embrace your faith.



Sharon Black

SOCIAL WORKERS ARE ESSENTIAL: THEN, NOW, AND BEYOND by Jennifer Robinson



Tamika J. Tucker Melette, LMSW

CHARLESTON—The wellbeing of the communities everywhere is the focus of social workers. They are the heroes that often do not get recognition, especially with the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic and social injustice. Social workers are the ones who address the barriers people face by trying to share resources to improve their lives. They are the ones who effect positive change and work with populations that many do not reach or populations that have issues many will not address.

Last year we heard the word "essential" to describe nurses, doctors and other hospital workers because they are the ones who work to save the lives of those suffering with COVID-19 and other illnesses. The word "essential" has been loosely tossed around in the news and on social media, but if we read the definition of this now popular term, it means absolutely necessary or extremely important. From that definition, we find that social workers have a bigger job than we are able to truly

identify.

From March 2020 until the reading of this article, many people have been seeking ways to find a better quality of life. The loss of jobs has affected millions. With those losses, many are seeking food resources, medical assistance and care for vulnerable children and adults. The work, care and services social workers provide is why March has been designated as "Social Work Month."

Social workers deserve appreciation for, and people need to know, what they do. During March, the goal is to raise awareness about the duties of social workers and learn about their contributions to society. Because social work is often misunderstood, people share information that is misleading and could lead others to mistrust the profession. "As a profession, social workers frequently use their collective power to pass laws and establish policies that give more people access to community services and benefits, improving the quality of life for everyone. In fact, social workers are everywhere people need help navigating tough life challenges. They contribute to interdisciplinary care teams in schools, hospitals, mental health centers, nonprofits, corporations, the military—and in local, state and federal government. Many social work professionals also own private consultation practices" (socialworkers.org).

SOCIAL WORKERS CONT'D

Tamika Melette is a social worker in the Charleston area with the Department of Mental Health. She currently works in the crisis unit, and she stated they are very tired. The pandemic and problems as a result of it have produced more people that need to be served, but they are working to ensure people are being assisted. They have also been active in the fight for social justice. "Many are not aware that fight for social justice is in the social worker's code of ethics," she stated.

Melette's fight for underserved and vulnerable populations began when she worked at a middle school as an attendance clerk. She said her curiosity was peaked by the behavior of two students who were disciplined for repeat behaviors. Once Melette heard the stories of their home lives, she realized there is more to what people experience than what is seen. These experiences impacted her and led her to choose social work.

Melette proudly stated, "Social work chose me." She graduated from Coker College with a bachelor's of social work. She later earned her master's in social work from Walden University and is now a licensed

master's level social worker with the state of South Carolina.

When Melette asked some of her social work colleagues what people need to know social work from their perspective, they shared:

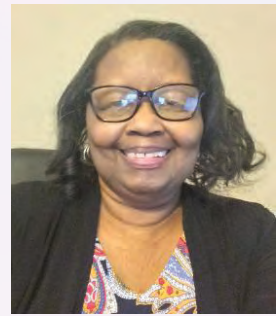
"Social work is a multi-faceted discipline, not to be placed in a box; we are more than just 'taking people's children.'"

"Part of its beauty is that social work is an incredibly diverse and expansive field. We can step into any industry, serve any demographic and make a lasting impact. From child abuse, to substance abuse, to policy change and fighting for social justice, social work supports the total health and well-being of every person involved in an array of systems, with integrity and competence."

"Hands down, social workers are some of the most creative advocates you will ever meet."

Tamika Melette's commitment and the commitment of other social workers deserve not only a month but also daily recognition of their services for the communities. Essential is an effective word for those who sacrifice so much to impact so many. We salute you.

A CHANGE AGENT IN SOCIAL WORK



Sylvia J. Rogers, LMSW

MARION-Social Work Month is a time to recognize not only the profession but the incredible people who dedicate their lives to helping others. The profession is one that promotes social change as well as development and cohesion with a focus on relationships. The practice-based profession promotes the empowerment of the individual as well as the community.

During Social Work Month 2021, we take the time to honor social workers for the important work they do to help individuals, families, groups or society confront, cope with and overcome challenges. Social work includes a broad range of roles, from protecting children with abuse or neglect issues to assisting senior citizens with home health care, housing or transportation issues.

Sylvia J. Rogers was born in Marion, where her compassion to serve others led her to pursue her Bachelor of Social Work degree from Benedict College and a master's of social work from USC. After completion of her BSW, she returned home to begin a career of service with the Marion County Department of Social Services. During her 34-year career there, Rogers worked within the various programs serving the people of Marion. She started her career as a human services specialist and continued her career with the SCDSS in various areas such as economic services as an eligibility case manager with the food stamp program (SNAP benefits and family independence). She served as a foster care case manager, in-home treatment worker and child protective services assessment worker. She became a human services supervisor in 2007 and later the program coordinator in 2013 in which she supervised the entire human service staff, including supervisors. She served in this capacity until her retirement in March of 2017.

In addition to social services, Rogers has worked at mental health and is currently a public health social worker with the State of South Carolina.

by Ta' Meeka Epps

As a social worker, one should possess an understanding of culture and its function within human behavior and society while recognizing the strengths, which exist in all cultures. Rogers understood the impact social diversity and oppression had on her individual clients with respect to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, health disparities and individual beliefs and values. She took her understanding of the disproportionate access or availability some groups of individuals faced to needed services and programs, and she became a change agent to minimize and, in some instances, erase the gap for those she served. "As a social worker, I strived to make a positive difference in the lives of all people on all systemic levels--individual, family, groups and society. Through my work with the National Association of Social Work (NASW), I serve the dedicated social workers across South Carolina."

Rogers serves as president of the NASW-SC Chapter. Her role became effective July 1, 2020 and is a two-year position. As president, she chairs the board and works closely with the executive director and staff to promote development and professional growth of the members. She coordinates training seminars to maintain professional standards, ensures members are abreast of advocacy concerns and social policies and addresses concerns at the chapter level.

Sylvia J. Rogers is affiliated with numerous organizations, which include Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc, Marion County Helping Hands Free Clinic and Bethel AME-Britton's Neck. She will continue to serve, helping those in need and bringing needed resources and services to the citizens of Marion County as long as God is in control.



PROVIDING SOCIAL SUPPORT DURING DIFFICULT TIMES Articles by Adalia Ellis



Susan Stoughton

There is no life transition that can be more fraught with worry than that of the end of life. Depending on an individual's situation and how prepared he or she and the family are, this time can be scary, stressful and include heightened emotions. Susan Stoughton is the social worker supervisor for McLeod Hospice. It is she and her team whose job is to provide support to individuals and families during this difficult time.

The ways in which they support are numerous and vital. "The hospice social worker is the resource person/counselor for all our patients and families," said Stoughton. "In addition to ensuring they have what they need in the way of services and equipment to enable patients to die comfortably at home, we assist with coming to terms with mortality, mending relationships, fulfilling 'bucket list' items, getting affairs in order, etc. We also make arrangements if a patient requires more care than they can receive at home."

Stoughton grew up in a medical family with a father who is a doctor and a mother who is a nurse. In high school her father gave her a book on health careers and told her to pick one. The chapter that stood out for her was the one on medical social work, and that is what she chose.

When a patient is transitioning from life to death, patience,

empathy and social intelligence are all qualities that Stoughton says an excellent social worker needs. "A social worker must have counseling skills but also the confidence to challenge the status quo and advocate for the patient/client," she said.

During these unprecedented times with COVID-19 changing the way so much is done, the only way services provided by social workers who are in hospice support has changed is that they no longer visit facilities. Instead, they Facetime or call, but that doesn't work well with dementia patients. They still visit patients who are in their homes. When visiting patients, they wear PPE and stand six feet away from the patient when possible.

Stoughton wishes the public understood how vital the social work role is. Sometimes when she is in a new home and is mistaken for a nurse, the person is corrected with, "Oh, this is only the social worker. It's understandable to discount the social worker's role when the focus is on symptom management, but when the focus becomes doing the real work of hospice, that's where the social worker takes the lead."

There are a myriad of ways social workers help society. It is all too easy to take for granted the support and services that social workers provide during vulnerable and difficult times in people's lives. "People tend to associate us with DSS and taking away people's kids. Health care workers, teachers, first responders all deserve the public adoration they've received, but social workers are out there too. The families I see show their appreciation for our work frequently. The public just needs to be educated about what we do."

FILLING IN THE GAP IN SUPPORT SERVICES



Cindy Halcombe

In our community there are so many "quiet" professions with people who do important work that helps with the functioning of the communities in which we live--work we don't see until we need it. Social work is one such profession, and Cindy Halcombe, LMSW, AD, is a social worker providing a critical need as an access health coordinator. In her role, she helps connect patients to local family doctors and makes sure that patients' care and

medications are properly managed.

Halcombe has always wanted to help people and feels like social work is a calling for her. "We are reaching out to people who are in the most vulnerable points in their lives, and we need to be able to want to help them to achieve a better outcome."

When asked what qualities a social worker must possess, Halcombe identified compassion, tenacity and love of people. "These qualities shine in social workers. They have to listen to what the person is really saying. Sometimes, they feel like no one else is listening," she said.

The list of services that social workers provide is long, and there is no question that the support they offer is essential. They fill in the gaps that people in vulnerable situations can fall through. Social workers, "can access resources and distribute them to people in all

different stages of life. Social workers assist in navigating health care systems, judicial systems, social services, educational systems and housing services, just to name a few."

During the pandemic, social workers have had to adjust to changes in all of these systems. While other systems are able to work from home, social workers, for the most part, continue to interact with people face to face. Because of the nature of the services that are provided, this aspect of their work, the in-person support, is vital. Social workers become the physical point of contact during a time when it is easy to feel disconnected, which can exacerbate vulnerable situations. "Our patients are getting medical care over the phone and having medications delivered. They do applications for financial assistance over the phone and through the mail. At times, they just want to see a face even if it's masked."

Social workers have had to take certain precautions during the pandemic, such as temporarily suspending home visits early on, and they do not visit people who are COVID positive. For those they can visit in their homes and hospital rooms and go to doctor's visits with, the workers wear masks, wash their hands and practice social distancing. If a social worker becomes sick, he or she does not visit patients.

Even while sick with COVID-19, patients are not left alone without support. For patients they are not able to visit, social workers have mailed forms and have done more phone calling. In addition to the precautions they take, Halcombe's team encourages patients "to wear their masks, wash their hands and to practice social distancing."

FILLING IN THE GAP CONT'D

As with many helping professions, the need is great, but the resources are few. "There are limits to what we can provide, and that is a frustration for some people. I am thankful we are able to provide the services we have access to. If it were up to me, and I had an unlimited budget, I would provide our services to all patients, and we would have lots of social workers to assist," said Halcombe.

The public could help by being more supportive of social workers. In South Carolina, most social workers hold a bachelor's or a master's and are paid, on average, \$38,380, so understanding that they carry a

heavy load with very little pay is important. Halcombe also stated, "People think all social workers work in child protective services when they work in a variety of fields. Social workers are needed in schools, mental health counseling, prisons, all health care settings, policy writing, substance abuse treatment and nursing homes."

Most social workers get into the field for the same reason as Halcombe: to help people. "In this time of crisis, we all need to work harder to be kind to each other. My personal opinion is social workers need a little extra kindness."

*The good we secure
for ourselves is
precarious and
uncertain until it is
secured for all of us
and incorporated
into our common life.*

Jane Addams

*The strongest
principle of growth
lies in human choice.*

George Eliot



**Social Work
Profession of Choice**

ABB ENHANCES PRESENCE IN SOUTH CAROLINA Articles submitted by Susan Grant, VP Marketing Director



Anderson Brothers Bank recently opened its third location in Florence, signifying its continued growth in the area. The newest location is at 2001 Hoffmeyer Road. The branch has a friendly, open feel with local friendly faces to greet its customers.

Anderson Brothers Bank currently has 25 branches in the Pee Dee and Coastal regions with this addition to the Florence area. "It is with great anticipation and excitement that we announce the opening of newest Anderson Brothers Bank location in Florence," said Randy Altman, area executive for Anderson Brothers Bank. "This new branch will be beneficial to our customers by providing a convenient location, and it represents an additional and significant step toward our future growth in the Florence market."

ROGERS JOINS ABB AS BRAND AMBASSADOR



Michele Rogers

MULLINS- Anderson Brothers Bank is pleased to announce Michele Rogers as brand ambassador. In her role, she will assist in broadening our brand by educating the public of the bank's products and services in a friendly and professional demeanor. She will work directly with branches and back office departments to communicate with our communities to drive brand awareness and generate new sale opportunities.

Rogers brings over 20 years of experience to Anderson Brothers Bank, including her most recent service with The Greater Mullins Chamber of Commerce as its executive director. She is president of Marion Mullins Rotary Club and a member of the Mullins Lion's Club and Greater Mullins Chamber Foundation. Rogers is a graduate of Francis Marion University and resides in Marion with her husband, Charlton, and son, Coleman

Kimbrell.

"We are very excited to welcome Michele to Anderson Brothers Bank and to our marketing team," said Susan Grant, vice president marketing director. "Her passion for building and growing relationships, high level of professionalism and natural leadership skills make her the perfect fit for our marketing team."

About Anderson Brothers Bank

Anderson Brothers Bank is a full service community bank offering a complete range of competitive loan services and deposit products. Founded in 1933, this family-owned bank blends the elements of traditional personal service, local market awareness and advanced technology to meet the financial needs of its customers.

Anderson Brothers Bank offers 24 branches conveniently located in 17 communities throughout the Pee Dee, Coastal and Low Country regions of South Carolina. The bank's main office is located at 101 North Main Street, P.O. Box 310 in Mullins, S.C. For additional information about Anderson Brothers Bank, call 843-464-6271, or visit ABBank.com

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ANDERSON
BROTHERS BANK

NEW YORK LIFE BUSINESS SOLUTIONS: PROTECTING YOUR BUSINESS AND EMPLOYEES



If you have employees, you know firsthand that the loss of a key employee can have a profound impact on business operations. When an employee leaves, customers who dealt directly with that person may worry about receiving their goods or services in a timely manner, suppliers may be concerned about getting paid for their deliveries and staff morale can also take a dip as remaining employees worry about assuming a heavier workload.

That's why it's important to make sure that your business is prepared to deal with the unexpected departure of a key employee, which usually happens for one of three reasons: the employee chooses to resign, the employee becomes disabled or he or she passes away.

While life insurance cannot protect against employees choosing to leave, it is often used as a tool to help incentivize them to stay. Deferred compensation plans are powerful vehicles for doing just this. Deferred compensation arrangements allow you to provide

retirement income to select employees. The way it works is that you and the selected employee enter a contract that specifies the compensation you will pay out to him or her in the future. Since you may not set up a specific reserve fund in which a participant has a vested right, a life insurance policy is uniquely suited to informally finance a deferred compensation plan. The future of your business depends on attracting and retaining the right talent with the right tools.

It's also important to protect your business against the economic losses it may face as the result of a top employee's death with the use of key person insurance. The way it works is that the business applies for and becomes the owner and beneficiary of a life insurance policy covering the key employee. If the insured employee dies, the business receives the policy proceeds.

Deferred compensation and key employee insurance are benefits that are related exclusively to your top employees, but New York Life also has options that you can offer your entire team to help cultivate a rewarding work environment, such as life and disability insurance. These benefits can provide employees and their families peace of mind and added financial security, which can go a long way toward attracting and retaining valuable employees.

As a business owner, you've worked hard to get where you are today. Having a contingency in place will allow you to focus on making the best possible decisions for the future your business.

This educational third-party article is provided as a courtesy by Julie A. Cord, agent, New York Life Insurance Company. To learn more about the information or topics discussed, please contact Julie A. Cord at 317-289-3010 or jacord@ft.newyorklife.com.

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5 NOT-SO-SECRET WAYS TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MONEY

New Year's resolutions are top of mind. For many, this means thinking about how to be smart with your money. Whether you're shopping for loved ones, looking to start a new hobby or treating yourself to something special, a little purchase planning goes a long way.

If you're using a credit card, did you know there could be added perks right at your fingertips that could help you unlock even more value from your purchases? Here are some quick tips to help you take advantage of all the benefits and tools from your credit cards, so you're not leaving anything on the table.

1. Take advantage of rewards

Some card issuers offer higher rewards on certain categories, such as groceries or drugstore purchases. Pay attention to the bonus categories offered with your card to make the most of your spending.

You can also try shopping through your card issuer's rewards portal on the mobile app or website, and you might even have access to extra points with certain retailers.

2. Use points to pay for purchases

Your credit card points can be just as valuable as the money in your pocket. Check your credit card rewards portal for all the redemption options that might be at your fingertips. Some, like Chase Ultimate

Rewards, give you the option to redeem for gift cards, electronics and even statement credits toward charitable contributions.

3. Activate offers to unlock more value

You've probably heard of cash back and credit card points and miles, but did you know some cards have even more perks simply by having them in your wallet? Select your card, and see the discounts and special offers available for you. You can activate or enroll and instantly start taking advantage of where you might already be using your card. Right now, eligible cardmembers can earn more rewards with Lyft, enjoy free two-day shipping with ShopRunner and more.

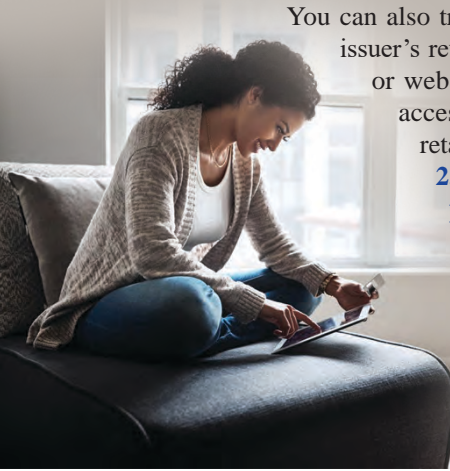
4. Plan your spending

Spend your money wisely by planning how you'll pay for your purchases in advance. Credit card members have the option to pay off purchases over a period of time that works for them with no interest, just a fixed monthly fee. And as an added bonus, you still earn rewards on the purchase. Before you purchase, you can even use the Plan Calculator to approximate what your payment plan will look like.

5. Track spending using your mobile banking app or online credit card portal

Knowing your expenses is one of the first steps to managing your money, and your mobile banking app or online credit card portal can be one of your best tools to do so. Instead of keeping physical receipts of all your purchases, log into your account to track how you're spending money. Some apps will also give you a spending summary, so you can look at your annual spending through a customized view.

Whether you're applying for a new credit card or looking to make the most of the one you have, be sure to tap into all the rewards and benefits available to you.



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PHYSICIANS HONORED WITH MCLEOD PILLARS OF PROFESSIONALISM

Articles submitted by McLeod Health



Pictured are the recipients of the 2020 Pillars of Professionalism. From left to right: Dr. Vipul Shah, Dr. Adnan Alsaka, Dr. Davinderbir Pannu, Dr. L.R. Perry and Dr. Michelle Huxford.

On Dec. 7, five McLeod physicians were honored with the Pillars of Professionalism Awards. This annual event recognizes those physicians who reflect the highest values in professional excellence.

Dr. Jeremy Robertson, chief medical officer for McLeod Regional Medical Center, opened the program and served as host. “Tonight, we celebrate our seventh year of Pillars of Professional Awards, recognizing those characteristics that our medical staff have identified as best of the best,” said Robertson. “2020 has been a challenging year, but those challenges have revealed the importance of all the hands that touch our patients.”

Rob Colones, president of McLeod Health, offered an invocation and was followed by Dr. Vinod Jona, chief of staff for McLeod Regional Medical Center. Jona spoke about the commitment of the medical staff during the pandemic and thanked administration and all McLeod team members for their dedication and service.

Dr. Adnan Alsaka received the Educator-Mentor Award. This pillar reflects a teacher whose goal is helping others succeed. Dr. William Hester of the McLeod Family Medicine Center presented this award to Alsaka in recognition of his mentoring medical students and resident physicians in the treatment of patients with nephrology concerns.

The Enthusiastic-Joy of Medicine Award was presented to Dr. Michelle Huxford by Dr. Thomas Lewis, medical director of Emergency Services for McLeod Regional Medical Center. This honor is presented to a leader who infects others with excitement and energy about providing health care. Huxford serves patients as an emergency medicine physician at McLeod Regional Medical Center.

Dr. Vipul Shah was recognized with the Ethical-Do the Right Thing Award by Dr. Sreenivas Rao, oncologist with the McLeod Cancer Center. The Ethical Pillar represents a trusted and respected steward who balances the needs of the patient with resources to treat their illness. Shah serves as medical director of McLeod Hospice and Palliative Care and the McLeod Hospice House.

The Efficient-Value in Medicine Award was presented to Dr. L. R. Perry. This recipient displays the attributes of being an agile decision maker who can create simplicity out of complexity. Dr. Gerald Hamrick presented this distinction to Perry, his colleague in anesthesiology at McLeod Health. Perry serves patients as part of American Anesthesiology.

Dr. Davinderbir Pannu received the Efficacious-Outstanding Outcomes Award from Dr. Rajesh Bajaj, oncologist with McLeod Cancer Center. This pillar reflects a knowledgeable and skilled surveyor of risk management and advocate of coordinated care. Pannu cares for patients as an advanced endoscopist and gastroenterologist with the McLeod Digestive Health Center.

Will McLeod, administrator for McLeod Regional Medical Center closed with thanks to all medical staff and a toast in honor of those who personify the mission and values of McLeod Health. “Today we honor the best in class, our collective vision to inspire, heal and comfort,” said McLeod. “To the awards recipients, past, present or future, we honor you for your model in both character and leadership. It is with heartfelt gratitude we extend our thanks and respect to all caregivers facing daily challenges with grace and compassion.”

MCLEOD RESEARCH NURSE RECEIVES PATIENT ADVOCACY AWARD



Michelle Gandy, RN, receives the inaugural Patient Advocacy Award from the SWOG Cancer Research Network.

Michelle Gandy, RN, a research nurse with the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research, received the inaugural Patient Advocacy Award from the SWOG Cancer Research Network during its Virtual Fall Group Meeting.

SWOG and The Hope Foundation launched the Special Recognition Awards in 2020 to honor members who show commitment and passion beyond the normal call of duty.

Gandy has served as a McLeod research coordinator since June 2019. Pam Worthy, assistant director of McLeod Infusion Services, Cancer Research and the Cancer Clinic, said,

“Michelle has formed close relationships with our research patients and become the major resource to help them navigate through the complex health care system. Her goal is to ensure that patients get required appointments/procedures scheduled regardless of the protocol they are placed on. The patients look to Michelle for support and encouragement in their research participation. She also initiated a program for our research patients that involves the presentation of a lapel pin in the shape of a

ribbon that represents all of the colors of the different types of cancer. Additionally, Michelle designed a car magnet to give the patients to display which reminds the local community about research,” added Worthy.

On receiving this recognition, Gandy said, “I’m humbled beyond words. I must say I’m very proud of this award, but I wouldn’t have been selected if not for the awesome team I work with. I’m fortunate to be surrounded and supported by people that share the same passion for putting our patients first and making sure they know how important they are to us and cancer research.”

Gandy has been with McLeod since 1989. She has worked as a nurse in cardiology, emergency services and hospice. “I’ve had the gift of many different avenues that being a nurse can bring, and God has blessed me beyond measure. When I decided to make nursing my ministry, God did amazing things and continues to do so, which is how I ended up in the Cancer Research department. This gem of a program at McLeod is doing amazing things for our cancer patients and our community. I’m proud and blessed to be a part of it,” added Gandy.

More than 1,100 attendees participated in the SWOG Virtual Group Meeting, which featured 42 educational sessions and the presentation of five special recognition awards.



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TELEHEALTH GETS POPULAR DURING PANDEMIC Submitted by MUSC Health Charleston



Byron Gipson

CHARLESTON—Columbia lawyer Byron Gipson gave telehealth a try for the first time because of the coronavirus pandemic. He needed hernia surgery. The surgeon he chose works almost two hours away at MUSC Health in Charleston.

Gipson would need to be in Charleston for the actual procedure, of course. But because of the pandemic, his prep meetings with his surgeon became virtual visits instead of in-person consultations.

Gipson used his iPad to meet with Heather Evans, M.D., via video.

“There’s a little trepidation that you feel, that you’d like to see her face to face here or there, but she was reassuring,” Gipson said. “After meeting with her the first time, it was clear that she is obviously at the top of the profession. She knows what she’s doing. She’s just got a really good bedside manner—well, video-side manner,” he joked. “She’d be great on Netflix.”

Telehealth was new to Evans too. “I learned, along with everybody else in the midst of the crisis, trying to find a way to care for patients. My experience this summer was I switched to entirely video-based clinics for probably two or three months. During that time, I figured it out as we went along. I really think this opens us up to a whole new way of taking care of patients.”

MUSC, which has its own Center for Telehealth, serves as the South Carolina Telehealth Alliance’s headquarters.



Gregory Perron, M.D.

Doctors across the state and across a range of specialties are adjusting. Gregory Perron, M.D., a family care doctor at MUSC Health, had never used telehealth before the pandemic. “We can really provide very good care via telehealth,” he said. “I have some people who drive from Myrtle Beach and Florence where taking a half day off or a whole day off to drive to my office to have a brief office visit—if a physical exam isn’t needed—is not a good use of the patient’s time. I think there will definitely be a role for continuing telehealth visits after the pandemic.”

When Perron needs to see patients in person, he arranges that at the end of the video visit. “For example, if a patient brings up a rash, back pain or joint pain, I may arrange for an in-person exam.”

Gipson, the lawyer who needed hernia surgery, liked that it allowed him to see Evans without leaving Columbia. Evans said telehealth made sense for her too. “I reviewed his CT scan, which he got in Columbia, before our video visit. I was able to share my screen and go over it and explain how I was making decisions about planning his operation. We talked about the risks and benefits. He wanted to move forward even though we’d never met in person.”

The surgery was a success. And so was Gipson’s experience with telehealth.

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MCLEOD DESIGNATED A CARE CONTINUUM CENTER OF EXCELLENCE Submitted by McLeod Health



*Providing Excellence in
Patient-Centered Care*

McLeod Health has received designation as a Care Continuum Center of Excellence by the GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer. The designation recognizes a commitment to improving outcomes for those diagnosed with lung cancer by providing patient-focused and coordinated multidisciplinary care. The GO2 Foundation formed the Care Continuum Centers of Excellence program to enable patients access to

standard of care lung cancer screening, early detection, diagnosis, treatment and survivorship in their local community.

“The McLeod Lung Cancer Screening Program is an extremely high quality, evidence-based program,” explained Dr. Vinod Jona, co-chair of the McLeod Healthy Lungs Initiative and chief of staff for McLeod Regional Medical Center. “Being recognized as the Care Continuum Center of Excellence for Lung Cancer is a testament to McLeod’s commitment to improving outcomes for their patients, and it truly reiterates the hard work and dedication of the McLeod Health team. This recognition and the program will go a long way to benefit our community in diagnosing and treating lung cancer at an early state.”

“McLeod Health is dedicated to providing patients with the highest quality care. Partnering with GO2 Foundation enables us to deliver even more resources to support lung cancer patients and their families. We are proud of our team and the impact we are having on

our local community,” added Juleidy Turnipseed, PA, McLeod Cardiothoracic Surgical Associates.

“We are honored to be working with McLeod Health as a GO2 Foundation Care Continuum Center of Excellence. Their commitment will help save lives and improve long-term survivorship by giving patients access to high-quality, multidisciplinary care closer to home. They are the example to follow,” says Laurie Fenton Ambrose, co-founder, president and CEO of GO2 Foundation.

The Care Continuum Centers of Excellence (CCCOE) program recognizes community hospitals that meet rigorous qualifying criteria that demonstrate collaborative leadership across the lung cancer care continuum. Meeting the CCCOE criteria puts member hospitals on par with leading academic and research institutions and provides patients with access to the latest innovations not typically found in community hospitals. The CCCOE approach results in patients receiving compassionate and timely care as well as treatment options that improve survivorship.

Founded by patients and survivors, the GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer transforms survivorship as the world’s leading organization dedicated to saving, extending and improving the lives of those vulnerable, at risk and diagnosed with lung cancer. The foundation works to change the reality of living with lung cancer by ending stigma, increasing public and private research funding and ensuring access to care.

McLeod Health

The Choice for Medical Excellence

NEW RADIATION OPTION FOR PROSTATE CANCER Submitted by McLeod Health



Larry D. Grubb, MD,
McLeod Radiation Oncologist

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in men in the nation and the third leading cause of cancer deaths in men. Fortunately, prostate cancer mortality rates have been decreasing since the mid-1990s in both African American and Caucasian men. This decrease is often attributed to our improved ability to detect and treat the disease in its early stages.

Treatment for prostate cancer often involves surgery or radiation therapy. As radiation oncologists, we treat prostate cancer using intensity modulated radiotherapy (IMRT), a special form of external-beam radiation therapy. With IMRT, we precisely deliver the dose of radiation directly to the prostate, minimizing harm to the surrounding organs. In addition, IMRT has been shown to be beneficial in reducing long-term side effects of prostate cancer.

Advancements in technology, treatment planning and imaging have also led to new innovations in radiation treatment such as hypofractionated radiation therapy for localized prostate cancer, which we now offer at the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research.

This treatment delivers the radiation dose in larger, more powerful portions (fractions) over fewer treatment visits. It also offers the same survival and risks as traditional radiation, yet the treatment is considerably shorter, and the patient's quality of life is not compromised.

Conventional treatment for prostate cancer with radiation involves 40 to 44 days of treatment or 25 days of treatment and a radioactive seed implant performed in an operating room. With hypofractionated treatment,

we can offer treatment in 20 to 28 days.

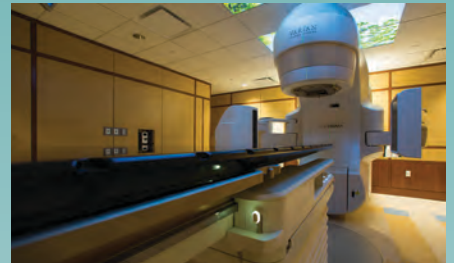
At McLeod, we utilize three TrueBeam linear accelerators to deliver this form of treatment. The advantages include the degree of precision offered; the submillimeter accuracy, which minimizes harm to healthy tissue and adjacent critical structures; and a platform that moves in six dimensions to position the patient in the best possible way for treatment. Not only do these linear accelerators allow for improved images of the tumors, but they also offer faster treatment times.

Featuring advanced imaging capabilities such as cone-beam CT, an image-guided radiotherapy (IGRT) tool for the verification of patient position, these linear accelerators also allow the team to conform the radiation dose to the tumor target, verify the location and shape of the tumor and make adjustments during treatment. Additionally, precise patient set-up and tumor targeting are accomplished through IGRT.

There is no one treatment option that is better for all men. The most appropriate treatment for prostate cancer should be based on the man's age, life expectancy, other medical problems, as well as the stage and aggressive nature of the cancer.

If you are diagnosed with prostate cancer, have a thorough discussion with your physician on the treatment options available to determine which one is best suited for you.

Dr. Larry D. Grubb has been caring for patients at the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research since 1992.



McLeod utilizes three TrueBeam linear accelerators to deliver hypofractionated prostate cancer treatment.

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SHATTERING THE MYTHS ABOUT DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

Submitted by Brandi Shepherd, Prevention Specialist at Rubicon Family Counseling Services



HARTSVILLE-Founded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse in 2010, The National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week (Jan. 22–Jan. 27) is a time to educate teens and adults on what science has taught us about drug addiction. Over the years it has transformed into an initiative that debunks popular myths surrounding alcohol and drug use. For this year's National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week, Rubicon would like to discuss some common misconceptions that we have seen in our 40+ years as a substance abuse prevention and treatment facility.

Myth 1: Drinking is not dangerous. I can drink and still be in control.

Alcohol is a central nervous depressant, meaning that it slows down vital functions. This results in impaired judgment, slurred speech, and poor coordination. While this may not seem like a big deal, alcohol use is the 3rd most common cause of death in the United States. Alcohol is the most commonly abused substance and is involved in over 50 percent of all suicides, violent crimes and traffic accidents. Eighty percent of domestic violence reports involve alcohol, and 60 percent of poor work performance can be tied back to its use. Long-term exposure to alcohol can even shrink the frontal lobes of your brain, permanently impairing your judgment and your ability to make decisions.

Myth 2: It's okay to let my teenager drink if he or she is not driving.

More than two-thirds of all underage drinking related deaths do not occur behind the wheel. Taking away your child's car keys when they drink may help to prevent them from getting into a wreck, but it will not eliminate their risk for suicide, poisoning, dating violence or homicide. Underage alcohol use also puts teenagers at a greater risk for sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, sexual assault, rape, memory loss, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. They are also up to seven times more likely to develop a substance use disorder.

Myth 3: Marijuana is not addictive.

Past research indicated that one out of every 11 people who used marijuana

developed an addiction. Due to the rise in THC concentrations, current data suggests that about one third of all marijuana users may have some degree of addiction. Marijuana addiction is caused by THC mimicking and blocking the body's neurotransmitter Anandamide. Over time and with continued use of marijuana, the user's body is unable to produce Anandamide on its own. This reprograms the user's brain into thinking that it needs marijuana to feel normal. It is at this stage of addiction that it becomes difficult for a person to stop using marijuana, even if he or she wants to quit. Other strong indicators of marijuana addiction include legal complications, falling behind in school, having problems at work and having an impaired ability to learn and remember things.

Myth 4: My kids should already know not to use alcohol or other drugs. I shouldn't have to talk to them about it.

Research shows that adolescents with parents who have favorable or permissive attitudes towards substance use are at a greater risk of using drugs and alcohol at an early age and developing a substance use disorder. This is because when parents don't talk to their kids about the risks of underage drinking and substance use, their kids are more likely to seek answers elsewhere—even from unreliable sources. This may cause them to not see the harm in trying alcohol or other



drugs. Talking to your kids is the best way to set clear guidelines about drug use.

Myth 5: If my friends and family members use it, then I can too.

Even though sharing medication is usually done with the best intentions, it can have unforeseen consequences. This is because no drug or medication is completely risk free. Taking medication that has not been prescribed to you by a physician increases your risk of having an allergic reaction, overdosing, experiencing negative side effects and worsening any preexisting medical conditions you may have.

Myth 6: Drinking alcohol makes me more outgoing.

As previously explained, alcohol is a depressant that impairs a person's judgment



SHATTERING THE MYTHS CONT'D

and ability to make rational decisions. While some people claim that in small quantities alcohol helps them to relax and become more social, this has been proven to be caused by a placebo effect. In other words, people who drink alcohol feel more outgoing because they expect to. In addition, alcohol use can make people more likely to withdraw from others or to feel more aggressive or depressed.

Myth 7: I drive better when I'm high or drunk.

Marijuana, alcohol and prescription pain relievers all have been shown to slow down the user's reflexes and reduce his or her concentration and coordination. Even in small quantities these drugs change the way the user perceives threats and performs tasks. This is why drug use increases the likelihood of a car crash by up to 300 percent.

Myth 8: Only bad people become addicts.

Addiction is not a character flaw or an indicator of a behavioral problem. It is a disease that creates a physiological need by rewiring the user's brain into thinking that it needs alcohol or other drugs above all else to feel normal. Anyone can develop a substance use disorder, and it takes great courage and strength to seek treatment for it.

If you or a loved one is suffering from a substance use disorder, you don't have to face this condition alone. Rubicon Family Counseling Services is here to answer any questions you may have and to provide you with treatment. Please give us a call at 843-332-4156, or visit us at 510 East Carolina Avenue in Hartsville, S.C.

From all of us at Rubicon, we wish you a happy and healthy start to the new year.



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DON'T TAKE A CHANCE. GET A FLU SHOT!

Submitted by Temujin Chavez, MD, MUSC Health - Infectious Diseases/Travel Medicine



Temujin Chavez, MD

By the second week of October, South Carolina was experiencing sporadic influenza (flu) activity. It's impossible to predict how active this 2020–2021 influenza season will be. A sure way to minimize the spread is to continue following facemask ordinances and social distancing guidelines and limiting large group gatherings. This will ensure people with influenza and influenza-like illnesses won't add to the strain on hospitals caring for COVID-19 patients.

This can be a confusing time if you're not feeling well. It could be the common cold, COVID-19 or the flu. If you have a fever, cough, shortness of breath or feel like you have the flu, you can contact your primary care physician. You may also use MUSC care virtual health service to be evaluated. MUSC.care virtual health or your doctor/nurse practitioner can use testing services to determine the cause of your problem and, more importantly, the best course of treatment. At this time there is not a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved COVID-19 vaccine. So getting an influenza vaccine is the best way to help lower your risk for having a flu-like illness.

The 2017-2018 influenza season saw 18 consecutive weeks for influenza-like illness and was at or above the state epidemic baseline. That season resulted in a total of 4,489 hospitalizations and 289 deaths statewide. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend everyone six months and older get a flu vaccine, either as a flu shot or nasal spray. There are many varieties of influenza vaccines. This includes

egg-free vaccines as well as higher doses intended for people 65 years and older. There are several places you can get your flu vaccine, either from your workplace, physician or a pharmacy, for example.

The most important thing is to not delay getting an influenza vaccine. Vaccines are especially important if you care for an infant under six months of age or are in regular contact with other people at high risk should they get the flu. Some high-risk people include those who are pregnant, have a heart or lung condition, have diabetes or are 65 years and older. You should also not be worried about a shortage of the influenza vaccine since production was increased to a record level of 200 million doses. Finally, when you, your child or grandchild receive the flu vaccine, please ask your physician or nurse if there are any other vaccinations that you might need.

Dr. Temujin Chavez is board certified in infectious disease and internal medicine physician at MUSC Health Florence Medical Center. He is accepting new patients. For more information, please call 843-674-6400, or visit [MUSChealth.org/florence](https://www.muschealth.org/florence).



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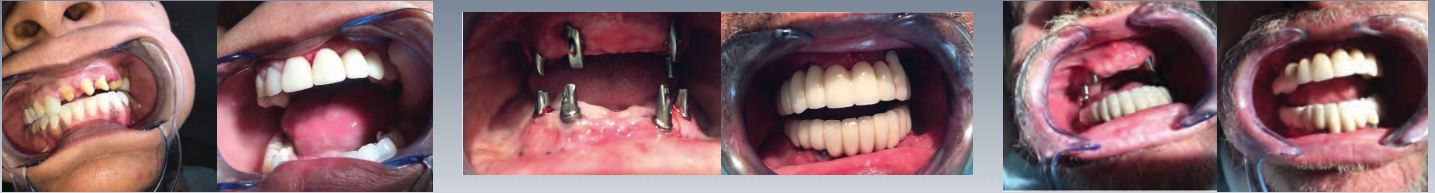
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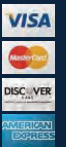
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GOOD NUTRITION AND DENTAL WELLNESS GO HAND-IN-HAND

It's long been known that proper nutrition contributes to good oral health. But it works the other way around too. A full set of healthy teeth enables a person to consume healthy foods that comprise a good diet.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are key components in a healthy diet - for overall well-being and for good dental health - along with whole-grain breads and cereals, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, and fish. Foods containing protein, such as peanuts and beans to name a couple, can be added to the daily mix for variety.

Good oral hygiene is a must as well. Brushing thoroughly twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste, flossing daily, drinking plenty of water, and regular dental checkups are vital to maintaining good dental health.

If gum disease and tooth decay are permitted to gain a foothold,

tooth loss may be the result. Individuals who experience tooth loss may find chewing certain foods difficult, therefore they eliminate them from their diets. Quality of nutritional intake and enjoyment of meals may be greatly diminished with tooth loss as well, which will impact oral health and overall health.

To enjoy better oral health throughout your life, it's important to heed the connection between nutrition and dental care. Talk to us about ways to enhance your relationship for an overall healthier you.



Regular visits can equal healthy teeth

Some people are under the mistaken belief that only children need regular dental visits. They figure once all the adult teeth have come in, there's no reason to visit the dentist regularly.

However, reasons to visit the dentist throughout one's lifetime include preventing dental-health issues and detecting potential problems early, when they are easier and less expensive to treat.

Regular dental visits are part of a good plan for overall health. A healthy set of teeth can help a patient enjoy better nutrition throughout his or her life to contribute to enhanced health.

How often you should visit your dentist should be based on your unique needs and your dentist's recommendations for you.

Thank you for all your referrals. We appreciate them!

We are a federally qualified health center.



HopeHealth's primary care providers meet the needs of individuals across rural and urban areas of Florence, Williamsburg, and Clarendon Counties.

Because You Deserve to Get Back to Being You Again.

As a nonprofit, federally qualified health center, HopeHealth is committed to excellent health care and service that exemplifies our love for people and passion for their well-being.

Our health care providers offer access to both primary and specialty health care services and integrate a range of health resources to provide the very best in patient care,

prevention, and support services.

HopeHealth educates patients on the importance of having a health care home. As a primary care facility, HopeHealth's medical team works to prevent and detect illness and the early onset of disease, provide routine physical examinations, and promote overall healthy lifestyles.

Florence • Timmonsville • Lake City • Kingstree • Greeleyville • Manning

Our Services

After Hours/Access Hope
Behavioral Health Services
Chiropractic Care
Chronic Disease Management
Dental Health
Diabetes & Nutrition
Endocrinology
Family Medicine
Hepatitis Services
HIV/AIDS Services
Infectious Diseases
Internal Medicine

Lab Services
Latino Health Services
Pain Management
Pediatric & Adolescent Care
Pharmacy
Primary Care
Radiology
Rheumatology
School-based Services
Senior Health
Substance Use Treatment
Women's Health Services

Your Health Begins Here

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HOPEHEALTH NEW PROVIDERS

Submitted by Donna Tracy, Communications Coordinator, HopeHealth

HopeHealth welcomed several new providers this quarter, including:

Courtney Atkins is a physician assistant at HopeHealth Pediatrics in Manning. From Forest City, N.C., Atkins is a member of the South Carolina Academy of Physician Assistants.

Kelsi Camak is a behavioral health consultant serving patients at Francis Marion University. From Florence, Camak is an adjunct professor of psychology at Francis Marion University and a member of the PSI CHI International Honors Society in Psychology, and she helped start the first Friday Homeless Connect event in Florence.

Atalee Jones is a physician assistant serving patients at the HopeHealth Medical Plaza. She is a member of the South Carolina Academy of Physician Assistants and is involved in volunteer organizations.

Megan Millhouse is a nurse practitioner serving patients at HopeHealth in Orangeburg. She is a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing.

Brandi Potter-Hare is a family nurse practitioner at the HopeHealth Medical Plaza in Florence. She is a member of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and has special interest in family medicine and women's health.

HopeHealth welcomed back **Tammie Pough** as a behavioral health counselor at the Medical Plaza. Pough has a certificate in Primary Care Behavioral and is also a certified Community Health Care Worker.

Chatonia Smalls is a behavioral health consultant in the Pain Management program at HopeHealth on Palmetto Street. Smalls is certified by the Association for Social Work Boards and a member of the Council of Nephrology Social Workers.

Merritt Tolan, MD, serves pain management patients at HopeHealth on Palmetto Street. From Easley, S.C., Tolan has more than 20 years of experience in patient care.

Dr. Steven Tollison is an OB/GYN serving HopeHealth patients in Kingstree and Manning. He is a recipient of the gold star award for patient satisfaction.

Nicole Troutman is a behavioral health consultant serving patients at HopeHealth in Aiken. From Batesburg, S.C., Troutman is a member of the National Association of Social Work.

Sharon Walters, DNP, is a nurse practitioner serving patients of HopeHealth at Francis Marion University. From Florence, Walters is on the HIV task force committee with DHEC.

HopeHealth is a nonprofit leader in providing affordable, expert health care and infectious diseases services for all ages in Aiken, Florence, Clarendon, Orangeburg and Williamsburg counties. Our federally-qualified health centers are the primary care providers of choice for more than 50,000 patients. To become a patient, call 843-667-9414, or visit hope-health.org.



Courtney Atkins, PA



Kelsi Harper Camak, MS, LPC



Atalee Jones, PA



Megan Millhouse, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC



Brandi Potter-Hare, FNP



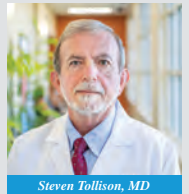
Tammie Pough, LMSW



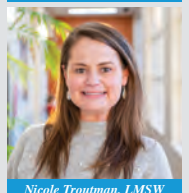
Chatonia Smalls, LISW-CP



Merritt Tolan, MD



Steven Tollison, MD



Nicole Troutman, LMSW

CSC CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE PEE DEE Submitted by Andrew Boardwine



Tammie Robinson, CSC Community Pharmacy Pharmacist in Hartsville.

HARTSVILLE—For more than 40 years, CareSouth Carolina (CSC) has stood by its community, serving as a medical home—a place where people can experience healing, caring relationships—regardless of their personal circumstance, and the best is yet to come.

CareSouth Carolina is celebrating its 40th year anniversary, and though the organization has grown immensely over the last four decades, the mission remains the same: to improve the health and well being of everyone.

CareSouth Carolina started with humble beginnings in 1980 when Society Hill Family Health Clinic opened its doors with five employees and provided services to 24 patients. In November of that same year, Ann Lewis—the current CEO for CareSouth Carolina—stepped in as the director for the organization.

“It is extremely hard for me to believe that we are celebrating the 40-year anniversary of CareSouth Carolina. And since I have been here for that 40 years, it becomes even more difficult to believe,” Lewis said. “From a small, four-person staff to our current staff of more than 550, we don’t even seem like the same organization. Being able to work with an organization like CareSouth as it has grown



CareSouth Carolinas MOBY technicians provide COVID-19 testing at remote locations across the Pee Dee.

and as its impact on so many patients and communities has been undeniable...all of this has been so humbling and even overwhelming.”

“Although there is still so much to do, we can truly say that we are ‘improving the health and wellbeing for everyone,’” Lewis said.

In 1985, Bishopville, Clio and McColl sites that were part of the Lee Medical Practice joined the Society Hill Family Health Clinic. In 1986, Society Hill family Health Clinic began doing business as Pee Dee Community Health Services before eventually ending on the name “CareSouth Carolina” in 1996.

Over the course of its history, CareSouth Carolina has seen exponential growth throughout the Pee Dee and strives to offer a full-patient experience for everyone in rural areas of the state that may not have access to care otherwise.



CSC Hartsville Provider Dawn Calhoun checks in with a patient.

office, a 17,000-square foot state-of-the-art facility, will provide space for additional primary care providers, dental services, behavioral health counseling, X-ray, lab, ultrasound, pharmacy with a drive-thru and a community room for various health and community events.

And CareSouth Carolina is still growing.

CareSouth Carolina has broken ground



CareSouth Carolina’s new McColl Health & Wellness Center serves patients in Marlboro County with state-of-the-art family practice services as well as pharmacy, gym and rehab services.

“It just grabs you by the heart—community health,” Lewis said. “There are not that many jobs that make this kind of difference in people’s lives.”

In 2019, CareSouth Carolina opened the doors to its state-of-the-art McColl Health & Wellness Center. The new facility, located at 3080 Highway 15- 401 E, has a total of 28,992 square feet and more than quadruples the organization’s capacity to provide services to Marlboro County and its surrounding areas.

The center offers space for additional primary care providers, behavioral health counseling, lab services, family support services and senior support services in a county that does not have a hospital. The new facility houses a state-of-the-art cardiac rehab with a therapy pool and whirlpool, a gym with exercise equipment, coffee bar and a teaching kitchen. In addition to medical, dental and wellness services provided, the center has a Helipad on its property to airlift those in need of emergency medical attention.

In addition, CareSouth Carolina is set to open the doors to its newest facility in Chesterfield later this year. The Chesterfield

on a facility in Dillon that will be a partnership with the South Carolina Department of Health & Human Services (SC-DHEC).

Today, CareSouth Carolina sees more than 36,000 patients every year at 14 different locations across five counties in the Pee Dee region. The organization operates medical centers in Bennettsville, Bishopville, Cheraw, Chesterfield, Dillon, Hartsville, Lake View, Latta, McColl and Society Hill.

An organization that began with just four now has more than 500 employees.

CareSouth Carolina offers extensive services to those areas of the Pee Dee region,



CareSouth Carolina Latta provider Kris Lane checks in on a patient. (This image was taken before COVID-19.)

CSC CELEBRATES 40 YEARS CONT'D



CSC pediatric provider Heather Worsham provides care to a patient at the Hartsville office. (This image was taken before COVID-19.)

including family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics, women services, OB/GYN, HIV/AIDS primary care, dental, chiropractic

services, pharmacy, substance-use prevention, geriatrics, social services, clinical counseling, laboratory, 4D ultrasound, X-Ray, migrant services and veterans choice provider.

In addition to providing a scope of services at its medical centers across the Pee Dee, CareSouth Carolina also provides comprehensive medical services through its Reaching Out and Delivering Services (ROADS) units.

Mobile ROADS provides school-based care for students in 57 schools in five different school districts in the Pee Dee. Care ROADS also provides school-based care but can be dispatched during natural disasters to provide remote care. Freedom ROADS provides

remote Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) services on-site at three area addictions-treatment agencies weekly for those struggling with substance abuse disorders.

CareSouth Carolina also has mobile dental units that provide comprehensive dental services in the community and at more than 57 schools in the Pee Dee through its “Miles of Smiles” program. Through that program, the organization serves thousands of children with school-based dental care each year.

All in all though, CareSouth Carolina is still about the one patient looking for a place to experience excellent care and service—a place where he or she can feel at home—and always welcome.

TELEHEALTH PROGRAM

See a CareSouth Carolina Provider with Your Smartphone, Tablet or Computer!

- Schedule your appointment by calling 843-309-8102.
- New or Existing CareSouth Carolina Patients.
- Available 8:30AM to 5:00PM Monday-Friday

If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, please contact a CareSouth Carolina office before coming in.

CURBSIDE PICKUP

Simply Call Your Local CSC Community Pharmacy for Curbside Pickup!

CSC Community Pharmacy Locations:

- 1268 South Fourth Street, Hartsville. 843.339.5533
- 999 Cheraw Street, Bennettsville. 843.456.7777
- 122 Latimer Street, Latta. 843.627.6261
- 715 South Doctors Drive, Cheraw. 843-865-4080
- 737 S. Main Street, Society Hill. 843.378.4148

8:30AM - 6:00PM
Monday - Friday

Convenient Locations:

Bennettsville Center 999 Cheraw Street Bennettsville, SC 29512 843.479.2341	Dillon Center 207 E. Monroe Street Dillon, SC 29536 843.774.4337
Bennettsville Pediatric Center 210 W. Main Street Bennettsville, SC 29512 843.479.1200	Hartsville Center 1268 S. Fourth Street Hartsville, SC 29550 843.332.3422 843.339.5520 Chiropractic
Bennettsville Women's Center 107 Perry Wiley Way Bennettsville, SC 29512 843.454.2294	Lake View Center 103 N. Kemper Street Lake View, SC 29563 843.759.2189
Bishopville Center 545 Sumter Highway Bishopville, SC 29010 803.484.5317	Latta Center 122 Latimer Street Latta, SC 29565 843.627.6252
Bishopville Pediatric Dental 101 Harris Street Bishopville, SC 29010 866.815.9845	McColl Health & Wellness Center 3080 Highway 15-401 E McColl, SC 29570 843.523.5751
Hunt's Family Practice 106 Hospital Square Bishopville, SC 29010 803.484.5943	Society Hill Center 737 S. Main Street Society Hill, SC 29593 843.378.4501
Cheraw Center 715 S. Doctors Drive Suite E Cheraw, SC 29520 843.537.0961	Public Employee Health Services - Marlboro County 100 Matheson Street Bennettsville, SC 29512 843.456.7752
Chesterfield Center 204 Perry Wiley Way Chesterfield, SC 29709 843.623.5080	

Pharmacy Locations:

HARTSVILLE 1280 South Fourth Street 843.339.5530	BISHOPVILLE 545 Sumter Highway 803.588.7960	BENNETTSVILLE 999 Cheraw Street 843.456.7777	SOCIETY HILL 737 S. Main Street 843.378.4148
CHERAW 715 S. Doctors Drive, Suite A 843.865.4080	LATTA 122 Latimer Street 843.627.6261	MCCOLL 3080 Highway 15-401 E 843.523.6212	

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Everyone.

ABDOMINAL WALL RECONSTRUCTION

Submitted by Hatem Abdallah, MD General Surgeon



Hatem Abdallah, MD

A hernia is a defect, or hole, through which tissues or organs may protrude through, resulting in the appearance of a bulge. One of my areas of clinical interest is in the management of ventral abdominal wall hernias. These can occur from prior operations and are termed an “incisional hernia.” Abdominal wall hernias are a very common problem in the United States with nearly 400,000 ventral abdominal wall hernia repairs performed every year in the U.S. alone.

Incisional hernias are very common in up to 20 percent of open surgeries. Emergency surgery, obesity, diabetes, blood loss or infection are some of the many factors leading to an incisional hernia. Additionally, the surgical technique used for closing the abdomen after surgery has also been shown to contribute to the chances of developing an incisional hernia. New recommendations suggest using smaller sutures, smaller needles and generally taking a little extra care in closing following an abdominal surgery. Studies show the new recommendations can reduce incisional hernia rates from 20 percent down to 10 percent or less.

Just like almost any other health problem, the best treatment is prevention, but for patients who I see at my practice with larger hernias more than 5 centimeters wide, abdominal wall reconstruction surgery may be a good option. This surgery involves using the abdominal wall to the patient’s advantage. By making incisions to release the various muscle layers at certain anatomical points, we are able to close these hernias successfully. This involves placing a mesh between the muscle layers. The mesh acts as an extra support while your body forms scar tissue around it, acting like the concrete. The mesh itself is not a layer of strength. It is your own body’s ability to heal that forms the true strength of the repair. There are various types of abdominal wall reconstruction, depending on the anatomy of the hernia itself. Other factors to consider for abdominal wall reconstruction are the complexity of the hernia, body mass index (BMI), as well as diabetes, heart and lung issues.

Another technique used in performing these procedures involves utilizing robotic surgery. MUSC Health Florence Medical Center is proud to be bringing robotic surgery as another tool to help patients. This option may be used to help patients who may not be able to tolerate an open operation to ensure a durable, safe hernia repair. For healthier patients, robotic surgery can be a good option instead of an open operation. This holds true for groin hernias as well.

The world of hernia knowledge and research has truly expanded exponentially over the last 10 years. We are now able to fix complex hernias using minimally invasive robotic techniques, which are otherwise more technically difficult to perform through traditional laparoscopic techniques. For those who suffer from these hernias, I am happy to offer a variety of surgical options including open, laparoscopic as well as robotic techniques. Not all hernia repair techniques are appropriate for everyone. Each patient should have a customized surgical approach for their hernia and overall health needs.

For more information, call Dr. Hatem Abdallah at MUSC Health–Floyd Medical Group in Florence at 843-669-1220.

CARDIOVASCULAR COMPLICATIONS OF A MENACING VIRUS

Submitted by Sam Rahman, MD, Interventional Cardiologist



Sam Rahman, MD

Dec. 31 marked the first anniversary of reporting the coronavirus disease, which was identified in Wuhan, China. The virus was dubbed with the acronym COVID-19 to distinguish it from the other members of the family of viruses known as the coronaviruses. The novel virus proved to be more infectious and lethal than its predecessors, infecting the highest number of individuals in the modern era and causing significant strain to both the health care system and economy.

The COVID-19 virus is airborne and primarily targets the respiratory tract, or airways. Infected individuals may develop a severe form of pulmonary infection or pneumonia, potentially leading to serious consequences and even death. Other systems can be affected, including the cardiovascular system.

The virus invades cells through receptors located on the cell’s surface. The heart and lungs have an abundance of these receptors, which, under normal circumstances, play an important role in regulating the function of the cardiovascular system. By binding to these receptors, the virus can disrupt the normal function and cause injury to the heart muscle cells and the blood vessel lining. Severe forms of COVID-19 infections are characterized by severe inflammatory responses that can damage the cardiovascular cells. Blood clots are more likely to form in the small blood vessels when the body is under severe stress and inflammation. This can cause injury to the heart muscles, leading to heart attacks and even causing more organ failure. Abnormal heart rhythms can also occur in patients infected with COVID-19.

Population studies have shown that patients with pre-existing cardiovascular disease are more susceptible to the virus and are more inclined to have critical outcomes and even death. However, COVID-19 can also cause an acute cardiac illness in healthy individuals without a pre-existing cardiac condition. It is important to note that young patients may die from COVID-19 as well. Sometimes it is difficult to determine the difference between COVID-19 and cardiovascular disease because of the overlapping symptoms including shortness of breath, chest pain and abnormal heart rhythms.

Since the start of the pandemic, the scientific and medical communities have been continuing to gain knowledge about the virus and its treatment. Most recently, vaccines have been made and have undergone testing. It is important to recognize that, just like influenza vaccine, the vaccines currently under trial do not completely prevent infection, and there are concerns they may not be the final solution needed to end the pandemic. There is still hope, however, that the vaccines will make a big difference within the next few months and may prevent severe illness and death. In the meantime, people need to do their share in adopting public health measures in order to curb the ferocious surge the country is currently experiencing.

The three rules of effective prevention of the disease remain unchanged: wearing a mask in public places, avoiding indoor crowded places and washing hands. These precautions could not be over emphasized when it comes to patients with heart disease.

Dr. Sam Rahman is an interventional cardiologist at MUSC Health – Cardiology in Florence on the main campus of MUSC Health Florence Medical Center. He is accepting patients. For more information, please call 843-674-4787.

HOPEHEALTH HOSTS VIRTUAL AIDSWALK 2020

Submitted by Donna Tracy Communications Coordinator, HopeHealth



From left: Tamala Dixon, infectious diseases practice administrator; Sallie Bachman, chief of special programs; and Carl M. Humphries, CEO, hosted the 23rd AIDS Walk on Facebook Live Dec. 5.

On Dec. 5, HopeHealth hosted AIDS Walk 2020 with a virtual program in place of the traditional walk through downtown Florence.

The 23rd AIDS Walk event went virtual last year due to COVID-19 with online participants joining a handful of HopeHealth staff on Facebook Live as they walked through Timrod Park.

During the event, those at the park lit candles and held a moment of silence in remembrance of those who have lost their lives to HIV/AIDS. In addition, Carl M. Humphries, CEO; Sallie Bachman, chief of special programs; and Tamala Dixon, infectious diseases practice administrator, spoke on the impact of HIV/AIDS and how treatment of the disease has progressed over the last 30 years.

In 1991, HopeHealth began as a grass-roots organization to support those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Today, HopeHealth is also a nonprofit leader in providing affordable, expert health care and infectious diseases services for all ages in Aiken, Florence, Clarendon, Orangeburg and Williamsburg Counties. Our federally-qualified health centers are the primary care providers of choice for more than 50,000 patients. To become a patient, call 843-432-3700, or visit hope-health.org.



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Rapid finger-stick testing
Results in just 20 minutes

4 Locations

For more information or to make an appointment, call

(843) 667-9414

Walk-in testing hours

HopeHealth Medical Plaza
360 North Irby Street, Florence
Mon – Thurs: 8:30 am – 4 pm
Fri: 8:30 am – 12 pm

Evening testing hours by appointment from 4 - 8 pm

HopeHealth in Manning
12 West South Street, Manning
Mon – Fri: 10 am – 4 pm

HopeHealth in Aiken
150 University Parkway, Aiken
By appointment only

HopeHealth in Orangeburg
1857 Joe S. Jeffords Hwy, Orangeburg
By appointment only



hope-health.org



Women are more than half of all people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide.



Worldwide, HIV/AIDS is the number 1 cause of death for women of reproductive age.



HIV/AIDS was responsible for 60,000 maternal deaths worldwide in 2008.



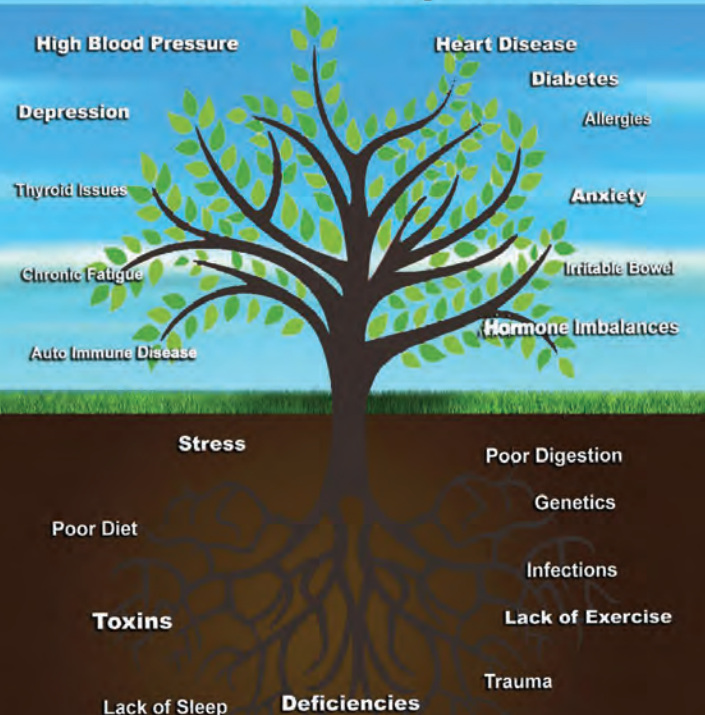
In Sub-Saharan Africa:

- 60% of the infected population are women.
- 72% of infections among young people age 15-24 are women.
- Among 15-24 year olds, young women are eight times as likely to become infected as young men.



It's time for a woman-centered approach to HIV/AIDS. Take action at www.genderhealth.org

Stop Chasing Symptoms and Get to the Root of the problem



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843-678-9394

HOPEHEALTH HOLDS BETHEA RIBBON CUTTING

Articles submitted by Donna Tracy Communications Coordinator, HopeHealth



Carl M. Humphries, HopeHealth CEO, cuts the ribbon officially opening HopeHealth at Bethea. Dana Jones, FNP, has been seeing patients of all ages at the facility in November.

HopeHealth held a ribbon cutting for the opening of its newest location, HopeHealth at Bethea on Dec. 8 and streamed the event on Facebook Live.

The one level, easy-access facility is a partnership between HopeHealth and Bethea Retirement Community. HopeHealth at Bethea provides excellent care for patients of all ages but continues to focus on seniors. The new 1,900 square-foot office space includes:

- three exam rooms • spacious waiting area • lab room • dedicated entrance

“Our expanded services and hours will allow us to broaden the scope of care that we are able to offer, and we are hopeful that we will soon be able to resume our popular ‘Seniors with Hope’ program at Bethea as well as at the Medical Plaza,” said Dr. Edward Behling, HopeHealth chief medical officer.

Visit facebook.com/hopehealthinc/ to view the ribbon cutting program and additional photos.



VETERANS WITH HOPE ART CONTEST WINNERS

Four students were recently presented gift cards for their winning submissions in the second annual Veterans with Hope “Thank a Vet” Art Contest. More than 25 artists participated in the contest in two age groups.

Winners are:

Ages 13 to 18:

First Place: Vanessa Sharper
-Age 15 - South Florence High School

Second Place: Lennia Valarie
-Age 17 - Wilson High School

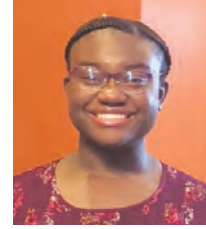
Age 12 and under:

First Place: Cayson Lupo -Age 8 - Temple Christian Academy

Second Place: Trenton Anderson - Age 7 - Temple Christian Academy

First place winners were awarded \$100 gifts cards, and second place winners received \$50 cards.

The art contest is open to all kids in Florence, Clarendon, Aiken, Orangeburg and Williamsburg counties each fall. Submissions reflect a gratitude and appreciation for current and former military personnel and the sacrifices made for our freedom. This year, HopeHealth provided art kits on a first-come, first-serve basis for participants. Each artist could also include a description of up to 250 words explaining his or her piece. Selected submissions will be framed and displayed in HopeHealth facilities along with selections from last year’s entries.



Vanessa Sharper



Lennia Valarie



From left: Trenton Anderson, HopeHealth care coordinator Conner Smith, and Cayson Lupo

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Betha Retirement Community Launches New State-of-the-Art Nursing and Rehabilitation Center

Betha Retirement Community launches the first skilled nursing and rehabilitation center of its kind in the PeeDee, revolutionizing senior care in the area by implementing the new household model. Betha Executive Director Ben Spurling says, "We all live our lives in pursuit of opportunities to grow, to learn, to experience moments of joy. At Betha, we refer to these principles as 'Abundant Living'. Working toward this goal of providing Abundant Life for seniors is always a challenge, and nowhere is this truer than in the skilled nursing environment, where it's easy to lose sight of those principles focusing on the very real health needs of residents. That's why we are so excited about the Household Model, which provides us with an innovative framework that weaves the threads of Abundant Living directly into the fabric of care that we provide to residents every single day."

The expansion features four distinct households, each with its own dedicated staff who work with the same residents each day, thus nurturing a family environment where residents and staff truly get to know one another. Life is resident directed, so residents get up as they wish, eat when and what they want, bathe when and how they prefer, participate in activities as they choose, host their family and friends as they desire, and go outdoors as they please on grounds designed with their safety in mind. Residents' families remain actively involved with their loved ones and benefit from the supportive care they will receive from Betha's team, so family can enjoy being family again without the added responsibility of serving as full-time caregivers too. Memory care is available.

The newhousehold model is designed to make residents feel like they are still at home, with extra attention to protecting residents' privacy. Each of the four households include premium and deluxe living options with private bedrooms or suites with private bathrooms. Daily rates are \$212-\$230. The overall design and landscape contribute to the feeling of a traditional neighborhood, with a semi-public entry hall that is only accessible through the front door. Residents may welcome their guests into the semi-private spaces like the household's living or dining room, or through the semi-private hallway to his private suite or bedroom. Living spaces are well appointed and comfortably sized with spa and amenities of personal choice. Front doors, patios, and front and back porches allow residents easy access to outdoor spaces. Residents can also host their friends and family in a private dining room or indulge in sweet treats at the ice cream café.



The Latest Technology

To provide the most advanced care and comfortable living for their residents, the building is fully equipped with the latest technology including: • Wireless call system • Electronic medical records • Wireless communication between house leaders and caregivers • Internet access for residents, with technologies that enhance communication with family and friends • Smart TV in each bedroom • UV system and ionization for all HVAC system air

The Rehabilitation Gym

Paying homage to Betha's Darlington heritage, the 2200+ square foot therapy gym is decorated in a Darlington Raceway theme. Our gym features: • An outdoor therapy garden, including a beach area, allows rehab guests to experiment with different surfaces • A therapy car to practice entry and exit • A therapy laundry and kitchen to practice daily household tasks • A traction table for spinal decompression in our private therapy room that provides nonsurgical treatment to relieve pain and promote healing for the cervical and lumbar regions



Visit BethaRetirement.com or contact Jenny Doll, Director of Marketing, 843-395-4402 for more information or to schedule a tour.

157 Home Avenue Darlington, SC 29532



HOW YOU CAN AFFORD A RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

Are you retired or approaching retirement age? You may be thinking about the best options for where to live moving forward. Perhaps your house has become more than you can handle, or you have health concerns that require more care--or maybe you'd just like to live in a warmer climate. Whatever your reasons for considering a change, you're probably concerned about the cost of such a move.

You may be surprised to learn that there can be financial advantages to moving to a retirement community. Here's what you need to know:

Your (or your spouse's) care needs may change.

Choosing a continuing care retirement community (CCRC) means that you will have options within a continuum of care, so you'll be taken care of no matter what your needs are or how they may change over time. This can make it much easier--and much less costly--to transfer from an independent living situation all the way to receiving any level of care that you may need in the future.

It may be more affordable than you expect.

While many CCRCs require a significant entrance fee, most of the time that fee is almost fully refundable at the end of the contract, meaning that you get money back if you decide to move somewhere else or your family inherits money when you pass. It's important to review the different types of contracts that are available to you within the CCRC model.

Your current expenses probably include items like:

- * Homeowners insurance
- * Property taxes
- * Utilities
- * Lawn service
- * Home maintenance and repairs
- * Mortgage and/or association fees
- * Cable, internet and phone
- * Recycling and sanitation

Once you total up these costs, remember that at a retirement

community you won't have any of these expenses or worries.

Tax benefits may apply.

Everyone's situation is unique, so you should always consult your personal tax advisor for specific advice before making a move. However, there are potential tax benefits you should be aware of when making your decision.

Continuing care retirement communities may offer financial assistance.

Many CCRCs can help you find bridge financing to help bridge the time between the sale of your current home and moving in to the community, among other possible financial resources.

Check with the community you're interested in to find out about financial options.

Moving in sooner can save you money.

Over the long term, the sooner you make your move to a CCRC, the less expensive it will be. Many communities offer an easy-to-use online calculation tool that can help you determine if moving there would be a good financial fit for you. To evaluate your situation, try out the Affordability Calculator offered by The Spires at Retireatberry.com/pricing/affordability-calculator.

Making any move can be challenging, but continuing care retirement communities are focused on helping you relax and enjoy this time of your life to the fullest.



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TIPS TO LOWER YOUR OUT-OF-POCKET MEDICATION COSTS IN JANUARY



January is here. Whether or not you marked the New Year, an expensive reality hit many Americans on Jan. 1: medical insurance deductibles reset to zero, and out-of-pocket costs went up.

Along with co-pays and coinsurance, those out-

of-pocket costs can put essential medications out of reach. Many people are forced to choose between paying bills, their medications and putting food on the table. It's no wonder Gallup polls consistently find healthcare costs to be one of this country's greatest worries.

But there are ways to cut those high out-of-pocket costs. The Patient Access Network (PAN) Foundation, a national charity that provides financial assistance to help people pay for their prescription medications, offers these tips for reducing your out-of-pocket costs for the lifesaving medications you need.

Talk to your healthcare team. Be honest with your doctor and pharmacist about the challenge of affording your medications. It may be difficult for you to talk about your finances, but remember, your healthcare team is on your side. Let them know what you can afford, and they may be able to tailor a treatment plan that fits within your budget.

Look into "Extra Help." Medicare beneficiaries may qualify for programs like, Extra Help, also known as the Low-Income Subsidy program. This program can significantly reduce your prescription costs.

Ask for generics. Many name-brand drugs now have generic equivalents, especially if the drugs you're taking have been on the market for a while. Generics are significantly cheaper than their name-brand versions. And don't worry. Generics are run through the same safety and efficacy tests by the FDA to ensure their quality and effectiveness.

Sign up for FundFinder. FundFinder is a free web-based app developed by the PAN Foundation that connects you with a charitable patient assistance foundation that could help pay the out-of-pocket costs for your prescription medications. Rather than having to monitor multiple foundations to see if they're offering funding, FundFinder checks for you and alerts you through email or text when the financial help that you need is available at PAN or another charitable foundation.

Shop around. You'd be surprised how much drug costs can vary from pharmacy to pharmacy. Make a few calls to make sure you're not paying more than you have to for the medications you need. And ask about discounts and coupons, like the NeedyMeds discount card, which could help you save up to 80 percent off prescription drug prices.

Check your state's assistance programs. Many states have assistance programs for residents who are having trouble paying for their medications. The first place to start is with your state's department of health. They can tell you about the programs that are available and whether you qualify. They also may have information about other programs in your area that are designed to help people afford their medication.

Looking ahead in the New Year should be full of hope, not worries about affording prescription medications. You can learn more about patient assistance charities like PAN and the ways you can get help paying for your prescription medical treatments at panfoundation.org.

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Stay Connected:



ART SHOWS ON DISPLAY IN LAKE CITY

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Make plans to take a day trip to Lake City to see three new art exhibitions! Explore the art of assemblage and oil with Kirkland Smith's masterful work. Shanequa Gay's exhibition will blow viewers away with her use of bold colors and textiles. The Jasper Project honors South Carolina women through installation, film, ceramics, and portraiture. While you're in town, stop by Crossroads Gallery to view past ArtFields winners and take a walk around town to check out the public art.

Galleries are open each week Tuesday-Saturday from 11AM-5PM.

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HOW TO THROW THE ULTIMATE VIRTUAL DINNER PARTY



As Americans are increasingly staying home, we're seeing the return of a longstanding tradition: the intimate dinner party with beloved family and friends.

"Food, drink, friends, good conversation—a dinner party is, in the end, a simple and enduring combination of ingredients, made unique by what hosts and guests infuse the evening with," writes Laura Rysman in the New York Times.

Thinking of throwing your own virtual dinner party? Preparations don't need to be lengthy or difficult if you follow a few simple tips. Consider the following suggestions for a warm, wonderful gathering that will leave your guests feeling loved and appreciated.

* Pull together the right guest list

With whom would you most enjoy

spending time at your virtual event? Are there people you've been wanting to get to know better? Friends you wish to thank? Family members you haven't seen in a long time? Decide who you'll invite. Then issue your invitations with ample time to reserve the date.

* Plan your menu and décor

Try sticking to your favorite recipes, perhaps incorporating dishes you think of as your "specialties," and leave out any dishes that could become overly complex or stressful. List the ingredients you'll need, and pick them up a day or two ahead, so you'll have plenty of time for the prep work. On the same trip, pick up flowers, candles, wood for your fireplace, holiday décor or anything else that will help you create a seasonal, welcoming ambiance.

* Assemble your tablescape

Even though it's a virtual party, you'll want to get out your best plates, glasses and silverware, and make sure everything is clean and polished from set up to clean up. Of course, that will be nearly effortless if you've already installed the LG QuadWash dishwasher with TrueSteam. The dishwasher uses the gentle power of TrueSteam to clean and dry dishes, delivering 60 percent fewer water spots for

brilliant, sparkling glassware. That means you won't have to waste valuable time re-washing plates or wiping spotty glasses by hand.

* Have a Zoom activity in mind

Sometimes things on Zoom can start to get awkward with people talking over one another, so get a game ready for your virtual event. Trivia is always a crowd favorite and is perfect over Zoom. Try planning your event around a scheduled activity like the televised viewing of a movie, sports event, concert or theater performance.

Once preparations are in place, all that's left to do is to sit back, and enjoy the company and great food to make lasting memories. Seize the day, and plan a dinner party with some of your favorite people. Find more information about the tools and machines that can help you in your quest at LG.com.



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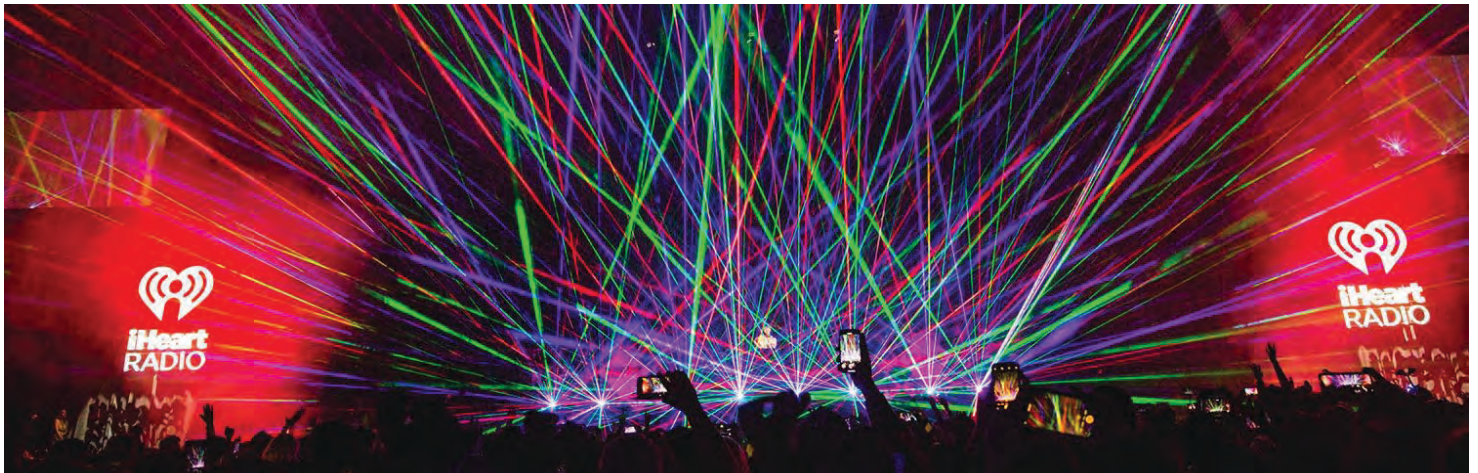


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FCFS INITIATIVES TO STAY CONNECTED

Submitted by Carolyn Jeffords, Executive Assistant, Florence County First Steps



Due to COVID-19, Florence County First Steps (FCFS) waived its annual educational in-person meeting and held a “drive-by” on Dec. 15 for 16 families receiving daycare scholarships and nine family daycare

providers, coordinated by program coordinators, Lana Hopkins and Anastasia Spann. Families and providers received toys that stimulate child development as well as gift bags for their participation. Acknowledging the risk of our frontline educator, FCFS provided personal protective equipment such as masks and sanitizer in efforts to assist them to remain safe amidst the pandemic.

Executive Director Spencer R. Scott stated, “As the pandemic shut down majority of in-person services in March, we had to find innovative ways to keep connected to our families and childcare community. Most of our work involves gathering people, so that has definitely been a major change in our work. The day we went remote, we really focused on finding the most effective way to service and protect our most vulnerable to the coronavirus.”

Beginning in 1999, the goal of FCFS is to prepare children of Florence County for school, and it has several initiatives in place to make this goal happen. Childcare Scholarships are distributed to qualified low-income households that are working or going to school. “According to Scott, this helps three-fold: it provides parents an opportunity to work or continue going to school to obtain a two or four year degree. It allows a child to be in an educational environment for eight hours of the day and gives employers an employee whose working and not concerned about their child not being in a safe or educational environment.”

There are also Technical Assistance (TA) and Quality Enhancement (QE) programs to ensure that providers and childcares facilities are giving the best care to families who attend the facilities. Virtual childcare trainings, which are set to start back in January 2021, allow providers to earn mandatory SC Department of Social Service credit hours.

If you would like to donate to this cause, please visit [paypal.me/florencefirststeps](https://www.paypal.com/florencefirststeps) to donate. You may also mail a check to 415 South Coit Street, Florence, S.C., 29501. We are also looking for board members who are passionate about our cause and want to be a part of our mission.



FCFS is a nonprofit organization geared to help kids 0-5 get ready for school. Families and providers received toys that stimulate child development as well as gift bags for their participation.

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