

*Celebrating 10 Years!*



PG. 11  
TIFFANY J. BROWN  
THE LAW OFFICES OF  
TIFFANY J. BROWN, LLC



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MUSC HEALTH  
FLORENCE



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DR. JERMAINE FORD  
PRESIDENT, FLORENCE-  
DARLINGTON TECHNICAL  
COLLEGE



PG. 40  
MEGAN ADKINS, FNP  
CIRCLE PARK

# DIVERSITY WORKS

OCTOBER 2021 VOLUME 11 ISSUE 4

*"For All of Us"*



Brian Harrelson



Courtney Pech



Oliver Kosht



Freddie Evans



COVER STORY: PG. 38  
RUIZ FOODS



# Celebrating



# Years!



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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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## PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE



Diana M. Murphy-Eaddy

This October officially completes 10 years for Diversity Works ©Magazine. Every publication has shown continuous growth and progress through partnership, which has strengthened our approach to career development, mentoring, recruiting and retention, as well as community outreach. For all these things, we are truly grateful.

We strive to bring everyone together by being all-inclusive and striving to bring out the best in each of us so we can all achieve great things. Our team works hard to support and enhance each person's unique characteristics by promoting mutual appreciation of one another and recognizing our differences while understanding our similarities. It has been an incredible ride, and we're

looking forward to many more wonderful years.

We would like to thank our partners for their engagement, sharing of their stories, advertising and continuous support; without them, we would not still be here. We appreciate your devotion to us and the many years of helping to grow our business.

To the readers who eagerly wait to receive their quarterly copies, please accept our appreciation for your unwavering kindness and loyalty.

To the magazine team, I can't say thank you enough for the excellent work you've done over the years, for giving of your time (even if it is something you enjoy) and the energy you put into writing such great articles for our readers to enjoy. You have helped create and grow awareness of the need for greater diversity and inclusiveness in organizations across the Pee Dee and South Carolina. Your contribution to this publication is greatly valued and well-respected.

And as we come to the end of another year and advance in promoting best practices in diversity, equity and inclusion, we will continue to focus on bringing people together for success of the individual, diverse organizations and our whole community. As always, please take the time to read another AWESOME edition of Diversity Works© Magazine for we have a lot of great articles and stories to share.

And until next year, remember: "We Are Stronger Together." So let's work to cultivate positive relationships.

Diana M. Murphy-Eaddy, CEO/Publisher/Visionary



## INTRODUCING THE 2021 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING FACILITATOR

*Jessica Cohen*



**CHARLESTON** - Jessica Cohen is a believer, solutionist and mother of one who was born and raised in Charleston. As chief strategist and owner of Spark Solutions, a coaching and consultation agency, she upholds the dignity and progress of purposed efforts with an affinity to serve ministries carried out as nonprofit organizations, businesses, and faith-based entities. Spark Solutions helps to lay the groundwork for community development by identifying potential, providing industry insights, and crafting tailored strategies. Operating under the belief that any genuine cause deserves to be seen and heard, Spark Solutions not only helps organizations fulfill their mission, but it also encourages and creates inclusive growth.

Cohen was a student athlete in college and played basketball at the University of North Carolina Wilmington before transferring to Coker University where she received her bachelor's in Communication Studies and master's in Collegiate Athletic Administration. She is currently working on a Doctorate of Public Administration at California

Baptist University and delights in the prospect of attending a faith-based institution that incorporates her moral principles within the teachings of the discipline she feels called to engage in. In her spare time, she enjoys seeing the world through her son's eyes, engaging in competitive games with friends and family and, like a true "Instagram foodie," eating with her eyes and taking pictures of aesthetically pleasing dishes. If she's not laughing, she's smiling, and if she's not smiling, she's laughing. She strives to bring joy to every environment she finds herself in and revels in the opportunity to engage in meaningful progressive conversations.

A natural extension of her character, Spark Solutions is dedicated to assisting community leaders and change agents who may struggle to elevate their advocacy to a level that brings real, impactful generational change. Their broad experience, both in the public and social sectors, helps open doors for grassroots organizations to have productive dialogues with key public decision-makers, thereby increasing their access to support services and resources. Cohen believes this will spark real progress and make a generational impact within the community.

### Services include:

- Social branding for influencers, student athletes and business owners
- Corporate social responsibility plans for businesses
- Community tilling workshops to cultivate growth for public and elected officials
- Strategy plans for community leaders
- Business, nonprofit and ministry blueprints for community impact
- Impact troubleshooting
- Issues mapping for nonprofits

Contact Jessica Cohen at [admin@sparksolutionscc.com](mailto:admin@sparksolutionscc.com), via Facebook @SparkSolutionscc or on Instagram @sparksolutionscc.

## INTRODUCING 2021 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING KEYNOTE SPEAKER

*Max Siegel*

**INDIANAPOLIS** - Nationally renowned sports and entertainment executive Max Siegel became the fourth CEO of USA Track & Field on May 1, 2012. In his first 32 months on the job, Siegel led USATF to financial growth and programmatic evolution that is unprecedented in the Olympic family.

At USATF, Siegel quickly went to work on growing the USATF business. Since February 2013, USATF has made nine partnership announcements, including seven in 2014. Among those are partnerships with The Hershey Company, Neustar, Subway, Rosetta Stone, the University of Phoenix, Coach's Eye, and a landmark deal with Nike that drew the attention of the national and international sports business communities. Changes to the bottom line have been coupled with new USATF programs, particularly in the youth and elite athlete spaces but inclusive of all USATF constituencies. The result is a new business model for the Olympic family's most historic National Governing Body.

His early work at USATF further complements Siegel's 20-plus year track record of financial growth and competitive success in the sports and entertainment industries.

He previously served as president of Global Operations at Dale Earnhardt Inc., where he sold tens of millions of dollars in sponsorships; as senior vice president at Sony/BMG; and as president of Zomba Gospel, Tommy Boy Gospel and Verity Records, where he led one of the most profitable divisions in the Sony BMG system. As a music executive, he increased top-line revenue and reduced expenses to yield unprecedented profit in the gospel industry. He also was part of the executive team overseeing the careers of stars such as Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, and Usher.

As the owner of Rev Racing, Siegel took NASCAR's Drive for Diversity Program and advanced it from a fledging effort to add diversity to the sport into a competitive juggernaut on the racetrack. In October 2013, one of his drivers, Bubba Wallace became the first African American driver in 50 years to win in one of NASCAR's national series. The only previous win by an African American driver was by Wendell Scott in 1963. In 2011, Siegel produced a documentary about Scott's accomplishments.

From the Drive for Diversity Program's start, Rev Racing has had 25 wins, 95 top 5s and 212 top 10 finishes in the NASCAR K&N Pro Series East, with drivers finishing in the top 10 in points in every season. His pit crew program has served more

than 100 participants, with 100% placement rate of its graduates. Sixty-five diverse pit crew members are currently working in the highest level of NASCAR. This year was a historical year for Siegel as owner and CEO of Rev Racing. When the green flag dropped at the season opening of the NASCAR Monster Energy Cup Series, 10% of the field came from his development program.

Siegel is a former director of the boards of USA Track & Field and the USA Swimming Foundation. Additional Olympic-family experience includes work with USA Gymnastics, USA Skiing, USA Swimming and the Goodwill Games while he was an attorney with Indianapolis-based Baker & Daniels in the 1990s. In addition to representing sports figures such as Hall of Famers Reggie White and Tony Gwynn during their careers, he has created literary, television and film properties, including the 2010 BET Networks series, "Changing Lanes" and the 2011 ESPN documentary, "Wendell Scott: A Race Story." Scott was later selected as an inductee into the NASCAR Hall of Fame for 2015. Siegel also is the author of "Know What Makes Them Tick: How to Successfully Negotiate Almost Any Situation."

Siegel has appeared on Oprah, NPR's Tavis Smiley Show, ABC's Good Morning America, ESPN, and CNBC; in print, he has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, the New York Times, Ebony's Power 100, Crain's New York Business, Black Enterprise and Billboard Magazine, among others.

Siegel also owns Max Siegel Inc. (MSI), a marketing and media agency that specializes in sports, entertainment and multicultural marketing. Through the agency's unique ability to connect brands and companies with their consumers, Max and team continue to redefine the agency landscape. MSI uses sports, multicultural marketing, partnership alignment with churches and schools, ministry, media and entertainment properties to find success for clients such as the US Army and Urban Leagues across the country.

His passions continue to keep him committed to giving back to his community and underprivileged youth. The MSI Youth foundation provides opportunities to children in need, offering support in the areas of financial literacy, leadership, STEM, living healthy lifestyles, and exposure to careers in the sports and entertainment industries.

The first African American to graduate with honors from Notre Dame law school, Siegel is a native of Indianapolis.





**01**



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**02**



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REGGIE WHITE (NFL HALL OF FAME), TONY GWYNN (MLB HALL OF FAME)

**03**



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KIM BURRELL, TONEX AND VICKI WINANS

**04**



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**05**



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**06**



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**07**



**REV RACING**

IN 2009, TOOK OVER THE MANAGEMENT OF NASCAR DRIVE FOR DIVERSITY PROGRAM DRIVER AND PITCREW ACADEMY

**08**



**USA TRACK AND FIELD**

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## INTRODUCING 2021 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING PRESENTER

*Dr. Cynthia J. Walters*



**COLUMBIA** - Dr. Cynthia J. Walters is a 47-year healthcare professional. Using her educational background and life work experiences to become a transformational leader, she moved into practical application of infrastructure building, strategic planning, development and training. She is known as a mentor and leader who generously shares her wisdom and insights.

Currently, Dr. Walters is employed by Prisma Health (formerly Palmetto Health), the largest healthcare system in South Carolina, as director of Diversity and Inclusion. Her responsibilities include strategic support and operational leadership to strengthen and sustain a culture

of inclusion for team members, patients, physicians and the communities served. She is committed to making all people feel they are seen, heard, visible and respected. Previously, she served as director of Organization Development and Education.

Dr. Walters is also a lecturer on the local and national levels. She is author of "From Chaos into Serenity: Messages to Encourage and Refresh the Soul" and has served as adjunct professor for Benedict College, Clafflin University, the University of South Carolina Moore School of Business and Virginia Union University. She is an ordained Baptist minister and serves as executive minister for Zion Baptist Church in Columbia.

She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in biology, a master's degree in community and occupational programs in education and a Doctor of Education degree, all from the University of South Carolina. In addition, she is a graduate of the Furman University Riley Diversity Leadership Institute and is working on a theology degree from Erskine Theological Seminary.

She is active in the Midlands community serving in the following capacities: chair, SC Chamber of Commerce Diversity Council; member, Community Relations Council; member, Women in Philanthropy; member, Hold out the Lifeline; and second vice president, Gethsemane Woman's Auxiliary. She also holds memberships in the Columbia Alumnae Chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the NAACP.

Dr. Walters is married to Otis Walters, Jr. They are proud parents of three adult children and one grandson.



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## INTRODUCING 2021 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING PRESENTER

# Rinah Rachel Galper



**DURHAM** - Rinah Rachel Galper is the sole proprietor of Joyoushout, which offers consulting, coaching and support to those engaged in the work of personal and collective transformation. Specifically, Galper accomplishes this using a “Broad Spectrum” approach that is intersectional, multi-modal, and collaborative. Broad Spectrum JEDI (Justice Equity, Diversity Inclusion) consulting, spiritually rooted life coaching for women, and enrichment programs for youth and adults engaged in the work of personal and collective

change are among the services provided.

Clients may opt for ongoing virtual JEDI book journeys, virtual and in-person staff trainings and presentations, and coming in fall 2021, Change Makers, a program supporting youth in creating inclusive communities and deepening their engagement in social change work. Galper also is the founder and director of Our Sacred Circles (OSC), which coordinates themed, virtual meetups designed to build community at the intersection of justice, healing, spirituality and creativity. Current OSC gatherings include Women Dismantling Racism, Bridge Builders, the OSC Writers’ Circle, and the OSC Wisdom Council. OSC and Joyoushout were recently highlighted in the July issue of the INDY magazine for their work to end system racism.

Galper has lived and worked in the Durham/Chapel Hill area of North Carolina since 2006 as a clergy member and healer, licensed special education and enrichment teacher, consultant and coach, program coordinator, storyteller,

group facilitator and caregiver. Prior to moving to North Carolina, she lived in Atlanta, South Dakota and New York where she worked as a social worker, school and museum educator, and advocate for families and crime victims. She lived, worked, and studied in Central America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The stories and lessons from her life and work continue to fuel her commitment to eliminating systemic oppression and biases that erode our shared humanity and perpetuate hate, fear, greed and ignorance.

Miriam Thompson, Ms. Galper’s mother and mentor, has been and remains deeply engaged in the civil rights movement and community work after five decades. She has instilled in both her daughters and her grandchildren a lifelong passion for justice and deep respect for the ancestors and freedom fighters upon whose shoulders we stand.

Upon her return from Mexico in 1985, Ms. Galper completed her Bachelor’s degree in Latin American Affairs and Women’s Studies. She returned to school again in 2000 to complete her master’s degree in Education. After three decades of engaging in and supporting deep personal healing and change work as well as collective struggle for equitable and responsive education and leadership, Ms. Galper now focuses her energies on supporting individual leaders and service providers and white dominant companies and organizations to create system and culture changes as part of our moral and economic mandate to become more diverse, inclusive, equitable, and justice driven..

Audre Lorde, an American writer, feminist, civil rights activist and self-described “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,” taught that, “Without community, there is no liberation...but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.” Ms. Galper’s work builds upon this wisdom to help create community spaces in which we can reimagine and labor for a more just, peaceful, and loving world.

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# INTRODUCING 2021 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING PRESENTER

## Larry O'Brien



**CHARLESTON** - Larry O'Brien is a sought-after executive coach, facilitator and diversity and inclusion consultant. He has more than 20 years' experience working within corporations in various leadership roles through which he has led global systems, process, training and culture change implementations.

Prior to founding Mendoza+O'Brien Leadership Development, O'Brien led the global leadership programs for Prudential Financial. In this role, he developed the leadership development strategy, aligning it

with the company's strategy, competencies and diversity and inclusion goals. Participants who attended these programs reported greater confidence and commitment to becoming inclusive leaders.

As chief learning officer for Mendoza+O'Brien, O'Brien works with individuals, teams and organizations to improve diversity and inclusion, communication, and performance. The process starts by learning about the lived experiences of employees through interviews and focus groups, developing a D&I roadmap, and delivering custom educational opportunities that move the heart and the mind.

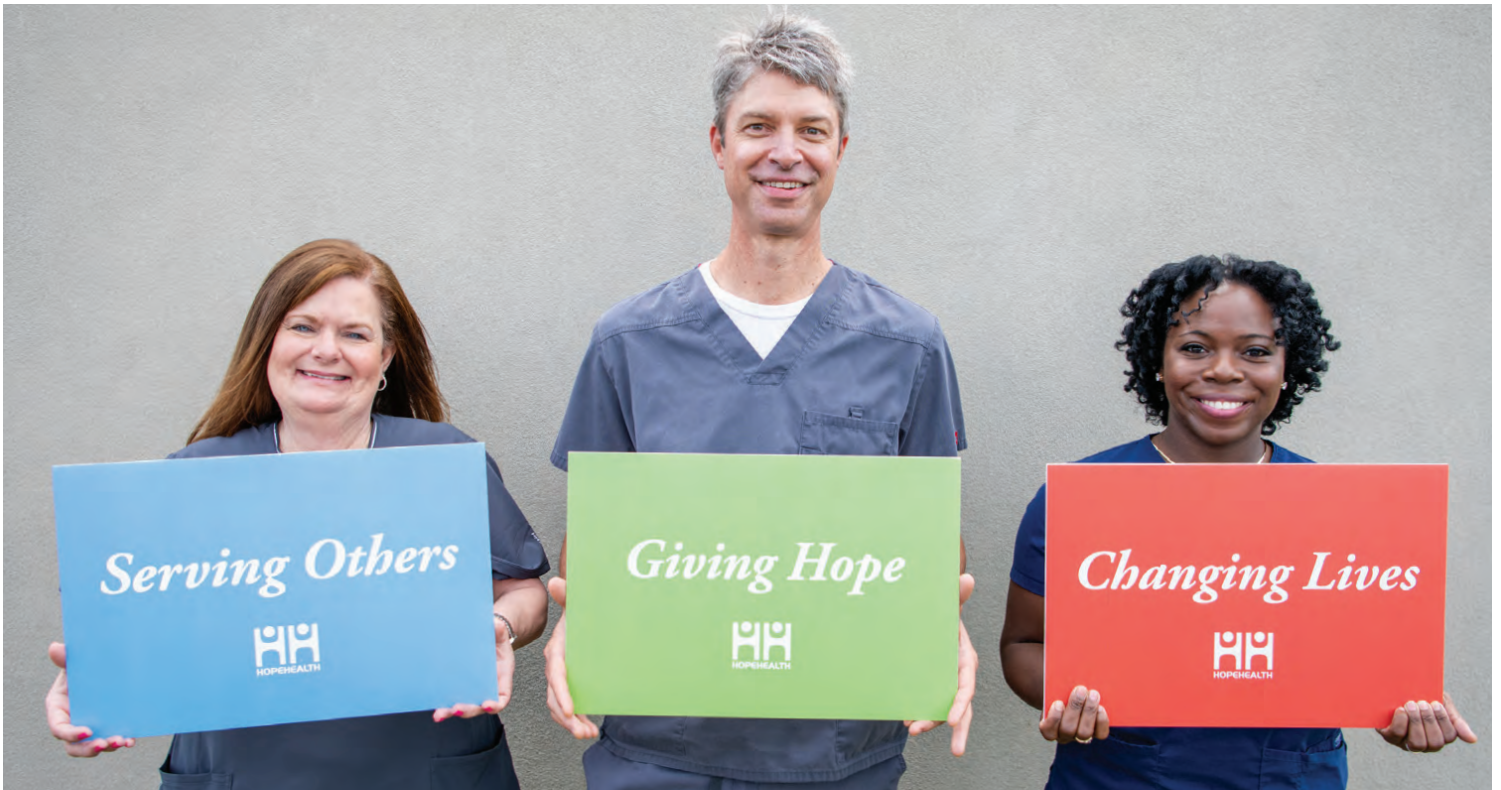
O'Brien has worked in various industries as a consultant including finance, technology, healthcare, manufacturing and more. Some of his clients include Prudential Financial, GE Aviation, Hydro One, CipherHealth, Whirlpool, Mayo Clinic and others.

O'Brien was born in Latin America and has lived in Argentina, Venezuela, and up and down the East Coast of the U.S. He leverages his global upbringing, education and experience to help leaders create an inclusive environment to harness the full potential of their diverse teams. He considers himself "bi-cultural" because he was raised in both Latin America and the United States. This gives him a unique insight as a diversity and inclusion consultant since he experienced what it is like to be an outsider in multiple countries.

### About Mendoza+O'Brien

Mendoza+O'Brien can help develop your inclusive leaders and teams of tomorrow. Our experienced facilitators deliver custom and impactful diversity and inclusion workshops on topics like Unconscious Bias, Allyship, Microaggressions, Inclusive Leadership, Inclusive Teams and Inclusive Conversations. We work with small, medium and large for profit and non-profit organizations and have experience across varied industries. Mendoza + O'Brien is headquartered in Charleston, South Carolina.

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## **BILLY D. WILLIAMS**

**APR. 18, 1939 - SEPT. 4, 2021**

*Submitted by Adriane Hutchinson*

Billy D. Williams was a native of Florence, South Carolina, the youngest of seven children born to the late Mr. and Mrs. Charlie and Emma Myers Williams. He was baptized at Savannah Grove Baptist Church, Effingham, SC, and was an active member of several ministries.

In 1957, Billy graduated from Wilson High School in Florence, SC. He studied interior design at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, NY. He worked at Fabric World as an interior decorator in New York City for many years. It was there that he met and married the love of his life, Anita Frazier, and to this union two children were born: Anthony and Adriane, who gave their parents two loving grandchildren. Later in life, Billy graduated from the Strom Thurmond Institute of Government. Billy was also the owner of B&A Decorators, Florence, SC.

In 1988, he was elected as Florence District 1 City Councilman for 23 years and served as Mayor Pro Tempore. He served in local, state and national capacities. Billy was one of the founders of the South Carolina Black Caucus of local elected officials, and he served as president. He was a board member of the National League of Cities and NBC-LEO National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials.

During his tenure on the Florence City Council, Williams fought for and spearheaded reform for better housing, education and healthcare for the citizens of Florence. His

accomplishments included the construction of the Cambridge Apartments, Coit Village Apartments and an affordable housing subdivision in Williams Heights, 15 affordable houses built in North Florence, and several Habitat for Humanity houses in West Florence.

In the area of education, Williams served as president of Wilson High School PTA and as a member of the Wilson High School Alumni Association. He organized the "Latch Key Kids Program of America," which was a partner between Florence School District 1 and the National League of Cities. He was one of the individuals responsible for the formation of the Weed and Seed program and served as an executive board member. Williams was a key advocate requesting that the Florence City Council appropriate funds for the renovation of the Boys and Girls Club, for which he served as a board member, and for the construction of the Barnes Street Recreation Center in West Florence.

In view of healthcare, Williams implemented a free discount prescription drug card that saved up to 20% on prescription drug costs for the citizens of Florence. He was a member of various social and civic organizations, including serving as a life member of the NAACP; Hiram Lodge #13 Prince Hall Masons, Pee Dee Consistory #197 and Crescent Temple #148, for which he served as Past Potente. He was also a board member for Savannah Grove Baptist Church and past president of the Brotherhood.

Williams was honored with the Palmetto Patriots Award and the National Service to Youth Award from the Boys and Girls Club of America for 15 years of devoted service.

LaShonda Nesmith Jackson, who was nominated by Williams to fill the council seat when Teresa Myers Ervin was elected mayor, said that many people were experiencing deep sorrow after learning of Williams' passing.

"A good heart has stopped beating. A wonderful soul has ascended to heaven. Mr. Billy was truly a man of integrity, wisdom, a man for all people."

She added that the love, legacy and impact he had will live on.

"He was a mentor, my friend, my confidant and father figure," said Nesmith Jackson.

Florence City Councilwoman Pat Gibson-Hye Moore said of her colleague that the two never mixed politics and friendship.

"Often he would come out to my house, and we would just talk," Gibson-Hye Moore said. She called Williams a "man among men" adding, "Sometimes people didn't realize how much he did to make our community better, not just from some people, not just for black people but for all people."

Tim Waters said Williams was an icon in the community, noting he was a master of bringing money to the city of Florence. He said that Williams worked on funding for the Boys & Girls Club and the Weed and Seed

program, among others.

Williams also previously served as the vice president of the Florence Community Development Agency and as chairman of the Florence County Democratic Party. He served as the mayor pro tempore on the council and as a campaign manager and field director for SC Senator Maggie Glover's campaigns. She said Florence has suffered a major loss, and that she owed much of her success to Williams and the late William DeBerry.

"Say what you will, but this O.G., this brother: Billy got it done," Glover said. "And his work will indeed speak for him."

Florence Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin won election to the Florence City Council over Williams in 2010.

Myers Ervin said she was sorry to learn of Williams' passing.

"With his passing, we also lose a voice who served not only on the council for 22 years but while doing his service he was a strong advocate for community development," she said.

After leaving council, Williams became chairman of the board of Pee Dee Healthy Start, a role he held until his death. Pee Dee Healthy Start Director Madie Robinson said Williams was dedicated and loyal. She added that he learned quickly about the mission and purpose of the organization and worked with the organization to secure new funding when a previous source was lost.

Williams is preceded in death by his parents, Charlie and Emma Myers Williams, and siblings, Herman Williams, Parnell Williams, Hattie Crews, Margaree Cannon, Iona Cusaac, Jestine Williams, Roscoe Hines, Mary Walker, Freddie Hines, and Mable Kelly. Those left to cherish his memories include his loving wife of 53 years, Anita F. Williams; son, Pastor Anthony D. Williams (Pastor Renee); daughter, Adriane (Frederic) Hutchinson; sisters and brothers-in-law, Clemmie J. Williams, Gloria Hines, Carolyn (Willie) Smith, Shirley Frazier, Mable Manigault, Frances (Leroy) Morant, Mary Ellen Frazier, John Frazier, Maxine Morris, Alvin (Elaine) Frazier, Queen Esther Frazier; two grandchildren, Jonathan Williams and Jade Hutchinson; and a host of family members and friends.





# ATTORNEY TIFFANY J. BROWN MAKES A CASE FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

Submitted by Tiffany J. Brown



Tiffany J. Brown

Florence native, Tiffany J. Brown, is owner and founder of the Law Offices of Tiffany J. Brown, LLC. A new attorney in the Pee Dee, she is currently licensed to practice in the states of South Carolina and North Carolina. Her firm is a faith-based operation that adheres to the motto: "Promising to Serve, Vowing to Commit." Family law, motor vehicle accidents, criminal justice and estate planning are all offered through the general practice firm.

Brown is a proud 2012 honors graduate of Wilson High School in Florence and a 2016 honors graduate of Benedict College in Columbia, SC, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in English. During her time at Benedict, she presented her scholarly paper, *The Reality of Truth: Applying the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* at the 24th Annual Conference of the National Association of African American Studies & Affiliates in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Before attending law school, Brown moved to Durham, NC and worked with the Wake County Public School System teaching autistic children. Attending North Carolina Central University School of Law was tops on her list as it is one of the most reputable HBCU law schools in the nation. She was selected to be a part of the NCCU School of Law

Performance Based Admissions Program, was admitted into the Fall Day Program in 2017, and graduated in 2020.

Brown is dedicated to giving back to her community, particularly to minority and small businesses. She was selected to serve as a guest speaker at the First Annual Small Business Expo on September 8, 2021, in Florence and is an active member of New Ebenezer Baptist Church, where she is a member of the Praise and Worship team. She also serves as an assistant secretary for the Florence Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and hosts a monthly show on her Facebook page called "Sweet & Legal Tips," during which she discusses legal topics while baking sweet treats with her grandmother.

"Success isn't about how much money you make. It's about the difference you make in people's lives." Brown strives to embody the essence of this quote by Michelle Obama with the aim of making a positive impact not just in the Florence community, but across the state and nation, too. She wants her peers to know: "There is nothing impossible with God."

If you are looking for an attorney who is honest, persistent and steadfast, call the Law Office of Tiffany J. Brown, LLC at (843) 610-7969, email [tjbrown@tiffanyjbrownlaw.com](mailto:tjbrown@tiffanyjbrownlaw.com) or visit [www.tiffanyjbrownlaw.com](http://www.tiffanyjbrownlaw.com).



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## SC PECAN MUSIC & FOOD FESTIVAL RETURNS TO DOWNTOWN FLORENCE

Submitted by the SC Pecan Music & Food Festival



Kids Zone (Photo credit to True Light Photography)

After a year off due to the pandemic, a rebranding, and a new website, the South Carolina Pecan Music & Food Festival is back and better than ever to celebrate its 17th annual return to Downtown Florence. This year, the stage is set with our biggest line-up of entertainment ever. The event takes place over nine blocks and has grown to become one of the state's most anticipated annual events. The festival was named "Best Fall Festival in South Carolina" by Travel + Leisure Online in 2017 and "Best Community Festival" by the Florence Morning News in its annual Best of the Pee Dee poll in 2014, 2019, and 2021.

This family-friendly event kicks off on Saturday, November 6, and will feature eight stages of live entertainment, amusement rides, a free Kids Fun Zone, STEAM Zone, classic car and truck show, Bike Like a Nut half-century and century bike rides, Run Like a Nut 5K/10K/Half Marathon (certified by USATF), over 250 food and craft vendors,

the Pecan Pub for craft brew enthusiasts, chalk art competition, arts demonstrations and more! We will also welcome back international live muralist, ARCY!, who will create a large-scale masterpiece in real time during the festival.

Musically, there is something for everyone with gospel, blues, country, jazz, dance, beach music, Motown, soul, and rock and roll. You don't want to miss our headline act, Grand Funk Railroad, performing live on the Florence Toyota Main Stage at Irby and Barody Streets starting at 5:30 p.m.

Looking to indulge in all things pecan? Our food vendors this year will have at least one item containing pecans on their menu, so you are guaranteed to find pecans anywhere you go. Pick up your bagged and covered pecans, pies, pecan treats and more from the Young's Pecan booth or at any one of the official Pecan Festival booths. Just look for the brown pecan flags or the giant pecan.

Make sure to bring the kids to check out the FREE Kids Fun Zone sponsored by HopeHealth on the lawn of the FMU Performing Arts Center on S. Dargan Street. It will feature live entertainment, inflatables, balloon sculpting, demonstrations, crafts and activities, and the Kids Zone featured entertainer, Circus Stella! We've even got something for pre-teens and their families to enjoy with our STEAM Zone featuring science, engineering, and robotics demonstrations and STEM career professionals.

COVID-19 precautions will be in place, including additional hand-washing and sanitizing stations, enhanced public health messaging, on-site COVID-19 vaccines, and capacity restrictions at typically crowded areas. All visitors are encouraged to observe social distancing and wear face coverings in crowded areas.

Don't go nuts looking for parking at this year's festival. Hop on



## SC PECAN CONT'D

the WBTW Park and Ride Shuttle, picking up at four different drop-off site locations throughout Florence and delivering visitors to festival grounds. For more information, including pick-up locations, visit our website. The Park and Ride shuttle is FREE and will run beginning at 9:30 a.m. every 20 minutes through 8:30 p.m.

*The festival runs from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m. and admission is free. Enjoy great food, fellowship, family fun, and of course, pecans. For more information and a festival map, visit our new website, [www.scpccanfestival.com](http://www.scpccanfestival.com) to see the full stage line-up and check out attractions. Find us on Facebook for updates and features leading up to festival day.*

## DUKE ENERGY HELPS BUILD SOUTH CAROLINA WORKFORCE

*Submitted by Ryan Mosier, Corporate Communications, Duke Energy - South Carolina*

**Duke Energy helps build South Carolina workforce with nearly \$200,000 in grants with focus on veterans, underserved communities**

- 10 organizations in the Palmetto State receive funding from the Duke Energy Foundation
- Grants strengthen programs that serve underrepresented audiences, including minorities and military veterans



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help grow the energy industry's workforce of tomorrow.

"We have a long history of targeting investments to have the greatest impact for our communities," said Mike Callahan, South Carolina state president for Duke Energy. "Part of that tradition has been a focus on helping to build a diverse workforce for the Palmetto State. These grants build on that by helping expand access to training opportunities for our nation's military veterans as well as minority and underserved communities. It is critical to continue that tradition and help strengthen the workforce pipeline needed to fuel the state's economic engine now and in the years to come."

These grants are part of Duke Energy's ongoing commitment to workforce development, which totals \$1.6 million over the past five years. As South Carolina continues its clean energy transformation, the Duke Energy Foundation is investing in programs that will build the next generation workforce as well as create access to training and job skills that fit current community needs.

For 80 years, the USO has been helping service members and their families transition from their service to civilian life. The organization continues that history of service with programs like the USO Pathfinder Scouts through which they work directly with transitioning service members and their families to identify personal and professional goals and connect them with the resources needed to accomplish those goals. Funds from the Duke Energy Foundation will expand an energy-specific track of the transition workshop offerings in South Carolina.

"Because of committed and trusted partners like the Duke Energy Foundation, the USO Southeast Region can continue to impact transitioning service members and their spouses in South Carolina with networking opportunities and educational transition programming, helping military families create a plan for success now – and for the future" said Raymond Whitaker, director of operations for the USO Southeast Region.

### Grant recipients

- Upstate Fatherhood Coalition – Pathways to Employment & Presence Program (\$5,000)
- Brothers Restoring Urban Hope – Interactive program for underserved students (\$10,000)
- South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind – Training for future careers in 3-D printing (\$5,000)
- American Association of Blacks in Energy – Scholarships for students majoring in STEM fields (\$15,000)
- University of South Carolina – Washington, D.C., internship program for minority students with focus on energy policy (\$56,000)
- Joseph's Outreach – Energy Industry Second Chance Pilot Program (\$25,000)
- USO – Employment readiness support to transitioning servicemembers (\$10,000)
- Upstate Warrior Solution – Program provides workforce training and assistance for justice-involved veterans in the Upstate (\$20,000)
- SC Future Makers – Program matches job seekers to employment opportunities, with a focus on military veterans (\$15,000)
- South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities – Provides \$2,500 scholarships to 12 minority students majoring in engineering (\$30,000)

### Duke Energy Foundation

The Duke Energy Foundation provides philanthropic support to meet the needs of communities where Duke Energy customers live and work. The foundation contributes more than \$30 million annually in charitable gifts, and is funded by Duke Energy shareholder dollars. More information about the foundation and its Powerful Communities program can be found at [duke-energy.com/foundation](http://duke-energy.com/foundation).

Duke Energy is executing an aggressive clean energy strategy to create a smarter energy future for its customers and communities – with goals of at least a 50 percent carbon reduction by 2030 and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The company is a top U.S. renewable energy provider, on track to own or purchase 16,000 megawatts of renewable energy capacity by 2025. The company also is investing in major electric grid upgrades and expanded battery storage and exploring zero-emitting power generation technologies such as hydrogen and advanced nuclear.

Duke Energy was named to Fortune's 2021 "World's Most Admired Companies" list and Forbes' "America's Best Employers" list. More information is available at [duke-energy.com](http://duke-energy.com). The Duke Energy News Center contains news releases, fact sheets, photos and videos. Duke Energy's illumination features stories about people, innovations, community topics and environmental issues. Follow Duke Energy on Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook.



## ABOUT SPHERION

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**LET'S GET TO WORK.**



# MAJOR PROJECTS UNDERWAY FOR THE CITY OF FLORENCE

Submitted by City of Florence



Project Urban Square Parking Deck

Florence is on the move this year with continued development planned throughout the city. Collaboration with community partners and investors creates a successful environment that improves the quality of life for residents. Efforts to improve

existing infrastructure and new construction projects are emerging and offer new economic opportunities and community rejuvenation.

Florence City Council took the first step on January 13, 2020 in laying out plans for the \$62.5 million mixed-use development located on West Evans Street across from the Florence City Center. The private investment in the property will total approximately \$50 million. Construction of this development will include a multifamily apartment building, a professional office building, a hotel and “high-density residential units” with the possibility of becoming townhomes or condos. The city’s plan to design, construct, maintain and operate street and pedestrian lighting, landscaping, sidewalks, a parking garage and a 1.5-acre park is underway, with the West Evans streetscape already complete. With the design plans halfway finalized for the parking garage, the completion for Project Urban Square is anticipated in five years.

Renovation of the downtown Carolina Theater and Florence Pharmacy is taking shape with the completion of the final design and is a highly anticipated project for downtown. The design includes a multi-use venue in the Carolina Theater space, accompanied by a restaurant in the Florence Pharmacy space. Construction is estimated to begin towards the end of this year. It will take approximately 12-16 months to complete.

Another major project that the city is undertaking is the Stormwater Capital Improvement Program. City Council recently adopted an ordinance issuing the sale of a \$7 million bond to fund various stormwater projects.



Work for the Stormwater Capital Improvement Program

Planned improvement areas include the Rebecca Street outfall, Oakland Avenue, Pennsylvania Street outfall, Dargan and Elm streets, Wisteria Drive, Tarleton Estates, Malden Drive, Thomas Road outfall, St. Anthony/College Park, and Sandhurst West. Stormwater

projects throughout the city will soon begin with preliminary research and survey work underway. The city also made an application and was awarded a \$4 million South Carolina Disaster Recovery Grant to fund infrastructure improvement projects in the Timrod Park neighborhood along the Coit and McQueen Street corridors; and a \$164,500 South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) 319 grant to fund a water quality project for Gully Branch.

The City of Florence recently received \$40 million in funding allocated by the third Florence County penny sales tax. This funding is for much-needed road repair projects to include corridor enhancements, intersection improvements, and road resurfacing. City staff identified 192 roadways to be a part of this project, which will take approximately seven years to complete. Currently, 12 roads are on schedule for resurfacing this summer/fall.

Addressing needed infrastructure improvements, planning for future economic growth and development, and building public spaces and amenities is essential in serving and maintaining a community while also enhancing livability and enjoyment for residents. There are many projects taking place in the City of Florence that continue the city’s progress and build upon recent successes. From large private-investment projects, such as Urban Square, to road resurfacing projects in our local neighborhoods, all are necessary to create an environment that keeps Florence moving Full Life. Full Forward.

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## **A FLAWLESS FOUNDATION** *by Jennifer Robinson*



*Katrina Niccole Judge-Woods*

Entrepreneurship Monitor showed that 17% of Black women are establishing or already operating new businesses compared to just 10% of white women and 15% of white men. Though that's impressive, the broader picture is a little less so. While Black female entrepreneurs take the lead early on, only 3% of them are running mature businesses down the line. Reasons for the drop-off point to obstacles in accessing capital as well as the types of businesses launched, which tend to be in crowded marketplaces with lower margins. As a Black woman proprietor, Katrina hopes to be among those who improve that percentage going forward.

Katrina is candid about her successes and failures as well as how they always led her back to a special place: her late grandmother's home in Pamplico. Her journey to k.Niccole ... the SALON&SPA began there, and she carries cherished memories of her grandmother, a strong woman who taught her many things. Surprisingly, Katrina's

Katrina Niccole Judge-Woods has a rich and unmatched foundation as a business owner and leader in the Pee Dee. She is a woman who maintains that her spiritual and familial foundations are why k.Niccole ... the Salon & Spa is unique to Florence. On her website, she describes it as an enterprise inspired by nature and "birthed by God to provide a place where all demographics and ethnicities are welcome."

Katrina is part of a growing trend. According to Harvard Business Review, a 2021 survey conducted in conjunction with the Global

passion was not originally rooted in cosmetology. Her plan in high school was to be an auto mechanic like her father. But her mother, having observed Katrina styling hair for her friends and family, recognized her daughter had a talent. Katrina's interest in being a hair stylist, however, was not particularly strong.

"It came too easy," she admitted. "I was always taught you had to fight for what you wanted and doing hair was too easy."

Still, her mother insisted that hairstyling was what she should do. In retrospect, Katrina is grateful for her mother's keen insights. She now views her long career in cosmetology through the lens of this quote: "Your gift will make room for you." In her 25-plus years as a hair artist, her gift has not only made room for her, but it has earned her a reputation as one of the most sought-after stylists in the area. As a Dudley Cosmetology University graduate, her talents were recognized in Atlanta during a hair show where she was commissioned to be a platform artist. Following this, she was offered positions in three well-known salons, accepted one and went to work. At her new



*The retTreatment Room - Womb Care/ V-Steam, A YONIQUE experience which aids various female issues.*



## A FLAWLESS FOUNDATION CONT'D



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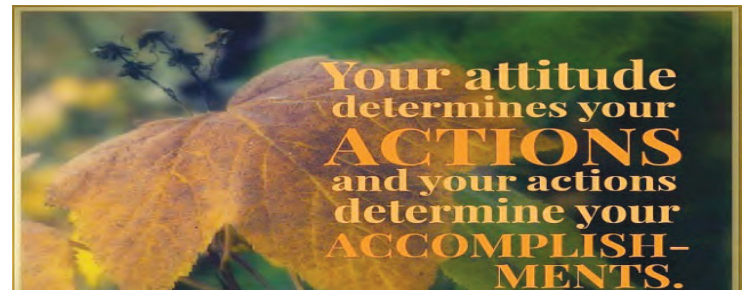
job, she observed a diverse clientele receiving personalized services with a VIP touch and learned that meeting the needs of every customer is essential to building a successful business. From tailoring appointments to individual needs to offering wine to enhance relaxation and enjoyment, each client left feeling cared for and refreshed. Adopting that aesthetic, Katrina aimed to deliver a similar experience, even when styling hair in her grandmother's home. She discovered that any environment could be an avenue for sharing her gifts and making others feel special.

Though the success she attained in Atlantic was gratifying, Katrina felt the pull of God and her mother to return home. Now a single mother with a baby of her own to care for, she knew she needed a support system. So, she opted to put her career on hold and leave Atlanta behind. As her mother drove her and her newborn son back to South Carolina, Katrina remembers facing uncertain plans for her future. Though her passion for styling was muted, she would often be reminded of her gift. Eventually, she regained her footing and returned to doing what she was gifted to do. Katrina worked in Orangeburg and Florence, and even went to work in Mississippi for a time. But

she was always drawn back to her foundation – her grandmother's home – where she continued styling hair and providing other services for her clients.

Though she was ready to take the next step in her career, Katrina was not sure what to do. But faith and persistence worked in her favor. K.Niccole ... the SALON & SPA came to fruition "after prayer and reminding God of his promises," she said. The business opened in March 2020 – just two weeks before the pandemic shutdown. Despite the seemingly unfortunate timing, Katrina found a bright spot. Unlike more established operations, k.Niccole did not have measurables by which to compare the current state of business. But Katrina reasoned that being such a new venture meant that every single customer gained was a plus. Choosing to adopt a positive attitude was a natural response arising from Katrina's firm foundation in family and God, the challenges she overcame on her journey and each success gained in her new enterprise. Who knew the journey from the big city lights and life of Atlanta to the rocky roads of small-town Pamplico would lead to living the dream ordained by her gift? The ones who helped her lay a flawless foundation, that's who: God, her grandmother, and her parents.

Learn more about k.Niccole...the SALON & SPA and the many services Katrina offers by visiting [kniccoletheSalonandspa.com](http://kniccoletheSalonandspa.com).



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# THE SMARTHUB APP EQUALS CONVENIENCE

Submitted by Joanna Arnsmeier, Community Relations Manager, Santee Electric Cooperative



**KINGSTREE** – Do you wish it was easier to pay your electric bill? Santee Electric has the answer for you: the SmartHub app.

What is the SmartHub app? It is a payment portal that gives members the ability to make payments right from their phones. SmartHub is so much more than your average billing

system – it also provides data on your hourly and daily power usage in detailed usage reports and provides account management in an all-in-one, easy-to-use system. SEC's SmartHub app includes a personal password-protected gateway and secure socket layer that guarantees your information remains confidential so you never have to worry.

SmartHub has a multitude of features. It allows you to pay your bill, report power outages, review your payment history, stop and start service, check on monthly energy use, and request maintenance. It also can notify you when your bill is due and allow you to pay it securely online or in the app, anytime, anywhere. The app also offers the option to sign up for autopayments. Just set your secure preferred payment method and let the account management go into autopilot. You will never miss a payment!

Again, SmartHub is more than just paying your bill – it can help you save time and money. In addition to the convenience, the SmartHub

app also gives details about your power bill by allowing you to track your energy usage. Monitoring your usage helps you to see when you are using more power than you mean to. It can help protect against high power bills by allowing you to see sudden increases in energy usage, which can indicate a problem. Most of the time, high usage can be explained by extreme temperatures, but sometimes it is because something is wrong like a pump running all the time or a thermostat causing heat strips to stay on 24 hours a day. Having the SmartHub app can help you catch anything unusual and identify problems faster. The SmartHub app is available to download through the App Store and Google Play.

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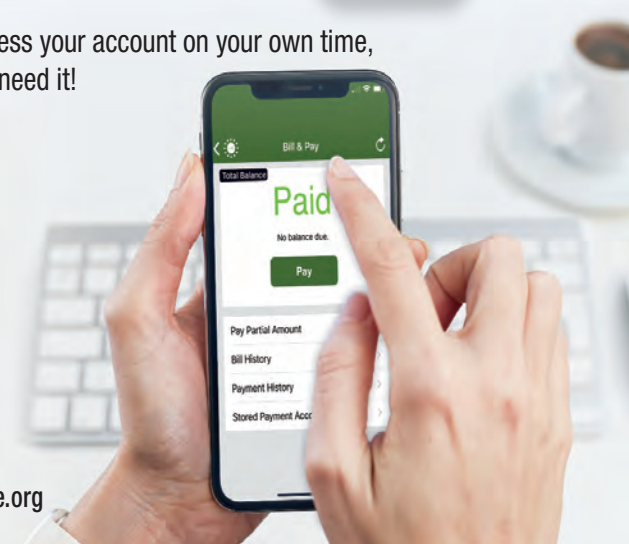


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# EXEMPLIFYING THE BENEFITS OF EDUCATION, ADVOCACY, SERVICE TO OTHERS

Submitted by Kelli Williams



Kelli Williams

**MULLINS** – Some people are born into opportunity and presented with advantages simply by way of birthright. And there are others who overcome test after test to rise to the occasion and not only seize opportunities for themselves but create a better way of life for others.

Kelli Williams is the latter. Born and raised in Mullins, SC, she decided long ago that her dreams of wanting more – not only for herself, but for those in her community – far exceeded any socioeconomic, racial, educational or sexist limitations. Understanding that a progressive education is the cornerstone of a successful career, she earned a bachelor's degree from Coastal Carolina University and an associate degree in Business Management from Miller Motte College.

Following graduation, Williams dared to dream a little bigger and create a career path that would not only allow her to fortify generational wealth for her future family, but to plant seeds of hope, faith and love throughout her community. With authenticity, a free-spirited, yet passionate nature, austere ambitiousness and servant leadership, she tirelessly worked to develop skills and experience to make endless room for herself and countless others.

As the CEO and lead business strategist of M-WAM Management Company, she has helped dozens of business owners and entrepreneurs better understand their niche and develop sound business strategies to use in building scalable and sustainable organizational structures. She also offers her expertise in business management and diversity projects as the SBIRT program coordinator for the MUSC Health Marion Medical Center.

In addition to her professional accomplishments, Williams is dedicated to the betterment of her community and provides compassionate leadership as an advocate, philanthropist and political leader throughout Marion County and the surrounding area. As a community activist, the founder of District 5 Coalition-Mullins, and a member of Emerge South Carolina, an organization supporting Democratic women in leadership positions, she believes in being the change she wishes to see in the world and not only talks the talk but shows up to walk the walk.

She does not try to paint a picture of perfection, however. After battling and defeating seven years of depression, countless professional setbacks, and overcoming the status of an “underdog,” her commitment to being a resource for judgement-free help to those in need is increasingly evident. As the founder and executive director of M-WAM BENEVOLENCE FOUNDATION, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, Williams works with fervor and unmatched faith in all her undertakings, an aesthetic demonstrated through her unwavering dedication to the service of others. She is also committed to authenticity and strives to meet people where they are to develop mutually successful, long-term relationships and partnerships.

*M-WAM Management Company is a group of strategists offering coaching and guidance as well as the tools for businesses to be successful as they strive to meet their success metrics. Learn more at <https://mwammanagementcompany.com>.*



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# RETHINKING GRIEF: THE HIDDEN IMPACTS OF NON-TRADITIONAL GRIEF

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** - Grief. It's a word we often use when talking about loss of life – but not a word we use to talk about loss within a different context like loss of hope, closeness to loved ones, or professional opportunities. The pandemic is a good example of how multi-layered grief can be. It caused some people to wait nine hours in line at the hospital in hopes that their loved ones would get needed care. Sometimes that wait ended without success. Others lost their sense of financial independence, opportunities to move

up in their careers, or the ability to spend time with the people they care about.

Someone grieving during the pandemic may not fully show up at work – and may not even know they're grieving at all. Perhaps their definition of grief only pertains to loss of life rather than the other pieces of their happiness and joy that were lost in the process. Suppressed grief impacts an employees' happiness, productivity, and ability to show up authentically in the workplace.

It's about time we rethink the concept of grief, how it shows up for people in the workplace, and what we can do to support those experiencing it.

## Non-Traditional Forms of Grief

There are several non-traditional forms of grief that tend to be overlooked in the business world. While they do not involve a physical loss of life, there is a loss of something – perhaps something an employee is no longer able to ignore because it impacts their ability to perform and do their best at work.

People are grieving the continuation of a global pandemic with no end in sight. The light at the end of the tunnel has shifted and many people are grieving the life, memories and freedoms they had pre-pandemic. The loss of a promotion or the opportunity to work on a highly visible project, or any missed opportunity for upward career mobility, could be a silent and painful low point in someone's life right now.

Someone may be grieving because they aren't meeting the expectations of others. Whether that's failing to perform well on a high visibility project or letting down a family member, people grieve the failure to meet expectations and contribute positively to someone else's success and happiness.

Someone may be grieving over missing out on special opportunities: concerts, vacations, birthdays and celebrations that were missed or had to be postponed. People may be grieving the loss of spending time with friends and family with no foreseeable reunion in sight.

People are grieving the loss of privacy. With work-from-home policies still dominating the business world, many people no longer have privacy or free time readily available. They may be wearing multiple hats as teacher, parent, cook, friend, and coworker without an opportunity to relax, retreat or enjoy peace and quiet.

People are grieving the loss of unmet dreams and life goals. Some people had to put their dreams on hold to become a parent, care for a sick family member, or make it through a stint of unemployment. Their dreams and ambitions have been hampered and, since then, they're grieving the loss of their longstanding dreams and goals.

People are grieving from isolation. Someone just packed up and moved to a new place, and they've lost a closeness to their friends, family and all things familiar. People are grieving the major impact of isolation in a new

place and the difficulty that comes with foraging new relationships in the future.

People are experiencing financial grief. The loss of income or a recent dependency on someone else for financial support may be impacting someone's mental wellbeing.

There are so many more examples of non-traditional grief that are overlooked in the workplace. It is clear to see all the ways the grief mentioned above might impact somebody's ability to show up fully at work.

## Expanding our definition of grief

There's more to grief than a loss of life. Expanding that definition to include non-traditional forms of grief like the loss of work opportunities, social connections, finances and more can create a new lens through which we view grief and the ways we can support those experiencing it.

Companies currently offering bereavement leave may want to include mental health or self-care time off. This special form of PTO would allow employees experiencing non-traditional forms of grief to take the time they need to work through it.

It's important to also take the stigma out of the words “mental health day.” People often think they need some chronic condition to take those days off. But, that's not true. Expanding our understanding of grief and encouraging the use of mental health or self-care time off can encourage employees to take the time they need to process grief outside of the workplace.

If maintaining the health and happiness of employees is an important part of your business, it's worth expanding the definition of grief and how your company can support people during these challenging times.

## Final thoughts

It's okay to grieve, accept what was, and release it. With non-traditional forms of grief, we open ourselves up for new opportunities to reflect, heal and show up fully. Expanding the definition of grief and giving employees the time off they need to process it can provide a new level of healing and presence in the workplace.

There's a responsibility that each employee and employer can assume to make sure non-traditional grief is recognized. If an employee is not willing to disclose that information to their employer, businesses will not be aware of the situation and the need to move towards action to support the person.

On the other hand, if the employer isn't thinking broadly about benefits like mental health or self-care time off, people may not feel the psychological safety to come forward and ask for the time they need to grieve.

This topic of non-traditional grief is something most organizations aren't processing. But, they should. When they do, the health, happiness and psychological safety of employees can grow and flourish. The way we think about grief can be turned on its head to support a broader array of challenges that impact an employee's ability to show up. When those non-traditional forms of grief are acknowledged, empathy, compassion, and authenticity can grow in the workplace.





# REEMERGE PROGRAM CONTRIBUTES TO LOW RECIDIVISM RATE

Submitted by Tiana Scarlett, Communications Specialist



Department of Corrections, Bryan Stirling, credits the herculean efforts by SC wardens, cabinet agencies and public and private partnerships in achieving this distinction. He also acknowledged the ongoing efforts of proactive reentry programs, including REEMERGE.

REEMERGE is a federally funded program by the US Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) and has provided aid to more than 100 returning citizens since its doors opened in 2018. REEMERGE assists returning citizens with career training, identification, entrepreneurship, life coaching, expungements, pardons and aspects of behavioral health.

Dwight James, REEMERGE program director, stated "The success of our program is rooted in the understanding that employable skills, mental health and life coaching are essential elements when establishing successful reentry plans. We are pleased that our efforts are playing a role in the state reaching a record low recidivism rate. That means we are making an impact on the lives of our clients, their families and our communities."

Active REEMERGE client, C. Wilkerson, is an example of life beyond incarceration. Wilkerson served 22 years in prison before being introduced to the REEMERGE program. The REEMERGE staff assisted him with completing his CDL training, and he recently formed an LLC to launch a cleaning solutions enterprise.

"You have to prepare for your next steps and have a realistic plan for

your life, so you won't end up back in prison," Wilkerson said.

James commended the SC Department of Employment and Workforce and the SC Department of Corrections Reentry staff for being a lifeline for REEMERGE during the height of the COVID-19 outbreak.

"As institutional partners, they enable a direct connection with referred individuals while still incarcerated," he said. "The access and coordination helped ensure clients had the basic identifications needed for securing a job, housing and benefits. This pre-release approach makes it much easier to prepare residents for employment or training once they are returned to their communities."

According to Stirling, 85% of incarcerated individuals will be released into the community within five years. Low recidivism rates add stability to families and communities, but it also saves taxpayers millions of dollars.

"We want to give them the opportunity to better themselves, so they won't return to prison," said Stirling.

Governor Henry McMaster shares the enthusiasm regarding the proactive reentry programs.

"Achieving these statistics takes vision, understanding and a belief that there are some who ended up behind the wire but want to get back on track. They can, especially when given the tools and opportunities to do so," he stated.

REEMERGE is dedicated to assisting formerly incarcerated persons with acquiring business acumen, achieving stable mental and emotional health, and gaining employment that provides a living wage.

## About REEMERGE

The REEMERGE reintegration program is federally funded through the US Department of Commerce MBDA and operated by DESA, Inc. For more information, contact Tiana Scarlett at (803) 722-1777.



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**Chris Goss**  
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# GET READY, GET READY, GET READY: YOUR HARVEST IS NOW!

by Dr. Grace Stephens



Dr. Grace Stephens

with hope and confidence that joy will come in the morning. Accordingly, we continued to sow seeds, even though they sometimes fell onto soil that may not have been fertile. Day in and day out, we had to find the wherewithal to take care of ourselves, our families, our businesses and other obligations. And we did all this while dealing with COVID, unemployment, death and illness of loved ones, and loss of homes, jobs and businesses. Our minds struggled to comprehend what was happening.

All of humankind have had to navigate unprecedented circumstances and muster every inch of strength and faith for this battle. We cry out, "Victory!" For the Lord knows the plans that He has for us – not to harm us but to prosper us and give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

## Our labor is not in vain

As Christians, we're taught to trust in the Lord during our times of trouble, plant seeds during days of tribulation and pain, and expect a harvest. We also know that "our labor in the Lord is not in vain" (I Corinthians 15:58b). Because of our faith in God, we believe our seeds will yield a harvest . . . so we continue to plant. For the past 18 months, we planted and believed it would pay off.

Like Noah, we've been believing God's word and planting seeds in preparation for what's to come. During this lull, many of us planted seeds for our future in the form of advancing our education, building our savings, starting a business, writing a book, praying and seeking God more fervently, tithing and sowing into others. These actions could be seen as risky, especially during these uncertain times, and some people may have called us crazy – maybe not to our faces but surely behind our backs. Each of these actions was a seed sown with hope of a plentiful harvest. But what else could we do given the circumstances? If we planted nothing, we were guaranteed nothing in return; if we planted something, there was a chance we would get some sort of return on our investment.



## Believe before seeing

Twenty-three million people lost their jobs in the month of April last year, and tens of millions more lost their jobs in the ensuing months, according to the Center on Education

and Workforce at Georgetown University. In another report from the Wall Street Journal, we learned that 200,000 businesses permanently closed in 2020. Whoa! Even the strongest Christians have asked, "What's the point of trying to plant anything in this continuous calamity? It would be a waste of time and resources if we did."

But King David, the author of Psalm 42:11, has something else to say about our circumstances: "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." Yes! That's what we ought to do – trust in the Lord and continue to praise Him despite what things look like and . . . get ready. We must put action to our faith (James 2:18), keep breathing, put one foot in front of the other, and keep our eye on the prize. We should anticipate that what we've planted and watered, God will make grow. After all, it's God who makes things grow, not us (I Corinthians 3:7).

As time passed, we waited – sometimes patiently, sometimes not so much – and we believed God that, despite everything that was going on in our lives and around the world, a harvest would come. Again, it seems kind of crazy to believe even though we can't yet see it, but this is the essence of faith – it's "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). As we've held on in faith, God has been pleased with us. Of course, we haven't always had the answers, and we may have been fearful at times. But the Lord is faithful through every battle and every trial, seeing us through every obstacle and past every roadblock.

We believed in God's promises and planted seeds expecting there would be a supernatural harvest – during a pandemic,



nonetheless. We understood that, with God on our side, nothing is impossible; we believed He would never leave us or forsake us, and we got ready for our harvest.

## It is harvest time

Now, the heavy lifting is done. We've planted and watered, and the waiting is almost over. It's time to harvest the growth God cultivated through our labor. God promises to reward those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6), and we believe He will honor the work of our hands with a supernatural harvest that will surprise and shock our biggest critics – all for His glory.

I'm here to tell you, friend, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens . . . a time to plant and a time to uproot . . . a time to tear down and a time to build" (Ecclesiastes 3:1–3). Why don't you take a moment now to thank God? Thanking God is never out of season, but as we enter the season of Thanksgiving, it's the perfect time to thank Him for His faithfulness and goodness to us and for the harvest He has so graciously prepared for us.

## Get ready! It is time to bring in the harvest.

Dr. Grace Stephens is one of America's leading advisors to Christian professionals and author of Amazon's No. 1 bestselling book, "I Am a Christian First: 12 Success Principles from the Diary of a Christian CEO." She serves as chancellor of MacCormac College in Chicago and is founder of the Global Christian Professional Women's Association. You can invite Grace to speak at your next ministry event or business conference or follow her online at [GraceStephens.org](http://GraceStephens.org).



# SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS AWARDS \$17,664,476 IN GRANTS

Submitted by Laura Baker, Communications Coordinator, SC First Steps



Marlboro County First Steps Executive Director Randall Johnson (pictured center) was presented a check for \$218,600 from SC First Steps Chief Partnership Officer Derek Cromwell (on right) and Program Officer Carletta Isreal (on left) at First United Methodist Children's Center in Bennettsville, S.C.

**COLUMBIA** – South Carolina First Steps has awarded its largest funding amount in more than 15 years – \$17,664,476 in grants to its network of 46 local First Steps partnerships. A combination of state, federal and private dollars, the funds will directly impact more than 30,000 children and will expand parenting programs, increase the quality of childcare, support positive transitions between early childhood and elementary school, and improve the health of South Carolina's youngest citizens.

The state's largest funder of early childhood programs in every county, South Carolina First Steps awarded \$14,435,228 in state funding to all 46 local First Steps partnerships, plus \$3,229,248 in federal, state, and private funds in targeted and competitive grant funding to help 44 counties expand and add new programs that successfully prepare children for school.

Georgia Mjartan, executive director of South Carolina First Steps, notes, "Investing public dollars in early childhood provides the greatest rate of return. For every dollar spent, we can track between \$4 and \$16 in societal benefits. The \$17.6 million we are investing today will produce an economic impact of as much as \$282 million for South Carolina. We are incredibly grateful to South Carolina's legislature and Governor Henry McMaster for their vision for a healthy, thriving future for all children."

South Carolina First Steps supports and funds a network of 46 county-level nonprofits. Each "local partnership" has a board made up of community leaders who employ an executive director and local staff. The partnerships run programs for families directly or in partnership with other local entities including school districts, childcare centers, libraries and museums. The grants awarded by South Carolina First Steps are matched with local philanthropic dollars and in-kind support, resulting in an even greater impact.

Children who participate in First Steps programs are 74% more likely to score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (given to all entering kindergartners) and are 34% less likely to be chronically absent from school. National and state-level research provides evidence that these programs work to ensure children are safe, healthy, and ready for school.

**Some highlights of this historic investment:**

- Funding is expected to nearly double the number of children and families served in the coming program year, compared to the current year.
- Fifty percent more children will be enrolled in "high-intensity" programs through which families engage with the program on a regular, sustained basis resulting in the greatest impact on children's long-term success.
- An estimated 1,700 rising kindergartners across 28 counties will have a better start to their first year in school thanks to expansion of Countdown to Kindergarten, a program in which the child's future kindergarten teacher visits them and their family at home and at school six times during the summer.
- Thirty-eight AmeriCorps members will be recruited, trained,

and deployed across 18 counties to provide family and community outreach, support and parent education using the HIPHY model (Home Instruction Program for Parents of Preschool Youngsters).

First Steps is now recruiting applicants across the state for a 10-month term of AmeriCorps service beginning September 3. An online application is available at [scfirststeps.org](http://scfirststeps.org).

For the state fiscal year that began July 1, 2021, the South Carolina General Assembly allocated \$14.4 million in Education Improvement Act funding for local First Steps partnerships. The First Steps AmeriCorps program is funded by a three-year grant from the United Way Association of South Carolina. Additional funding for local First Steps partnerships comes from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), a federal grant awarded to the South Carolina Department of Social Services by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, and from private and philanthropic grants and contributions. South Carolina First Steps is a primary partner for the PDG B-5 grant and provides 100% of the required state matching funds.

Additional funding for the expansion of Countdown to Kindergarten 2021 was made possible by supplemental Education Improvement Act (EIA) funding from the South Carolina Department of Education. Detailed information by county is available by contacting the local First Steps office or Betty Gardiner, director of Grantmaking and Development, at [bgardiner@scfirststeps.org](mailto:bgardiner@scfirststeps.org).

## HUNTER NAMED DCSD DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL

Submitted by Christopher McKagen, Communications Specialist



Dr. Ayesha Hunter

**DARLINGTON** – Darlington County School District (DCSD) announced in August that Dr. Ayesha Hunter will be the district's new director of personnel. The Darlington County Board of Education approved the hiring at the recommendation of the administration during its July meeting.

Hunter comes to DCSD from the Sumter School District, where she has served as principal of Bates Middle School since 2011. Prior to that, she served as a principal at Crosswell Elementary School and as an assistant principal at Bates Middle, Millwood Elementary and Wilder Elementary schools. She taught third, fourth and fifth grades at Crosswell Elementary from 1996 to 1999. She began working in the Sumter School District as an adult education teacher in 1996.

Since 2005, Hunter has also worked as an adjunct professor at the University of South Carolina, Southern Wesleyan University and Grand Canyon University.

She holds a Master of Education in Education Administration from Winthrop University as well as a Doctor of Education in Education Administration from South Carolina State University. She is certified as a superintendent, an elementary and a secondary education principal and through the School Leadership Executive Institute.

As director of personnel, Hunter's primary responsibilities will include planning and directing the district's program for recruitment and selection of the best qualified teachers and personnel. She will work closely with efforts to certify district information regarding educational experience, certifications and classifications. Additionally, she will coordinate employee scholarship programs and teacher/support staff incentives as well as maintain the job description manual and benchmarking of positions.



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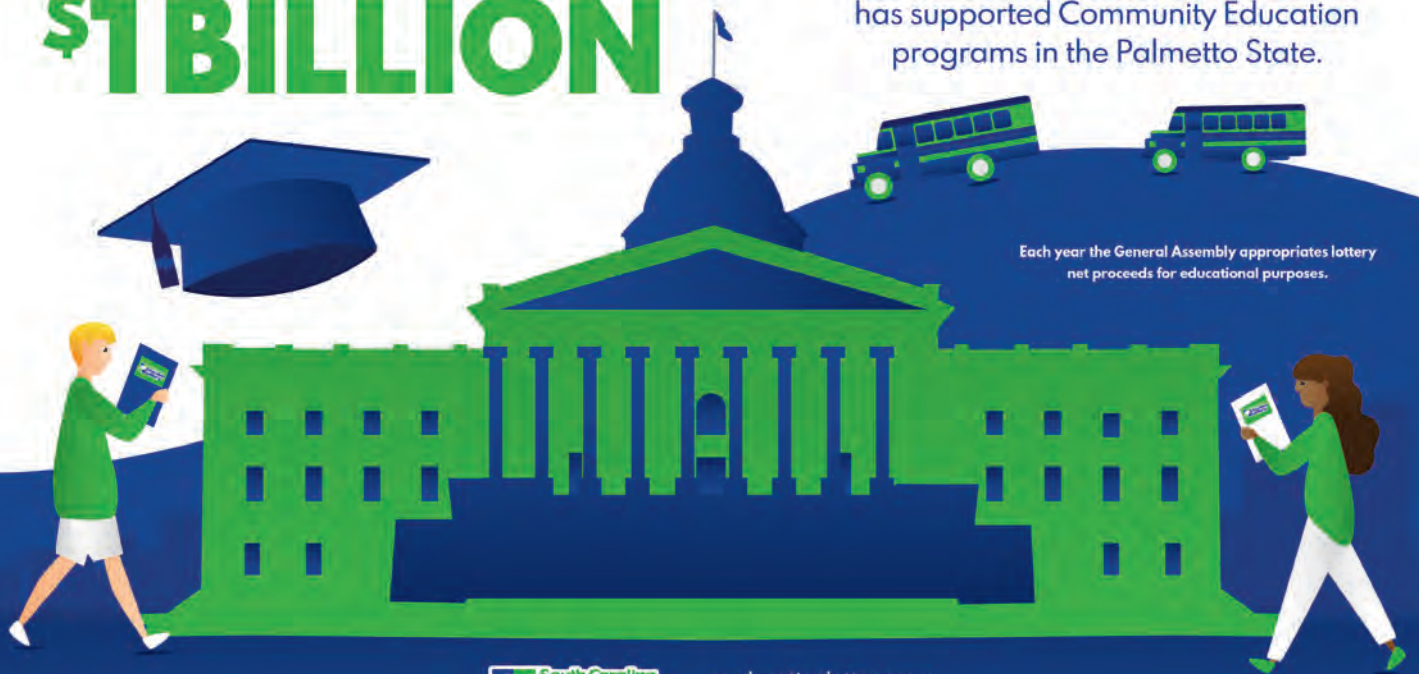
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# CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY

U.S. News and World Report **Best Colleges 2022** Rankings

Listed in Economic Diversity (Regional Colleges in South) – Highlights schools with the largest percentages of undergraduates receiving federal Pell Grants.

## 3rd Best Top Performers on Social Mobility

– Institutions who advance social mobility by enrolling and graduating large portions of disadvantaged students awarded Pell Grants.

## Top 10 Best HBCU

– Ranked among 78 HBCUs, however, Claflin is the #1 HBCU in South Carolina.

## 7th Best Regional College in South

– Institutions that focus on undergraduate education but grant fewer than half their degrees in liberal arts disciplines.

Listed in Best Undergraduate Computer Science Programs





# CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY REMAINS A TOP 10 INSTITUTION IN U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT

Submitted by J. Craig Cotton, Director of Public Relations, Office of Communications and Marketing



**ORANGEBURG** – “Claflin University not only survived – we thrived,” Claflin President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack proclaimed last fall after considering how quickly the university’s faculty, staff, students and alumni adapted to the massive disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. By transitioning to innovative teaching and learning modules and working cohesively as a team, essential administrative functions, academic departments, and other university programs continued to

operate effectively. Despite numerous challenges associated with COVID-19, Claflin achieved national accreditation for the School of Education, approval to launch the new Master of Science in Nursing program during the Fall 2021 semester, and record-breaking fundraising success.

Claflin’s accomplishments did not go unnoticed as U.S. News and World Report ranked Claflin in the “Top 10” on its list of the nation’s Best Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs) for the 11th consecutive year. Claflin is the only HBCU in South Carolina ranked in the “Top 10.”

The prestigious publication ranked Claflin seventh in the Best Regional College in the South category. Institutions in this group focus on undergraduate education but grant fewer than half their degrees in liberal arts disciplines.

Claflin was third in the U.S. News ranking of the Top Performers on Social Mobility for Regional Colleges in the South. Claflin is among the colleges that are more successful than others at advancing social mobility by enrolling and graduating large proportions of students awarded Pell Grants.

“These rankings reflect our ongoing commitment to academic excellence and student success,” said Warmack. “They also serve as a tribute to our outstanding faculty and staff that, during the past year, redefined teaching and learning at Claflin during a global pandemic. We applaud our students who also persevered and continued to pursue their dreams of earning a Claflin degree. Our leal and loyal alumni contributed to our impressive rankings by continuing to give generously to support our students and the mission of this historic university.”

The U.S. News & World Report’s Best HBCU ranking measures the quality of undergraduate education at historically Black colleges and universities. These HBCUs were compared only with one another for this ranking. A school must currently be listed as part of the White House and U.S. Department of Education’s Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities to be included in U.S. News’ HBCU ranking. To qualify for this U.S. News ranking, an HBCU also must be an undergraduate baccalaureate-granting institution that enrolls primarily first-year, first-time students and must be a school that is part of the 2022 Best Colleges rankings. In total, 79 HBCUs were eligible to be included on the list; 78 of those were ranked, and one was unranked. Regional Colleges rankings are split into four regions: North, South, Midwest, and West.

Claflin also made U.S. News and World Report’s lists of colleges recognized for efforts to achieve economic diversity and as a Best Undergraduate Computer Science Program among Regional Colleges in the South.



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### **U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges 2022 Rankings**

- Claflin was named a Top 10 HBCU for the 11th consecutive year and the No.1 HBCU in South Carolina

### **Also:**

- 7th Best Regional College in the South
- 3rd Best for Top Performers on Social Mobility

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## MORE THAN A DANCE

by De'Angela Haynes



Justine Roberts

**MULLINS** – Have you ever been awed by someone gifted and talented from a young age? Meet Mullins native Justine Roberts. The little girl who made the discovery of her life’s passion at the tender age of 7 by falling in love with the art of dance IS BACK! All grown up now, she turned her discovery and awesome passion into her own studio, the Justine Roberts Performing Arts Academy (PAA). With the addition of a STEM program, it underwent a name change and is now known as the Performing Arts & Science Academy (PASA).

With the support of her family, Justine majored in dance for two years at New York University before leaving to become a professional dancer with the world-renowned Alvin Ailey Dance Company. She continues as a professional dancer with various dance companies, including LaRocke Bay African Dance and Joyce Harrington Dance Company of New York. Roberts even had a role in the famous dance movie, “Fame.”

In 1993, she relocated to Mullins to teach dance, but the dance schools were not teaching the styles that were dear to her heart: Soul Modern and African Dance. She also noticed a lack of diversity in the dance schools. When offered the chance to teach dance at the Mullins Recreation Center, she recruited 75 to 100 students. In 1996, Justine obtained her certification and opened PAA. She then became an artist in residence with the PAA Players. The dream of owning a dance studio had come true, allowing her to nurture talents, create awareness of her art and give students the opportunity to dance.

Through the years, Justine grew her program with the assistance of enthusiastic students, parents and a welcoming community. Diversity is very much alive in her studio with her students ranging from ages 4 to 18, including all races and various styles of dance: Modern, African, Jazz, Ballet, Tap and Lyrical.

Her students have performed across South and North Carolina, some of them obtaining college scholarships. Many have pursued dance careers with professional companies, are working as dance teachers, or own their own dance schools. In 2010, the Performing Arts Academy became a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization.

After changing the program name in 2013, the Performing Arts & Science Academy





## MORE THAN DANCE CONT'D

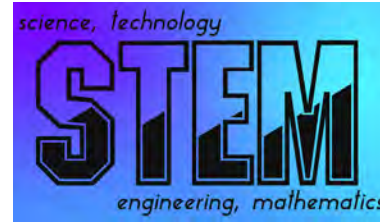


embarked on several different ventures in its mission to provide avenues toward community betterment. With an array of programs spanning the spectrum from food service to tutoring, PASA has provided positive outlets to the community's youth. Justine felt it was time to enhance, empower and enrich the students who participated in the program by implementing an educational STEM component. She added mathematics, science engineering and technology to the lineup as well as art, dance, drama, music, ELA and reading. After researching the negative educational outcomes in Marion County, Justine wanted to make a difference by giving the students the tools, skills and opportunities to succeed globally in education and the workforce arena – much in the same positive ways that dance has impacted their lives.

Justine added even more power to her punch by taking up the fight against child hunger and poverty. Since 2016, PASA has been a sponsor of the Summer Food Service Program through the South

Carolina Department of Education. In 2018, Justine added to her outreach by becoming a sponsor of the Child and Adult Care Food Program through the Department of Social Services. These programs work to improve, develop and maintain healthy diets and good eating habits. PASA provides thousands of USDA-approved meals throughout the community and the state. In 2021, PASA partnered with the B.O.O.S.T. program to sponsor the Y.A.S.L. (Youth Athletic Summer League), which affords community youth the opportunity to participate in sports. This program and the establishment of a Teen After School Center provide safe, positive and engaging outlets for young people. For Justine, reaching the youth of her community and beyond is more than a dance!

It is PASA's mission to enrich lives, cultivate positive characteristics, promote love for self and others, encourage community outreach through arts and education, and improve the health and well-being of



our community via access to healthy and nutritious meals and advocacy. For more information about the Performing Arts & Science Academy, located at 320 North Main Street in Marion, call (843) 433-8131 or (843) 230-1298.

## PDRTA, FLORENCE 1 SCHOOLS PARTNER TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

*Submitted by Melissa Rollins, Communication Specialist, Florence 1 Schools*



PDRTA and Florence 1 Schools are working together to ease district bus delays and get high school students to school on time. PDRTA Executive Director Don Strickland said he was glad to work with the district.

"I was certainly eager to assist in any way possible to help students reach school in a timely manner," Strickland said. "Students, teachers, parents and administration have been through difficult times in the last 18 months. PDRTA is here to help in the areas that we can."

Brandi Wetzel, assistant director of transportation for Florence 1, said the district appreciates PDRTA's willingness to partner with the transportation department.

"We want to thank PDRTA for their support in getting our children to school," Wetzel said.

A route is currently set up to run through the Oakland Avenue and Quinby areas to Wilson High School. Strickland said it would also be an easy transition if West Florence students want to ride the bus. He said there is an established stop across the road at the Beltline Drive Walmart and arrangements could be made for the bus to drop students at the school.

PDRTA has buses that run fixed routes throughout Florence on a regular schedule each day. Florence 1 high school students can board at any of the bus stops along the fixed route. They can also wave at a bus driver along the fixed route and, when it is safe to do so, the driver will stop. Students will need to show their district student ID when they board and they can ride for free.

Strickland said a great resource for parents and Florence 1 students interested in the bus service is the PDRTA-Sync app that shows routes running in real-time. Students can use the app to locate bus stops and track buses along their routes. Strickland also said parents can call the PDRTA dispatch at (843) 665-2227 option 2 for assistance finding the closest stop to their location.

Florence 1 students using the bus to get to school would not be the only young people using the buses, Strickland said. Teens within the community who are familiar with PDRTA are already using their service to get around town.

"We already have a lot of youth who ride the bus to the mall and other places," Strickland said. "We have talked to our operators and told them that students would be riding. Our drivers do a great job looking out for all the youth who ride our buses, providing a safe environment, and they will do the same for these high-schoolers too. All PDRTA buses are equipped with cameras and bike racks and are ADA accessible."

Florence 1 Superintendent Dr. Richard O'Malley said that Florence 1 board of trustees member Alexis D. Pipkins Sr. brought the option to his attention, and PDRTA board member George Jebaily helped coordinate between the two entities.

"This is a perfect example of working with resources in our community to solve a problem, and we appreciate the suggestion from Mr. Pipkins and the help from Mr. Jebaily," O'Malley said. "This opens doors for students because they can use PDRTA to get to school but they can also use it to get to their part-time job. There are students who want to participate in after-school activities but they rely on the school bus for transportation home. Now, some of those students can join a club, participate in a sport or other activity and use PDRTA to get home afterwards."

## FDTC NAMES DR. JERMAINE FORD AS PRESIDENT

Articles by FDTC



Dr. Jermaine Ford speaks to faculty and staff in the SiMT Auditorium.

Florence-Darlington Technical College has named Dr. Jermaine Ford to the position of president effective October 4, 2021. FDTC's Area Commission selected Ford after a national search for FDTC's fifth president. Latta native, Edward Bethea, will continue to serve as the interim president until Ford assumes the presidential role.

"On behalf of our area commissioners, we are very excited to welcome Dr. Jermaine Ford as our next president," said Paul Seward, chairman of FDTC's Area Commission. "Dr. Ford has worked his way up the ranks

through extensive education and work experience to prepare himself for this next chapter in his life. He brings a unique skillset based on his 26 years of experience between the private sector and higher education. Dr. Ford brings a high energy and collaborative leadership style which was on full display during the interview process. We look forward to supporting him as a board and moving forward with new strategic objectives that will allow FDTC to serve the Pee Dee Region. The commission would like to thank Mr. Ed Bethea for his service to FDTC during this period of transition."

Ford said he is honored to serve as the next president for Florence-Darlington Technical College.

"As a first-generation college student and advocate of underserved populations, this is a dream come true," he said. "I have dedicated my career to transforming lives and offering pathways to greatness through education. Florence-Darlington Technical College supports the economic and workforce development demands of the Pee Dee Region and the state of South Carolina. I would like to personally thank the Florence-Darlington County Commission for understanding my passion and drive for higher education. I look forward to working with Florence-Darlington Technical College's faculty, staff and students to bring growth, excellence and innovation. I take great pride in our technical college mission, and I am inspired to lead the charge for student success. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity and find it a blessing to serve. I look forward to our continued success."

Prior to accepting the position at FDTC, Ford served as the vice president for Workforce & Economic Development at South Louisiana Community College in Lafayette, La. During his time there, Ford grew the enrollment by more than 250%. He also created the college's first Center for Professional Development for faculty and staff development and increased unrestricted revenue by more than \$30 million.

After graduating with an associate degree from Moraine Valley Community College, Ford went on to earn a bachelor's degree at DePaul University, an MBA from the University of Phoenix and an Ed.D. in organizational leadership with an emphasis in higher education from Grand Canyon University.

He has been married for 22 years to Professor Khalilah Ford, and they have two daughters, Kailynn and Kaci.

## FLORENCE-DARLINGTON TECHNICAL COLLEGE PROVIDES TRANSFER OPTION



A FDTC Network Systems Management student works on an assignment in class.



The articulation agreement between Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) and Francis Marion University (FMU) now includes FDTC's Business and Network Systems Management (NSM) students.

FDTC students who earn an Associate in Applied Sciences through the Marketing, Management and NSM programs will have an opportunity to transfer directly into the

School of Business at FMU.

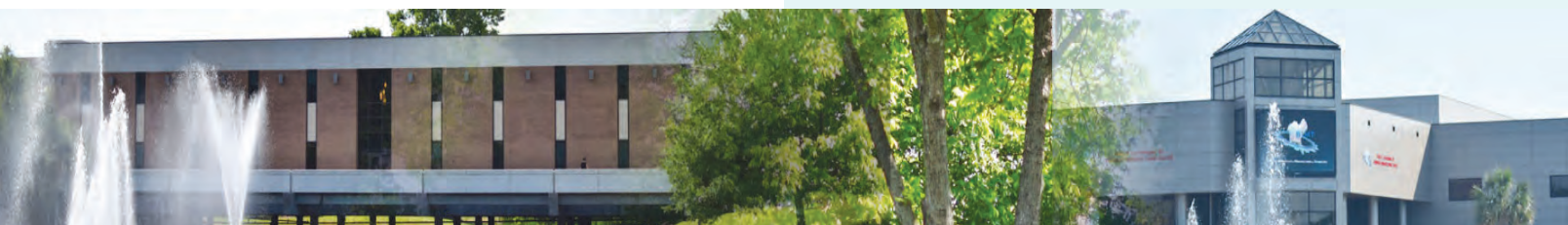
"The Business and Computer Technologies Department is excited that our students will have the opportunity to further their education and increase their earning potential. They can apply their associate degree toward a bachelor's degree at Francis Marion University," said Pete Gioldasis, FDTC department chair of Business and Computer Technologies. "After graduation from Florence-Darlington Technical College, not only will our students be employable, but they will be able to obtain their bachelor's degrees at Francis Marion University in only two years."

The students will enter the bridge program at FMU as juniors as they study to earn a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. This opportunity will help FDTC students save money as they advance through their higher education journey. The two institutions have worked together for years, but this is the first time there has been an articulation agreement for the business and NSM programs.

"We have always had a great relationship with Florence-Darlington Technical College and we look forward to working with them to fulfill our mission of providing more education opportunities for the men and women of South Carolina," said Dr. Hari Rajagopalan, dean of the School of Business at FMU.

FMU's Business School has a long tradition of placing their graduates in the workforce and is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). FDTC students participating in the bridge program must earn at least 25% of the required semester hours at FMU, and no more than 76 credit hours can transfer to FMU.

For more information on Business and Network Systems Management classes at FDTC, please contact Pete Gioldasis via email at [Pete.Gioldasis@fdtc.edu](mailto:Pete.Gioldasis@fdtc.edu) or call (843) 661-8126.







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# DCSD CELEBRATES READING RECOVERY, EARLY LITERACY TRAINING GRADUATES

Submitted by Christopher McKagen, Communications Specialist



Darlington County School District recognized several DCSD educators who graduated from Reading Recovery and Early Literacy training courses.

**DARLINGTON**— Darlington County School District (DCSD) recognized in July nearly one dozen teachers who graduated from Reading Recovery and Early Literacy training courses after completing a full year of graduate-level coursework.

The instruction is offered through DCSD's partnership with Clemson University's Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Training Center under the guidance and leadership of Kim Floyd, DCSD's Reading Recovery teacher leader.

"These teachers became a part of a community of learners dedicated to teaching young striving readers and improving instruction and student outcomes for all students," said Kacy Keels, DCSD's director of early childhood. "On behalf of DCSD, we want to extend our sincere appreciation to this group of outstanding educators for their dedication and commitment in making a positive difference in the lives of students."

At the conclusion of the training, four of the teachers became certified in Reading Recovery. They enrolled in four graduate-level

courses through Clemson University and earned a total of 12 graduate credit hours. In addition, they received credit for the Add-On Literacy Endorsement through Read to Succeed.

The graduate Reading Recovery teachers are:

- Ellen Oldland, Thornwell School for the Arts
- Irby Dubose, North Hartsville Elementary School
- Ashleigh Chaplin, Pate Elementary School
- Patricia McFadden-Moyd, Clarendon County School District 2

Additionally, Early Literacy teachers trained alongside the new Reading Recovery teachers. These teachers are primary classroom teachers who serve in schools where there is a Reading Recovery teacher or a Reading Recovery teacher in training. The Early Literacy teachers enrolled in two graduate-level courses through Clemson University and earned a total of eight graduate-level hours.

The courses are approved for two of the required Read to Succeed classes: Instructional Strategies for Reading and Assessment Strategies for Reading. Throughout the training, the teachers learned how to apply Reading Recovery instructional procedures to design-focused lessons with the goal of accelerating literacy learning for all students.

The Early Literacy Professional Development teachers are:

- Amanda Woodard, Pate Elementary School
- Carmen Blakney Bennett, Pate Elementary School
- Leigh Hixson, Cain Elementary School
- Kinsey Johnson, North Hartsville Elementary School
- Jennifer Brigman, J.L. Cain Elementary School
- Kim Edgerton, J.L. Cain Elementary School
- Breana Adger-Canty, Clarendon County School District 2

# FMU EARNS RECOGNITION AS A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

Submitted by FMU



Francis Marion University achieved top marks in all categories for the first time ever in the Great Colleges to Work For® survey. The recognition is based on a survey of FMU employees conducted by Modern Think, a leading strategic organizational development and management consulting firm that focuses on workplace excellence. The honor signals that FMU continues to maintain one of the finest workplace environments in the nation. Only a select few national institutions of higher learning are recognized each year.

While 2021 marks the ninth straight year FMU has been recognized by Great Colleges to Work For®, this is the first time the university has scored top marks in all categories. Complete Great Colleges rankings were published as part of the Chronicle for Higher Education's 10th annual Academic Workplace Special Issue in September. They are available on Modern Think's Great Colleges website at <https://greatcollegesprogram.com/list/>.

FMU is one of the 70 four-year colleges and universities in the

nation recognized by Modern Think's survey and one of 42 recognized as an Honor Roll school. It is one of two South Carolina institutions recognized as an Honor Roll institution for 2021.

The survey was administered to faculty and staff in universities across the country and compiled independently by Modern Think. Employees were selected randomly for the survey, which covers 10 different areas of work life. Dr. Fred Carter, FMU's president, says this year's rankings are the culmination of continued efforts by the university to build a welcoming and inclusive culture.

"Today's announcement is a testament to years of hard work and dedication from the faculty and staff here at Francis Marion University," Carter says. "It is because of these incredible people that FMU is a 'Great College to Work For' and that we are able to serve the state, this region and this community."

FMU's employees reported top scores in all categories: Job Satisfaction and Support; Compensation and Benefits; Professional Development; Mission and Pride; Supervisor/Department Chair Effectiveness; Confidence in Senior Leadership; Faculty and Staff Well-being; Shared Governance; Faculty Experience; and Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging.

The survey results are based on a two-part assessment process: an institutional questionnaire that captured employment data and workplace policies from each institution and a survey administered to faculty, administrators, and professional support staff. The primary factor in deciding whether an institution receives recognition is employee feedback.





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## FMU RANKED AMONG BEST COLLEGES IN THE SOUTH Submitted by FMU



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- Patricia McFadden-Moyd, Clarendon County School District 2

Additionally, Early Literacy teachers trained alongside the new Reading Recovery teachers. These teachers are primary classroom teachers who serve in schools where there is a Reading Recovery teacher or a Reading Recovery teacher in training. The Early Literacy teachers enrolled in two graduate-level courses through Clemson University and earned a total of eight graduate-level hours.

The courses are approved for two of the required Read to Succeed classes: Instructional Strategies for Reading and Assessment Strategies for Reading. Throughout the training, the teachers learned how to apply Reading Recovery instructional procedures to design-focused lessons with the goal of accelerating literacy learning for all students.

The Early Literacy Professional Development teachers are:

- Amanda Woodard, Pate Elementary School
- Carmen Blakney Bennett, Pate Elementary School
- Leigh Hixson, Cain Elementary School
- Kinsey Johnson, North Hartsville Elementary School
- Jennifer Brigman, J.L. Cain Elementary School
- Kim Edgerton, J.L. Cain Elementary School
- Breana Adger-Canty, Clarendon County School District 2



# CULTIVATING EXCELLENCE Submitted by Dr. Kandace Bethea, Superintendent



Dr. Kandace Bethea

**MARION** – Across this nation, school hallways are once again filled with students as well as new opportunities as the pandemic challenges us to rethink education and the way we do business.

In Marion County, we are excited about the work ahead and are incredibly excited about our new 2021-26 Marion County School District strategic plan, Cultivating Excellence. The plan will serve as a roadmap for us to cultivate excellence for each of our students through the implementation of multi-year initiatives that push us forward and closer to our goal of becoming “world-class.”

Traditionally, when we think about cultivation, we think about preparing land to grow crops or a garden. But to cultivate also means to try to acquire or develop a quality, sentiment or skill. Gardeners will get new baby plants with little roots and a tiny stalk. They will cultivate the soil and give the plants resources to grow into strong and healthy plants.

As educators, we cultivate young minds. We provide them with a well-prepared curriculum rich with knowledge. We then give them the resources to help their minds grow. Upon graduation, they are strong and prepared to continue their journey equipped with the tools to continue their own cultivation.

For the next five years, Marion County aims to:

## 1. Empower excellent student learning

Student success refers to every student meeting individual growth goals and accountability. Our passion for the success of our students motivates us to do what is needed to accomplish our goals by providing support for all.

## 2. Cultivate talented and empowered employees

Our staff is an asset. We work hard to retain talented staff while recruiting

year-round for new talent. Everything we do is an opportunity to recruit or retain new Marion County School District team members.

## 3. Support the whole child

We believe it is paramount to establish safe and supportive learning environments that promote social and emotional competencies of staff and students.

## 4. Connect and engage stakeholders

Effective communication creates opportunities for authentic dialogue and builds stronger working relationships. We strive to create a system through which students are engaged, parents are participating in school and at home, and there is frequent collaboration between the district and our community partners.

## 5. Adopt anytime, anywhere, any pace student learning

We commit to transforming how we stimulate the teaching and learning experiences for students through evolving technologies and innovative instructional practices.

## 6. Support equitable resource allocation

We strive to equalize the access and flow of resources to remove barriers and yield positive outcomes for all students.

In Marion County School District we are cultivating excellence.



Our surveys tell us the top 10 reasons teachers are choosing Marion County School District are:

1. Relationships with colleagues
2. Location and commute
3. Salary supplements and benefits
4. Strong leadership
5. Career ladder opportunities
6. Mentorship
7. Student loan forgiveness
8. Opportunity to receive a master's degree from local universities at a reduced cost
9. New graduates from college may receive an additional stipend of \$1,500
10. Make a **deep impact** in the lives of students -- now and on their futures

***Educating, preparing, and inspiring tomorrow's citizens and leaders.***

[www.Marion.k12.sc.us](http://www.Marion.k12.sc.us)



# HGTC FOUNDATION RECEIVES ADDITIONAL SUPPORT Submitted by HGTC



*(Pictured left to right) Tom Fox, Sheriff's Foundation of Horry County president; Teresa Bartelotte, HGTC Foundation accountant; Dr. Dan Wysong, HGTC assistant vice president for Academic Affairs/Dean; and Phillip Thompson, Horry County sheriff.*

**CONWAY**– The Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) Foundation was recently presented with additional support from the Sheriff's Foundation of Horry County in the form of a \$15,000 check. This latest donation from Sheriff Phillip Thompson, and Foundation President and Chief Deputy Sheriff Tom Fox, added funding towards the \$100,000 endowment for students attending HGTC in the Criminal Justice program. To date, the Sheriff's Foundation of Horry County has contributed \$100,000 for the scholarship.

"The purpose of the endowment is to support individuals who have chosen a career in the field of law enforcement by providing scholarships for criminal justice majors seeking a career in law enforcement or related field," said Sheriff Thompson. "By providing scholarship opportunities, we hope to increase officer retention through recognition, education and professional development."

"We are immensely grateful to the Sheriff's Foundation of Horry County for their continued commitment to HGTC and the criminal justice students in our community," said Neyle Wilson, HGTC Foundation president/CEO of Corporate & Foundation Relations. "Scholarships are an important financial resource to many HGTC students. A scholarship award is critical to a student who is struggling to pay for tuition or books and supplies. On behalf of the HGTC Foundation Board of Directors, I would like to thank the Sheriff's

Foundation of Horry County for their generous support."

The donation will help numerous students achieve their goals of attending HGTC to pursue Criminal Justice degrees for years to come. Many of the highly skilled graduates will proudly serve their local communities whether in law enforcement, the courts, corrections or juvenile justice.

HGTC President, Dr. Marilyn Murphy Fore, responded to the support by saying, "HGTC is grateful for the amazing support we have received from Sheriff Phillip Thompson and Chief Deputy Tom Fox at the Sheriff's Foundation of Horry County to advance the education for students in law enforcement. To receive such a generous donation for HGTC students, particularly during these times, encourages everyone at HGTC to be thankful for the positive impact made to help our students going into the outstanding career of law enforcement."

"The relationship between the Criminal Justice Program and the law enforcement community is extraordinary," added Dr. Dan Wysong, HGTC assistant vice president for Academic Affairs/Dean.

"The gifts received from the Sheriff's Foundation of Horry County will help provide current and future law enforcement officers the opportunity to seek college degrees without the debt. We sincerely appreciate all of the support for our students."

The purpose of the HGTC Foundation is to raise funds to support the programs, services and activities of HGTC, its students and employees, and to create and cultivate positive relationships between the college and the community.

The HGTC Foundation invites the community to become involved as the college continues to foster its reputation as a high-quality learning and teaching institution with a student-centered environment. The community can enhance this vision with financial support for scholarships, programs, facilities or other needs; donation of equipment or technology; mentoring students; providing internships; and service on various academic or foundation advisory boards.

To reach the HGTC Foundation, call 843-477-2105 or visit the website.



## JOIN OUR TEAM.

As Gators, we believe we're at our strongest when we support and celebrate our similarities as well as our differences. That's why diversity and inclusion are more than buzzwords at HGTC. It's about communities and individuals—students, staff, and professors who combine their own unique identities and views by working together.

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## **RUIZ FOODS FLORENCE ... WELCOMING ... OPPORTUNITY ... GIVING BACK** Submitted by Ruiz Foods

When you take a moment to talk to a Ruiz Foods Florence Team Member about their employment at Ruiz Foods, you will likely hear phrases such as: great place to work, opportunity to learn, welcoming culture, giving back is important and pride in accomplishment. “We have an amazing team here at Ruiz Foods Florence,” said George Jurkovich, Vice President of Operations, Ruiz Foods Florence. “I’m proud to be part of this dynamic group of people who take such pride in the El Monterey® and Tornados® products they manufacture. They’re dedicated and committed to each other ... and to the community.”

### **FREDDIE EVANS – OPERATIONS SUPERVISOR**

Just ask Freddie Evans, who will be celebrating six years with Ruiz Foods Florence in January, 2022. “I was fortunate to join Ruiz Foods Florence when they first came to Florence,” shares Freddie Evans, Operations Supervisor, “so I’ve been with the company since the first El Monterey® Burrito came off the very first line.”

Evans eagerly shares all the opportunities he believes Ruiz Foods Florence has given him. He began on the burrito production line. First line one when it started. Then line two when it started. Then he was given the opportunity to move over to the processing side and, then, to the bakery and later, another move to the kitchen. “I love a challenge,” explains Evans, “and I love learning. So, the more opportunity I had to learn something new the more I said to myself, ‘bring it on.’”

Well, ‘bring it on’ Ruiz Foods Florence did. Freddie was presented with opportunities for advancement time and time again. “He demonstrated a desire to grow with Ruiz Foods Florence,” said Jurkovich. “He’s definitely a hard worker and eager to learn anything and everything. I believe he will be an important contributor to our future here in Florence.”

But there’s more. Freddie Evans has embraced the Ruiz Foods Florence commitment of giving back to the community. “You’ve got to give back,” explains Evans. “It’s important and Ruiz Foods Florence gives us that opportunity. I like to call it ‘returning the love’.” Evans most recently participated in the Hospital Blankets Ruiz Cares project. And, in the past, one his favorites is reading scholarship applications for the Ruiz 4 Kids Scholarship Program.

For Freddie Evans, Ruiz Foods Florence is a great place to work. “Great benefits, good wages,” adds Evans. “I’m proud to work for this family business. I like to tell people that what you put in is what you get out.”

### **BRIAN HARRELSON – OPERATIONS SUPERVISOR**

It’s much the same ... but different ... for Brian Harrelson who began working at Ruiz Foods Florence in October 2016 as a packer.

“What I noticed right away was how welcoming people were,” shares Harrelson. “You know when you begin working at a new place, and it takes a while to get to know people? Not at Ruiz Foods Florence. Right away people were kind and welcoming.”

From a packer in 2016 to a lead of the packaging department in May of 2017, Brian loves the opportunity for growth and advancement at Ruiz Foods Florence. “I love to learn,” explains Harrelson, “and Ruiz Foods Florence has given me that opportunity. What’s great is with that learning comes growth and advancement.”

A firm believer in holding people accountable, “I like to look at myself as a coach,” says Harrelson. “I make it a point to know everyone that works with me by name, and I speak to them asking what I can do to help them and how can I help make their job better. It’s important, you know, to be able to mentor those that are looking for that. After all, we’re one unit and we work to strive and march as one unit. It’s like an ‘all hands of deck’ philosophy.”

“Brian is a great asset to the Ruiz Florence Team,” explains Jurkovich. “He’s a quick study and eager to learn.”

Wearing a Ruiz Cares shirt when Brian was interviewed, “I get involved as much as I can. I work second shift so sometimes it’s tough. It’s a good feeling knowing you work for a company – a family company – that cares about the community.”

### **OLIVER KOSHT - SCHEDULER, FINISHED GOODS**

Oliver’s journey is similar, starting January 4, 2016 in the bakery. “I was hired to stack tortillas,” said Kosht. “But, like Brian and Freddie shared before me, if you want an opportunity to learn and grow, Ruiz Foods Florence is the place. While I began in the bakery, I moved to the spice room, then to inventory control and the spice room, then to setting up production each morning. The opportunities just kept coming. And I even spent time at the Corporate office learning the new computer system in 2018. Fascinating is all I can say.”

“Oliver was a great asset to us learning the new computer system,” explains Jurkovich. “In fact, he became our ‘go to’ guy when we had questions or needed guidance. We called him a ‘Super SME’ (Subject Matter Expert) which helped promote him to the Scheduler role he has today.”

Oliver has been a scheduler of finished goods since November of 2019. And it’s becoming a bit of a family tradition. Oliver’s son, James Warren, “but everyone calls him Danny,” shares Kosht, has been working at Ruiz Foods Florence for six months. “He works in the bakery ... just like where I started.”

Ruiz Foods Florence offers Oliver a challenge. As he puts it, “it’s not a boring company. Each day is different and there is definitely room for advancement if you’re willing to learn and if you’re serious.”

Again, like so many at Ruiz Foods Florence, the opportunity to give back to the community is important, too. “I’ve been donating part of my paycheck to Ruiz 4 Kids since day one,” shares Kosht. “I love the Mini-Grants for Teachers Program because the money I donate goes right to the teachers in our area. It’s the right thing to do.”

### **COURTNEY PECH**

Last but certainly not least, by a long shot, is Courtney Pech who started as a tortilla thrower on line 2 in April, 2016. “I never held a manufacturing job,” shares Pech, “but I didn’t want a desk job. Ruiz Foods Florence was hiring but, unlike most manufacturing companies, wasn’t requiring experience. So I saw an opportunity and took it. This is exactly where I belong. I like it a lot.”

Since her beginning at Ruiz Foods Florence in 2016, Courtney has held many positions within the company ... bakery, packaging, kitchen ... even quality assurance for over a year. “The challenges and the opportunities to learn new skills is amazing,” shares Tech.

So when asked why she decided she wanted to go for a Supervisor’s position, Courtney was quick to say, “Why not, it’s a great opportunity and I do like opportunities.”

As a Supervisor in training, Courtney believes she is making a contribution to Ruiz. “I work hard to help Team Members ... the way I believe I was helped. I tell them that if they can show drive and initiative they will see opportunities open up before them at Ruiz Foods Florence. And I tell new Team Members to give me two weeks after they start ... two weeks and trust me that after that it will be easier. You see, I can remember my first two weeks. I felt muscles I never knew I had. But after that second week, well, I knew I could do it ... and I did.”

An athlete most of her life, Courtney believes in and understands the concept of teamwork. She believes in cross-training the Team Members that work with her. That way, everyone grows and everyone can be available to help each other if and when needed. “Courtney is a real enthusiastic Team Member,” shares Jurkovich. “She works hard to help others so they can grow and willingly shares her experiences and recommendations.”

### **KIM RUIZ BECK**

“I thoroughly enjoy the opportunities I have to meet the Team at our Ruiz Foods Florence facility,” shares Kim Ruiz Beck, Chairman, Ruiz Food Products, Inc. “There is an eagerness here, an eagerness to learn ... and a dedication to each other and to the products they make. And when it comes to embracing our commitment to give back to the community? Our Florence Team Members are simply just amazing. I am so pleased we are a member of the Florence business community.”





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# EMOTIONAL RESCUE: STRESSORS OF PANDEMIC by Jennifer Robinson



Javonna Muldrow

If there was ever a time when people needed emotional checkups, it was between March 2020 and now. Our world was turned upside down thanks to the rapid spread of a deadly virus of which little was known. It was stated repeatedly that everything had to be “shut down,” and people were not allowed to leave their homes except for necessities and emergencies. For several months in 2020, people were confined to their homes without any information about when the pandemic would end. People began

sharing on social media about their mental and emotional struggles. Their struggles stemmed from feeling trapped or experiencing triggers from being in one place too long. Unfortunately, many could not cope with not being able to interact with other people for long periods of time and acts of desperation played out.

While emotional wellness is related to mental wellness, they are not the same. Being well emotionally refers to the ability to process feelings in a healthy, positive way and manage the stress of everyday life. Javonna Muldrow, LPC, a centralized intake/mobile crisis supervisor at Pee Dee Mental Health, said that to understand mental struggles, it helps to know that thoughts create behaviors that lead to behavior responses. Emotions are how we feel, and mental issues lead to what we do. It’s about functionality.

“When people are emotional sometimes, it’s because they have difficulty coping with challenges and change,” she said. “There are also stressors in their lives. Sometimes what is perceived as mental struggles could be emotional.”

Stress can be escalated by poor diet, lack of rest, job struggles

or family issues. Help or treatment is sometimes not accepted because of mental health stigma.

“Negativity surrounding counseling comes from misunderstanding and patients not agreeing with mental health professional diagnoses. It is important to help people understand their emotions and that there are tools to assist,” said Muldrow.

It is important to help people understand their emotions, and there are tools to assist. This year, encouraging everyone to take this time to raise awareness will help monitor emotional wellness and allow for sharing about emotional wellness to help friends, colleagues, and loved ones. It is crucial to understand what emotional wellness is, how to identify it and how to enhance it when others are struggling or need a boost. No matter where people stand on the coronavirus pandemic and other hot button issues like the social and racial justice movement, everyone can admit that circumstances in the U.S. have been stressful. For many, the pandemic has been traumatic, and it helps to understand emotional wellness.

“The Covid era has caused disconnection,” said Muldrow. “People began to long for human and emotional connection. Creative connections, such as social media and virtual meetings, have increased because people desire communication. So, they do not have to be reminded of their isolation, social media small groups or platforms were implemented to relieve the pressure of anxiety.”

Self-care is important during such times, she noted.

“Some healthy choices for wellness are rest, setting boundaries, healthy diet, time management and avoiding alcohol and drug use. These healthy choices encourage stability.”

Pee Dee Mental Health has various care and crisis programs to assist people with emotional health. The Mobile Crisis Unit is effective in assisting those who require help during and after hours. They have a greater reach for mental and emotional health assistance because they can travel to rural locations. Visit their website at [peedeementalhealth.org](http://peedeementalhealth.org) or call (843) 317-4073.

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## ADDRESSING RISE IN PANDEMIC-RELATED SUBSTANCE ABUSE

*Submitted by Megan Adkins, Prevention Specialist, Circle Park Behavioral Health Services*



Megan Adkins

The COVID-19 resurgence has arrived with a vengeance. The current predominant strain of the virus known as the Delta variant is causing case numbers to surpass those from the height of the pandemic in 2020; the numbers from this year’s Labor Day weekend alone were four-times higher than at any point last year. Mask mandates and social distancing measures have returned, along with mounting hospitalizations and escalating uncertainties concerning the

upcoming months. This resurgence is a jarring shock to the world after experiencing the encouraging downward trend in infections this past spring and summer. The rejuvenation of the warmer months has vanished and been, understandably, replaced with anxiety and apprehension. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to take a considerable toll on the population, inducing heightened stress levels and instability, leading to an exacerbation of mental health issues and substance use disorders.

The coronavirus has irrevocably disrupted daily life as people learn to navigate inconceivable difficulties. In 2020, individuals were forced to deal with overwhelming and stressful conditions, ranging from unprecedented loss of employment, isolation from loved ones, and increased mental health issues. According to a CDC

MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS  
 problem, stigma, suicide, psychology, society, human, mental, illness, disorder, personality, mind, depression, addiction, bipolar, risk, care, stress, trauma, anxiety, phobia, neurology, problem, behavior, response, emotion, function, coping, challenge, change, difficulty, perceived, struggle, stressor, diet, rest, job, family, help, treatment, stigma, misunderstanding, diagnosis, awareness, emotional, wellness, connection, communication, isolation, social media, platforms, anxiety, self-care, boundaries, healthy diet, time management, alcohol, drug use, stability, assistance, rural locations, website, call, peedeementalhealth.org



## ADDRESSING RISE CONT'D

survey, 40% of adult respondents reported at least one negative mental or behavioral health condition in 2020, with 10% reporting suicidal ideation. Mental health conditions such as anxiety and depressive disorders have been on the rise since the onset of the pandemic, particularly affecting individuals aged 18-24. A 2021 study of 240 U.S. adults found that social anxiety symptoms significantly increased during the COVID-19 shutdowns, with many still coping with isolation's lingering effects on their comfort level in social situations. Researchers predict that the pandemic will have lasting negative impacts on mental health, given the traumatic nature of public health crises. According to the American Psychological Association, social isolation is linked to increased rates of depression, anxiety, and poor sleep quality. Loneliness was a mounting concern among psychologists even before the pandemic and has now been further magnified by the current crisis.

The pandemic has also had detrimental effects on those struggling with substance use disorders. Overdoses doubled in Florence County during the pandemic with national numbers surpassing 94,000, according to the CDC. This is the highest number ever recorded for a 12-month period. Synthetic opioids, particularly fentanyl, have been the primary driver behind the increase in overdoses. Alcohol consumption also exploded in 2020 with a study from the National Library of Medicine reporting 60.1% of participants affirming an increase in drinking since the onset of the pandemic. Unfortunately, an increase in substance use was also found among the adolescent population. According to a Journal of Adolescent Health study, frequency of alcohol and cannabis use increased, with 31.6% using substances with peers via technology. Adolescents were unable to celebrate significant life events, such as graduation and prom, and experienced increased boredom, loss of loved ones, and heightened academic stress from virtual instruction. Another study also showed that parents adapted a more lenient attitude

towards underage drinking with 1 in 6 participants allowing their adolescent to drink with family during the lockdowns compared to zero in 6 before the pandemic. With upward trends in overdoses and substance use disorders, it is crucial that drug and alcohol education be presented to communities and that residents are made aware of treatment and intervention services available in their area.

Given these distressing trends and circumstances, Circle Park Behavioral Health Services remains committed to the residents of Florence County to provide prevention, intervention and treatment services to those coping with substance use and mental health disorders. Seeking help for these issues can feel like a daunting task, but it is imperative that people recognize that they are not alone in these struggles. Circle Park offers a wide array of resources, including medication-assisted treatment utilizing Suboxone, Subutex and Vivitrol for those struggling with opioid and alcohol use. We also provide peer-support services that capitalize on the support of our own staff who are in long-term recovery and help patients navigate the treatment and recovery process. Our treatment providers implement Trauma-Informed Care, with emphasis on stabilization and a holistic treatment approach. For more information regarding these services, contact Circle Park at 843-665-9349 or visit us on our website [www.circlepark.com](http://www.circlepark.com).

We are also pleased to offer a 16-bed residential treatment facility for women diagnosed with a severe substance use disorder. It is located at 1430 S Cashua Drive in Florence County. Designed to provide a nurturing and therapeutic environment, the center offers a unique opportunity for children, up to the age of 10, to continue living on-site with their mothers for 90 to 120 days. The center offers a wide array of treatment services, including group sessions, medication-assisted treatment and general medical care. For more information regarding the facility, contact the Chrysalis Center at (843) 673-0660 or visit [www.chrysaliscenter.com](http://www.chrysaliscenter.com).



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Developed with funding from the S.C. State Opioid Response Project (federal grant #1H79T1081720-01).





# UNDERSTANDING VITILIGO: STIGMA, MYTHS AND LACK OF A CURE ADD TO SUFFERERS' ANXIETIES by Jennifer Robinson



**NORTH MYRTLE BEACH** – In the 1980s and early 1990s, pop star Michael Jackson drew criticism and judgement because his skin transitioned from a warm caramel complexion to pale and colorless. People said he was ashamed of his culture

and was conforming to European standards. He often stated for the media that he had vitiligo, but the public outcry called for people to “cancel” him for not accepting his blackness.

Vitiligo (vit-ih-LIE-go) is a disease that causes loss of skin color in patches. The discolored areas usually get bigger with time, and the condition can affect any part of the body. It can also affect hair and the inside of the mouth. Normally, the color of hair and skin is determined by melanin. Vitiligo occurs when cells that produce melanin die or stop functioning. While vitiligo affects people of all skin types, it may be more noticeable in people with darker skin. The condition is not life-threatening or contagious but can create stress and make you feel bad about yourself. Treatment for vitiligo may restore color to the affected skin, according to the Mayo Clinic, but it will not prevent continued loss of skin color or a recurrence.

Mitzi Royall Love founded the non-profit organization, For the Love of Vitiligo Ministry, in April 2021 to raise awareness. She learned she had the condition more than 10 years ago when a spot was discovered on her back. Then, it began to spread on her right hand. Her health wasn’t normal, and she experienced menopausal symptoms, low level hemoglobin levels that led to a blood transfusion, and other symptoms. She saw a doctor who referred her to a specialist. As a cancer survivor, and because little is known about vitiligo, she researched the condition to learn more.

Here are a few “knowns” concerning vitiligo:

- Currently, there is no cure.
- Treatments, which vary in effectiveness, include phototherapy, topical steroids, calcineurin inhibitors and bleaching. Insurance coverage can be spotty as some companies consider treatments to be “cosmetic.”
  - Only 0.5 to 1% of the world’s population has vitiligo, according to Yale Medicine.
  - Vitiligo is an auto-immune disease; genetics may be a determining factor in development of the condition.
  - Psychological stressors may trigger vitiligo.
  - Vitiligo can affect mental health, causing depression and anxiety due to societal pressures. This can lead to social stigmatization, shame, avoidance of intimacy, adjustment disorders, fear, suicidal ideation and other psychiatric morbidities.
    - Having a family member with vitiligo or another auto-immune disorder seems to increase the risk of developing the condition.
    - Research is ongoing at major medical universities with some promising new treatments on the horizon.

Love has helped spread awareness about vitiligo as a guest speaker at several events, including the Myrtle Beach International Culture Festival and through participation in World Vitiligo Day 2021. Learn more about For the Love of Vitiligo at [fortheloveofvitiligo.com](http://fortheloveofvitiligo.com).

## Vitiligo: Facts and Myths

**MYTH:** People with vitiligo are born with patchy, uneven skin because they have mixed-race parents.

**FACT:** Vitiligo is not related to ethnicity of the parents and most people with it have even skin pigmentation at birth.

**MYTH:** Only dark-skinned people get vitiligo.

**FACT:** Vitiligo affects people of all races equally; however, it may be more noticeable in people with dark skin.

**MYTH:** Vitiligo is related to other skin diseases such as skin cancer, leprosy, and albinism.

**FACT:** Vitiligo is a completely separate condition and not related to skin cancer, leprosy or albinism. It is thought to be an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks and kills cells that make skin color, called melanocytes.

**MYTH:** Vitiligo only affects skin you can see, such as on faces and hands.

**FACT:** White or light patches caused by vitiligo tend to occur more commonly in sun-exposed areas, such as hands, feet, arms, face, and lips. However, these patches can also occur in the armpits, groins, eyes, navel, genitals and rectal areas.

**MYTH:** Vitiligo is made worse by eating certain combinations of foods.

**FACT:** Vitiligo appears to be entirely unaffected by food choices.

**MYTH:** People with vitiligo are often impaired with other physical and mental disabilities.

**FACT:** Generally speaking, most people with vitiligo are vibrant, normal individuals with a life-altering, but not necessarily life-threatening, skin disorder. The disease may be more common in people who have other autoimmune disorders, such as:

- Hyperthyroidism—an overactive thyroid gland
- Adrenocortical insufficiency—the adrenal gland does not produce enough of the hormone
- Alopecia areata—patches of hair baldness
- Pernicious anemia—a low level of red blood cells caused by the failure of the body to absorb vitamin B12

(People with vitiligo should make regular doctor appointments to monitor for these and other potential conditions.)

**MYTH:** You can predict who will have vitiligo and how extensive the disease will be by looking at them.

**FACT:** There is no superficial way to predict who will have vitiligo. The diagnosis of vitiligo is made based on a physical examination, medical history, and laboratory tests, sometimes including a biopsy.

**MYTH:** If you see someone with vitiligo, you should turn the other way because it’s contagious.

**FACT:** Vitiligo is neither contagious nor infectious, and there’s no way to get it from someone else. So, there is no reason to avoid people who may have visible signs of the disorder.

Learn more about vitiligo from the American Academy of Dermatology at <https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/a-z/vitiligo-overview>.



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# CROWNING GLORY: WIG STORE OWNER, MARLISA SMALLS, RESTORES CONFIDENCE, SPREADS LOVE

by De'Angela Haynes



Marlisa K. Small

**LITTLE RIVER** – Beauty is one of the most trending topics transgenerationally. A lot of people want to look attractive, so they do various things to enhance their inner and outer beauty.

Having your hair styled, for instance, may be a priority for some women, whether as a person who takes pride in her appearance or a professional who needs to maintain a put-together look.

And in some cultures and religions, a woman's hair represents her glory crown. But those who are sick or battling cancer may experience side effects from their conditions and treatments, including loss of hair. Many women with cancer report this as one of the most devastating aspects of chemotherapy as they associate their hair with their womanhood.

Marlisa K. Small, herself a cancer survivor, sees it as her job to ensure no one suffers low self-esteem related to hair loss. As a thriving entrepreneur, she is making tremendous strides and impacts through her business: Marlisa's Wig Studio & Day Spa in Little River, SC. Small was diagnosed in 1991 with cancer and is a 28-year survivor. While she says she is not defined by her cancer experience, she has been inspired by the strength and courage she sees in other survivors, those just learning about their illness and those already undergoing treatments. Anyone going through cancer treatment who comes to the Wig Studio is provided a custom new wig free of charge.

Small has helped cancer patients from Ocean Isle, Sunset Beach, Calabash, Holden Beach, Longs, Little River and North Myrtle Beach. She has also sent wigs across the United States and internationally. People from practically anywhere can send her a photograph and she will work with them.

Small is a highly active member of her community with a reputation for performing good works. She is a member of the North Myrtle Beach Ladies Club and a former Ms. South Carolina Senior America, having represented South Carolina in 2018. She last competed in Atlantic City in October, where she shared information about her nonprofit, Wigs for Cancer, Inc. and placed in the top 10. She received a standing ovation and brought the house down with her competition performance of Martini McBride's "I'm going to love you through it."

Small was named Rotarian of the year 2009-2010 and recognized for her fundraising successes for the North Strand Homeless Shelter. She has awards of recognition from the local veterans center. She received the Martin Luther King Community Service Award for 2017 for her service to the community. She promotes a wig and makeup class alongside Tami Wilcox Fogleman of Tami & Co to help women look good and feel better about themselves. And she works with other cancer awareness programs such as TR's Cancer Fighters. A patriotic woman, she is often called upon to sing the national anthem at events.

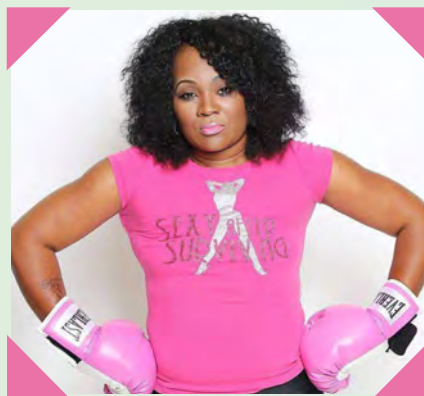
Small also gives her time and talents to raising money for many causes in the community, including two annual fundraisers.

One is Bold & Beautiful Wigs for Cancer, which provides free, custom, high quality wigs to those going through cancer. The money raised at her annual gala funds the efforts; in 2017 alone, the event raised \$42,000. Her other fundraiser is Camp Kemo, the participants of which she calls her Bold & Beautiful Buddies. These are children going through cancer who attend camp for a week. In 2018, she joined with others in the community to raise \$32,000 to send kids to camp.

Always looking for ways to inspire others, Smalls is out there every day bringing awareness and changing the lives of those experiencing the side effects of cancer. She is an asset and gift to our community, region and state, a trailblazer who continues to use innovative ways to enhance the beauty and lives of others.

Anyone interested in the gala can call (843) 424-1638 and purchase tickets or donate to the fundraiser. Marlisa's Wig Studio & Day Spa, located in the heart of Little River at 1561 Hwy 17 North, is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment.

## "HAPPY BIRTHDAY" LATONYA WILSON



It is sad to announce the passing of a wonderful person, Latonya Wilson from Sumter, South Carolina who devoted her time and energy to increasing awareness of and funding for, Metastatic Breast Cancer. Latonya's story was told in the Diversity Works Magazine for Breast Cancer Awareness in October 2020, but sadly Latonya lost her battle with breast cancer August 7, 2021. Because of all the work she has done with breast cancer advocacy I am trying to reach all outlets to celebrate her life this month. When I think of breast cancer awareness I think of Latonya Wilson and I want to honor her birthday which is Oct. 23rd and Breast Cancer Awareness month in a special way. We want to say Thank you for all your contribution and hard work in bringing awareness to breast cancer as you will be truly missed!

- Sister Malanda Williams







Breast Cancer Awareness





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# GET THE FACTS ON BREAST CANCER.

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around the world, and  
in the U.S. it's every

**2 minutes.** 

About **281,550 women** and about  
**2,650 men** will be diagnosed  
with breast cancer in the U.S. this year.



About  
**1 in 8 women**  
in the U.S. will  
get breast cancer  
in her lifetime.

It is estimated that

**90% of people**

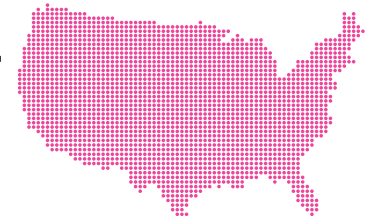
will survive **5 or more years**  
after being diagnosed  
with breast cancer.

**In non-metastatic invasive breast cancer**

There is estimated to be more than

**3.8 million**

**breast cancer  
survivors in  
the U.S.**



**Breast Cancer** is the leading cause of cancer death in women,  
after lung cancer. The chance of a woman dying from early stage  
breast cancer is estimated to be **1 in 39 (about 2.6%)**



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# MAKING GOOD ON A SECOND CHANCE: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF CANCER

Articles by De'Angela Haynes



Dorothy Hines

**HARTSVILLE** – When it comes to life, we encounter situations that throw us off course, challenge us and sometimes even threaten our lives. There are those people, however, who not only manage to survive in these instances but actually thrive. Dorothy Hines, a 77-year-old, two-time survivor of breast cancer, is one such person. She is more than familiar with how cancer can run through a family's history. She is also determined to break

that cycle and live her life to the fullest.

Dorothy's journey toward cancer awareness began in 1980 when she lost her mother, Estelle Shelton, to stomach cancer. At that moment, she faced the reality that cancer was something she needed to research and tell other family members about. She also experienced the loss of two of her mother's sisters to cancer. But when her sister, Cornelia Blackwell, died of lymphoma in 2005, the prevalence of cancer in the family began to alarm her. Dorothy started getting regular check-ups, though she was feeling fine. For a while, no serious health issues arose, but in 2007, that changed. After a routine mammogram, she received a phone call from her doctor asking her to come into the office. She learned her mammogram had shown a suspicious area, so another was needed to confirm or rule it out. When the same result was given, a biopsy was ordered. It showed that Dorothy had breast cancer.

She discussed with her doctor two options: a lumpectomy or breast removal. Then she sat down with her husband. Ultimately, Dorothy decided to have the lumpectomy, and the

procedure was performed in July 2007. She also had to have 32 radiation treatments. As expected, it was not a great experience and she developed skin irritation and cracking. Still, she continued to follow up with her healthcare team with hope and prayer. Eventually, it looked like she had beat the disease. Things improved for her, but not so for another sister, Gladys, who died of stomach cancer in 2009. Dorothy became fearful that she would also die of cancer. When she developed a rash and drainage from the nipple of her once cancerous breast in 2011, she immediately alerted her doctor who ran some tests. The results showed the cancer had returned, but this time in the nipple. After more tests were done, which were scary and painful, the decision was made to remove the breast right away.

Though the surgery was successful, Dorothy's recovery was challenging thanks to pain, drainage, a tedious healing process, and numerous doctor visits. Getting the liquids and blood she needed during the healing process posed challenges, too. Underneath the surface, there was always the fear of the cancer returning and spreading. But happily, that chapter in



Dorothy Hines cancer "Free"

Dorothy's life had a positive ending.

"We are now in 2021, and to God be the glory because I am cancer-free for nine years – I hope!" she said.

Dorothy understands she is still on her journey and must remain vigilant. Instead of being sad and doubtful, though, she is determined to make good on this second chance at life. She is breaking the cycle of cancer running rampant in her family and grateful for her life and health.

## MORE THAN A SURVIVOR



Sundi and her daughter at a Relay for Life event just after she was diagnosed.

**CHARLESTON** – Sundi Herring was late scheduling her annual mammogram. The 45-year-old mother of a 15- and 10-year-old had a busy season upon her. Schools were virtual and she was trying to revive a challenging fundraising year for the American Cancer Society. On top of that, she and her husband were planning and replanning their 20th anniversary trip as the COVID rules kept changing.

Sundi knew she needed to get that mammogram. Her first call after Christmas break was to her primary care doctor to get things going. As Associate Director of Development for the American Cancer Society, she regularly preaches "Early Detection Saves Lives." Her mom and grandmother both had breast cancer in their mid and late 60s. She had already been told her breasts were dense; still, she felt no lumps or bumps. The "girls" looked the same. She banked on her dad's genes.

After her call, things moved slowly as there was a COVID backlog of patients needing routine care. It took three weeks to get in with her primary care doctor and another week for the mammogram, which showed an abnormality. It took several

more weeks in which she underwent a sonogram, biopsies, and the wait for biopsy reports. Finally, on April 1st (yes, April Fool's Day) she got the call from her oncologist. Her tests pointed toward ductal carcinoma in situ. It seemed small, and the path to lumpectomy and radiation seemed clear. But they would do an MRI for one more confirmation and order some genetic testing. In the end, they discovered the cancer larger than suspected and a mastectomy was the only option.

Sundi sat in shock at the plastic surgeon's office, her mouth agape as she looked at naked torsos of women and weighed options for implants and reconstruction. The question stood out in her mind: "When did this become my life?" There is a one in eight chance that a woman in the U.S. will find herself asking the same question, according to the American Cancer Society. Sundi knew this figure by heart – but not IN her heart. Looking at those pictures really hit the message home. So many are scarred by this mean disease, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

After the shock of accepting the final decision of a double mastectomy and reconstruction, Sundi thought of the others she knew – her mom, coworkers, her Making Strides Against Breast Cancer friends and volunteers. Early on, she made the decision to share her story knowing there is healing in coming together and sharing feelings. She had witnessed this as the manager of



## MORE THAN A SURVIVOR CONT'D



*Sundi Herring holding her pathology report showing she's cancer-free.*

the American Cancer Society Hope Lodge, a free home-away-from-home for cancer patients in Charleston. Sundi wanted and needed to connect with fellow survivors and thrivers. She shared personal updates on social media. She called them to connect. Her family and community carried her in big, small and heartbreakingly beautiful ways. Memories of their love light shone through the darkness of her weeks of recovery. Today, Sundi is cancer-free. Luckily, she was in the 3%

of patients who hear, “We got it all – no further treatment is needed.”

It is Sundi’s prayer that she can continue to be a part of others’ healing and use her voice to remind other women to get screened often and early. She also hopes others can understand the word “we” is at the forefront of the word “wellness” for a reason – each day we can support others as they face challenges like breast cancer. After all, we are better together.

Sundi is not just a survivor – she’s a survivor committed to helping other women be one, too.

## FACING DOWN A RARE CANCER

*by Jennifer Robinson*



*Connie Goethel*

Imagine having symptoms of breast cancer and having cancer in your breast, but not having breast cancer. Huh? This was the case for Connie Goethel, who was not only shocked to learn she had cancer in her breast, but that it was a rare form called Burkitt lymphoma. While Connie’s is not an isolated case, living with a rare cancer in the breast raises

awareness for many who may not be visiting their doctors for regular checkups. Goethel learned that sometimes symptoms may mimic one disease but be identified as something else.

She began feeling as if her body was not “responding” as it normally should. Plagued by hot flashes and sweats, her husband encouraged her to seek medical attention. Living in California at the time, she was hospitalized, and tests revealed her surprising diagnosis: Burkitt lymphoma. It was already wreaking havoc on her body, and she was moved to the ICU to have her blood cleaned through dialysis.

So, what is Burkitt lymphoma? According to WebMD, it is a form of non-Hodgkin lymphoma originating in immune cells called B-cells. It is a highly aggressive cancer that can weaken the immune system and quickly become fatal. The good news is that more than half of those diagnosed can achieve long-term survival with early treatment and intensive chemotherapy.

There are different types of Burkitt lymphoma, including an endemic (African) variant characterized by tumors of the jaw or other facial bones. The gastrointestinal tract, ovaries and

– as in Goethel’s case – the breasts may be affected as well as the central nervous system where it can spread, inflicting nerve damage, weakness and paralysis.

Other symptoms associated with Burkitt lymphoma include:

- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Fatigue
- Night sweats
- Unexplained fever

Goethel struggled with her treatment, which consisted of a PICC (peripherally inserted central catheter) line for chemotherapy. She also underwent radiation and a bone marrow transplant. The chemo was difficult but Goethel gained healing strength from her support system. This included her spirited niece, Raychel, who visited while Goethel was hospitalized for treatment and accomplished something no one else had.

“When Rachel threatened to drive my red convertible Mustang, it woke me up!” laughed Goethel.

Her experience, along with those of friends who have survived cancer, ignited a forum for educating others. Goethel began sharing her personal story and volunteering with Heroes of Hope, a non-profit organization that acts as a kind of “giving circle” of people who spread awareness about pediatric cancer, raise money for research and coordinate programs that benefit young cancer patients.

Connie is also an advocate for support groups, believing the support system is pivotal to the healing process. Her affirmation is “I am meaner than cancer!” – another way of saying she is a courageous survivor, a positive force for other survivors, and a dedicated community educator. She hopes her story enlightens those who may be experiencing symptoms they do not understand. Goethel wants them to know that there is no shame or embarrassment in seeking medical attention when things just don’t seem right.

To learn more about Burkitt lymphoma, visit [lymphoma.org/aboutlymphoma/nhl/burkitt](http://lymphoma.org/aboutlymphoma/nhl/burkitt). Find more information on Heroes for Hope at [www.sofiashope.org/heroes-of-hope](http://www.sofiashope.org/heroes-of-hope). For cancer statistics, other survivor stories, and ways to contribute to research for cancer, visit [acsheroes.org](http://acsheroes.org).





# COMFORT WITH PASSION: SUPPORT GROUPS EASES WORRIES OF CANCER PATIENTS

by Jennifer Robinson



Myra Davis

Myra Davis, a breast cancer survivor, is very much aware how important it is to have as much peace of mind as possible when battling a disease. She is working hard to help ease the worries of other survivors who are dealing with financial burdens on top of the ones created by their illnesses.

When Davis was diagnosed with cancer in early 2017, it was devastating news. But she prayed and asked God to help her with what she knew was going to be a difficult journey. She completed all her treatments in the first year following her diagnosis.

“My treatment was a long process of four strong and 12 light chemotherapies and 32 radiation sessions,” Davis said. “I am glad to be here to testify about God’s goodness.”

Though it was unpleasant, she forged great relationships with some wonderful people – others with cancer who were also receiving treatments. Davis learned about their stories and how they were coping with their processes. Her new friends shared details about their health, families and, oftentimes, financial struggles as they went through chemotherapy and radiation. Those stories filled her with compassion, and she felt the need to encourage them even though she was going through similar trials.

Davis remembered the stories of a friend who died from cancer and how they talked about the financial struggles of going through treatment – something many people don’t consider. The hard reality is that certain insurance plans do not adequately cover some of these treatments. Based on her friend’s experiences as well as the other patients she met while receiving

radiation, Davis knew she had to do something.

“Not only did I have compassion for those who were enduring treatments, but I developed a passion for helping others,” she said.

One of the nurses at the center noticed how Davis interacted with the other patients and suggested she start a support group. Though hesitant, Davis felt it was “a nudge from God.” She asked Him what to do and He gave her a name for her mission: Comfort with Passion.

Comfort with Passion is an

organization that financially assists people on their cancer journeys. Most people are not aware of the many ways, big and small, that they can give comfort and help to cancer patients during chemotherapy and radiation. Being

on the frontlines, the dedicated health care teams at these treatment centers typically work hard to make sessions more manageable for their patients. For example, after surgery to have her lymph nodes removed, Davis’s treatment center gifted her with a heart-shaped pillow she carried with her everywhere. It provided her much comfort and inspired the name of her ministry.

Comfort with Passion raises money through fundraisers to assist cancer patients with gas expenses for travel to treatments, snacks during hospital stays, and to help cover the costs of healthcare when insurance coverage falls short. Davis said she is grateful for the calling and looks forward to what’s next.

To purchase a T-shirt, make a donation, or learn more about Comfort with Passion, visit their Facebook page: Comfort with Passion People Helping Cancer Patients.



Comfort with a Passion

Breast Cancer Awareness



Myra Davis





# Breast Cancer

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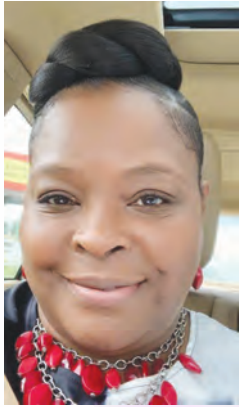
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## PEE DEE COALITION SHELTER DIRECTOR OFFERS VICTIMS A BEACON OF HOPE

by Anna Bowman



Shonette Dargan-Richardson

To some people, the phrase “Life isn’t fair” is just a cliché. But to women seeking shelter because of domestic violence, it is a frightening reality made even more terrifying when their child or children are also in danger. Since 1989, the Pee Dee Coalition Emergency Safe Shelter has been a welcoming beacon of hope for women and children when their lives abruptly fall apart because of domestic violence or sexual abuse.

A referral call to the Emergency Safe Shelter can come at a moment’s notice from a police officer, client, an advocate, or a hospital staff member seeking shelter for a victim. When the call comes, Shonette Dargan-Richardson, the shelter program director, along with an entire professional staff, is waiting to help clients begin the process of putting their lives back together again. The healing begins the first day a client enters the shelter, said Dargan-Richardson, an 8 ½-year veteran of the agency.

“We talk with them and make them feel at home,” she said. “We provide a private setting in the main office where we can take an assessment of the client’s situation. This assessment helps us to find out what the client’s needs and goals are.”

Welcoming the clients into a compassionate environment starts with a tour of the facility in which they are introduced to other residents, assigned a room and provided with a care packet of daily essential items such as soap, toothpaste, a toothbrush, deodorant, shampoo and conditioner, clean towels, bed linens and clothing if needed. All too often, clients arrive with only the clothes on their back.

As the Shelter Program Director, Dargan-Richardson said her ultimate goal is to ensure that we provide a safe environment and meet the needs of the clients. She stated, “We have nine staff members that work at the shelter, which includes my position as well,” said Dargan-Richardson, “The shelter staff consist of Advocates, Night Weekend Relief Workers, a Children’s Advocate, a House Mother, and myself. The responsibility of the staff is to advocate on behalf of the client. Tasks include setting goals, making referrals, transporting, attending court, facilitating groups, and providing direct services. And because domestic violence can occur at any time, the shelter is equipped to provide coverage after hours and on the weekend to complete the intake process and provide direct services to the client. As the shelter director, Dargan-Richardson is available 24/7 should an emergency or need arise.

Too often, children are a part of the domestic violence scenario and present a unique predicament that must be addressed during the intake process. The staff at the shelter are highly experienced in meeting the needs of these children, including ensuring they can continue their education. Dargan-Richardson noted that the well-being of the child’s education is a high-priority focus.

“We have built a relationship with the school guidance counselors and principal,” she said. “We have a children’s advocate who works with the mother and the school to register

the child(ren) in school. We also advocate and assist with transportation to and from school until arrangements for bus pick-up are complete.”

Providing food, clothes, shelter and schooling are important components for a child during such traumatic experiences. However, the staff also knows that a child’s mental well-being and his/her ability to adjust to their new situation are paramount to their overall health. Their new environment can cause issues that need special attention. This is a specialty of the children’s advocate who intervenes in a key role once the mother signs an affidavit to allow counseling for the child. Counseling for the child can be done through play therapy, cognitive behavior therapy and other therapy techniques, said Dargan-Richardson.

Because of the pandemic, only 12 to 15 women and children can be accommodated at this time in the two-story, 6-bedroom safe house, which includes a downstairs bedroom that is handicap accessible. Families can stay up to 60 days but that can be increased or decreased depending upon the needs of the client. There are support groups at the shelter to meet with the women and talk about the signs of abuse and the importance of having safety plans. In the event a client completes her stay or wants to leave for any reason, the staff coordinates with local community partners to assist with housing referrals. The New Beginnings Transitional Shelter, located in Marlboro County, is a new phase of the program that will allow clients to stay up to two years if needed.

It is difficult to see clients who have experienced trauma arrive at the shelter, said Dargan-Richardson.

“First and foremost, I and my shelter staff know we are in this role to serve clients who have survived hard and difficult times,” she said. “In realizing this, our entire purpose for being here is to help empower women and children. We aim to ensure that clients are safe – that alone is so gratifying, knowing we have contributed to saving a life – not just saving a life but helping that client to become empowered to become the survivor that they are. This is a reward, and it keeps us serving our community.”

As the shelter program director, Dargan-Richardson also assists in recruiting and training staff, volunteers and interns. “I attend various community events and presentations, sharing information about domestic violence, sexual assault, the services we provide, and the needs of our shelter program,” she said.

To ensure the clients are being well cared for, Dargan-Richardson engages in self-care to stay focused and achieve balance in her own life.

“I take time off when needed and I encourage my staff to take time when needed as well,” she emphasized.

A Florence native, Dargan-Richardson is married to Marvin D. Richardson Sr.; they are parents to six adult children and three beautiful granddaughters. She is a graduate of South Florence High School (1989); Limestone College (AA Business Administration); Coker College (BA Psychology); and South University (MA Professional Counseling).

She is also the pastor of Outbreak Cathedral Ministries in Lamar, SC, which she lovingly describes as “The small church with a big heart.” When not working, she enjoys spending time with her family or watching her favorite television channel, HGTV.



**A MOTHER'S LOSS** *Articles submitted by Naomi Project*



What can I tell you about my first born, Kendra Nakeel Johnson, affectionately known as “Honey”? First, Kendra was a daughter, a sister, and mother of a son, Kaleb Elijah Council. He was just a teenager when his mother was murdered.

The second thing I would like for you to know about Kendra is that she could light up a room with her smile and her bubbly personality. If she was your friend, she was your friend no matter what. Since she was a little girl, Kendra never met a person she would not hold a conversation with. My mother called her an “old soul” and said she was the oldest young person she had ever known.

Kendra was born on October 27, 1978 at Marion Memorial Hospital. She weighed 6 lbs., 7 oz. and was 18 inches long with a head full of curly, black hair. For the first six months of Kendra’s life, all she did was cry. I had Kendra when I was 18, my last year of high school. She was my little honey – my ride or die. I never thought I could love anyone or anything like I loved this little human.

Kendra was the oldest of four, the one that each of her siblings would go to when they needed something done. She was the fixer of the family. That’s why I wasn’t surprised by how many lives she touched during the 33 years God allowed her to be on this Earth.

February 20, 2013 was one of the worst days of my life because that was the day my daughter’s life was taken by a man she thought she knew and loved. I am sure at an earlier time in their relationship, she believed he felt the same way. At some

point, she realized he was being passive and trying to control her. She did her best to end the relationship, including taking out a restraining order against him. Sadly, before he could be served, he plotted to end my daughter’s life in a manner that no woman, no human being – and certainly not my daughter – deserved.

The investigation found that, the week before my daughter was murdered, the man (whose name I refuse to give any air to) went out and bought a 9mm pistol. They also found out from a neighbor that he was seen that same week in her yard with her son, all the while plotting to end my daughter life. One Wednesday morning, he parked his car at the Goodwill on Second Loop Road in Florence. He waited until she put her son on the bus for school, then walked to her condo. He entered through the front door, which her son had left unlocked. She was waiting on a friend to drive her to work. But instead of her friend coming through the door, it was her killer.

I can only imagine what she must have been thinking when she came face to face with the man she once thought loved her. This time, he was here to take her life. The investigators found that she was trying to run away when he pulled out the gun and shot her once in the back. At that time, this was all we knew about the murder. We later learned that this person had shot my



daughter in back, then in her head, effectively ending my daughter’s life. She left behind her 11-year-old son, mother, sister, brother, and a family who loves her still and misses her dearly. I am Venita Graham, mother of Kendra Nakeel (Honey) Johnson.

**RISE IN DOMESTIC ABUSE KEEPING STEP WITH COVID**



The motivation behind our non-profit domestic abuse grassroots organization comes from recognizing how women’s lives unravel when they experience the trauma of domestic abuse and violence. Abuse trends have worsened due to COVID-19 and its economic devastation. In South Carolina, the Pee Dee region’s poverty rate is a high 26%. Here, many women are forced to remain in or return to abusive relationships due to financial insecurity, unemployment, and a lack of essential life skills.

In the wake of this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, which has encroached upon and taken the lives of so many citizens, our country is finally inching towards a reinstatement of our way of life. As we make our way back to normalcy, we

think not only of those who have survived, but those who are no longer with us and the families they left behind. Much like this relentless killer, there is another menace to our society that has grown in tandem with this pandemic and often stays hidden until it is too late: DOMESTIC ABUSE. Domestic abuse affects millions globally and does not discriminate against sexual orientation, gender, race or religion. It can affect victims physically, emotionally and financially. It is also felt by the children present in the home. Once a symptom of abuse appears, it is only a matter of time until the “infection” spreads. The abuse escalates as a victim’s freedom is often taken away. If left untreated, it will spiral out of control until a life is lost. As of 2021, South Carolina remains one of the leading states in the nation in deaths by domestic abuse. No one wants to talk about domestic abuse until it is too late. But, what if these deaths could have been avoided if more of us spoke up or offered these victims a way out?

Just as the COVID-19 vaccines have offered hope for a better tomorrow, there is hope for families of domestic abuse. Partnership is vital for non-profit organizations, so reach out to non-profits that care about serving the community and help them build a better future for generations to come.



## HOPE HANNA KEEPS HOPE ALIVE



Hope Hanna

From the first moment the caller hears the compassionate voice on the other end of the crisis hotline, they know hope is on the other end of the phone – literally. Hope Hanna, crisis line coordinator for the Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault (PDC), is one of the highly trained professionals on the other end of the crisis hotline answering incoming calls and evaluating the urgency of the caller's needs and safety. Since 1987, the agency, like so many others across the country, has operated with the sole purpose of helping end the epidemic of domestic violence by providing non-judgmental support and resources. The PDC hotline, established as a requirement/standard for a domestic violence/sexual assault crisis center, is operated by a live person 24/7 and managed by two individuals on a 12-hour shift. Hanna, who joined the PDC in 2019, took on the position of crisis line coordinator in 2021.

While some callers may seem to be facing similar circumstances, no two individuals experience a crisis in the same way. This is why professionals like Hanna are thoroughly trained to examine each call based on critical issues. Upon receiving a call, the staff immediately asks key questions to evaluate the situation.

- Is the caller safe and able to talk?
- What is the caller's name and contact number in case the call is dropped?
- Are medical or law enforcement services needed?

Once the caller expresses the reason for reaching out, the crisis counselor provides assurance that they are there to support them through the process. Being able to ask these pertinent questions is crucial, especially if an individual is in immediate danger.

"The top reason a call is received is usually in regard to some form of abuse: physical or sexual," said Hanna. "These calls mainly come from local hospitals and medical facilities in the Pee Dee region. We also receive calls from individuals who are victims of physical, sexual and emotional/verbal abuse, from other people calling on their behalf, or from another agency seeking resources for their client who has been a victim of an assault, physical and/or sexual."

The PDC works with community partners – law enforcement, mental health, local hospitals, social services, the court system – to provide needed assistance that individuals may be having difficulty accessing. The average call log varies from 1,000 to more than 1,200 calls per month, according to Hanna. In 2020, the number of called spiked thanks to the pandemic.

"There was an increase in the call volume in 2020, primarily due to individuals being confined to their homes for various reason: businesses closing, lack of community resources/entertainment, loss of employment, sickness/illness, having to quarantine, and/or lack of childcare," said Hanna.

The stresses of such situations allowed for the surfacing of domestic problems that may have been previously overlooked. The crisis hotline also experiences a peak during the holiday season due to the use of alcohol and/or drugs during festivities, added Hanna.

When a caller is in immediate danger, the PDC collaborates with them to involve law enforcement to assist in their current situation. If a safe place to stay is required, they are referred to the Pee Dee Coalition Emergency Shelter until they are able to make

Articles by Anna Bowman

arrangements with family members. Sometimes an individual may need a whole new start, so will receive help securing employment, housing and other needs. While the crisis line is open to men and women, the emergency shelter and transitional shelter can only accommodate women and children. Referrals are provided to males in need of shelter. The staff at the county sites also provide male victims with assistance in obtaining an order of protection through family court, court/hospital accompaniment, and counseling services and/or referrals.

If you are experiencing domestic violence or sexual abuse, call the Pee Dee Coalition's Crisis Hotline toll-free at (800) 273-1820 or locally at 843-669-4600. For additional information, including volunteer opportunities, visit the website at: [www.peedeecoalition.org](http://www.peedeecoalition.org).

## ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE



Allen McBride

No one wants to be in the direct path of a person who can't control their temper or worse, resorts to physical violence. In South Carolina, 41.5% of women and 17.4% of men will experience intimate partner physical or sexual violence or stalking in their lifetime, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. For a person to overcome their detrimental behavior, they must be willing to accept they have a problem that could not only be dangerous, but deadly. In an effort to be proactive, the Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault implemented the Alternative to Violence Program to target some of the reoccurring behaviors that result in violence.

The Alternative to Violence Program (ATV), established by the Pee Dee Coalition in 1995, is dedicated to stopping domestic violence by changing the behavior that causes it. Allen McBride, program director for the Alternative to Violence Program, says the program is available for both men and women. It teaches alternatives to anger, rage, fear, isolation and desperation that are part of the abusive relationship. The goal is to enable abusers to identify alternate ways of dealing with emotions without the use of violence.

There are two ways in which participants may seek assistance from the program: voluntarily or be referred by the judicial system. The latter option comes with some very stiff consequences for failing to complete the program or not following the protocol of the program. Participants assigned by the judicial system are governed by several options: Pay a fine up to \$5,000, take 90 days in jail or submit to domestic violence intervention, which includes 26 weeks of group psychoeducation counseling for a fee. The 26-week session curriculum is now offered as part of the agency's virtual services. If a client fails the program, the other two options are at the discretion of the court. Therefore, there could be a hefty cost for not completing the program.

Beside referrals from the judicial system, the program also receives referrals from the SC Department of Social Services. These participants have had incidents of violence occurring and witnessed by minor children. The children are sometimes placed in foster care and the parents are granted reunions with the child when they complete the ATV program.

Even though domestic violence can occur at any age, McBride stated that most participants fall in the range of ages from 35 to 45 years of age. He said there are many variables that might influence



## ALTERNATIVES CONT'D

why people choose violence to solve situations or conflicts. Family culture is one reason. Children repeat what they see occurring in their family environment. People also find themselves in certain predicaments that lead them to feel there's no other way out of a situation other than to lash out at the first threat they conceive as a problem; in reality, there may not be a threat at all – just preconceived notions.

McBride acknowledges that every relationship has conflict and arguments, but not every relationship has abuse. Many couples fight in a fair and non-abusive way. Many couples ignore the abuse because at first, it does not frequently occur. Whatever the reason for any type of abuse, be it occasional or an everyday experience, the ATV program provides participants with the tools and coping strategies intended to encourage all participants to develop healthy relationships based on mutual respect and support. The core services that the Pee Dee Coalition's ATV program utilizes to assist participants are:

- Assessment
- 26-week group sessions
- Criminal justice/legal coordination
- Case tracking

- Information and referral, and
- Community education and training

The ATV program also upholds that, for violence to stop, the abuser must:

- Admit the abuse.
- Seek help.
- Identify the reason for the abusive behavior.
- Replace the behavior with reasonable alternatives.

Additionally, the ATV program, helps victims of abuse to remember:

- Apologies and remorse do not stop domestic violence.
- The period of calm and closeness after an abusive episode does not mean it will never happen again.
- The only way to change behavior is for the abuser to take responsibility.

McBride believes the ATV program is beneficial to everyone. For additional information about the Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault's Alternative To Violence (ATV) program, please contact Allen McBride (843) 673-2008 or visit the website: [www.peedeecoalition.org](http://www.peedeecoalition.org).

## EMPOWERED AGAIN by Jennifer Robinson



*Sarah Ingram*

Sarah Ingram is a fighter who desired freedom emotionally, spiritually, financially and physically. At the age of 18, she was homeless and living in a hotel following a sexual violation in her family. She met a man through a mutual friend and, after dating him a while, they formulated a relationship. The man, who will be called "Robert," was a drug dealer who used his Northern charm to pique her interests.

Robert took control of her life by verbally abusing her. The relationship escalated quickly, Sarah remembered, and soon he became her pimp. He used physical abuse to control her, slapping her numerous times and pulling her hair. "I didn't fight back because I didn't want to lose the stability," said Sarah. "I equated love with being taken care of."

They shared an apartment, and Sarah was so under his control that she would physically fight other women to maintain their relationship. Then, she got fed up and grew rebellious, doing things he wouldn't approve of, mostly as a distraction. Family and close friends became aware of the abuse and encouraged her to leave – and she did.

Sarah encourages other survivors to learn about themselves and warns that no one should have that kind of control over another person. She also encourages those who have been subject to abuse to seek help. Experiencing or surviving that kind of mistreatment should not be viewed as weakness or a source of embarrassment. It helps to be honest about what happened.

The emotions felt following abuse can be used as a positive weapon, and the experiences of abuse and healing can be used to encourage others. Sarah wants her story to be shared because people are moved by words and words have impact.

Sarah is now living a life she's proud of and is still on the journey toward healing. Her drive helped her pursue independence and led her to seek employment, return to school to complete her education, and put distance between herself and the abuser. She credits God for helping her heal and no longer has nightmares about

the traumatic situation from which she is now free.

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, get help by calling (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or visit [TheHotline.org](http://TheHotline.org) online.

### Statistics from the National Coalition of Domestic Violence

- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner contact sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking with impacts such as injury, fearfulness, post-traumatic stress disorder, use of victim services, contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, etc.

- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner. This includes a range of behaviors (e.g. slapping, shoving, pushing) and in some cases might not be considered "domestic violence."

- 1 in 7 women and 1 in 25 men have been injured by an intimate partner.

- 1 in 10 women have been raped by an intimate partner. Data is unavailable on male victims.

- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have been victims of severe physical violence (e.g. beating, burning, strangling) by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

- 1 in 7 women and 1 in 18 men have been stalked by an intimate partner during their lifetime to the point they felt fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed.

- On a typical day, there are more than 20,000 phone calls placed to domestic violence hotlines nationwide.

- The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by 500%.

- Intimate partner violence accounts for 15% of all violent crime.

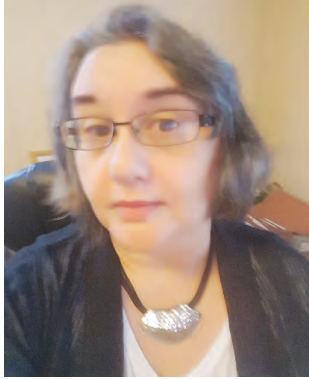
- Women between the ages of 18-24 are most commonly abused by an intimate partner.

- 19% of domestic violence involves a weapon.

- Domestic victimization is correlated with a higher rate of depression and suicidal behavior.

- Only 34% of people who are injured by intimate partners receive medical care for their injuries.



**EMPOWERMENT: HELPING VICTIMS BECOME VICTORS** *by De'Angela Haynes*

Glenda Schleich

**DILLON** – The first Domestic Violence Month (DVAM) was observed in October 1987. Since that time, DVAM has helped grow awareness of the issues faced by victims and survivors of domestic violence, while delivering the message they no longer have to be victims – they can be victors.

But the imparting of empowerment must be facilitated by people who are passionate about helping and supporting those suffering from domestic violence. Glenda Schleich of the Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault (PDC) in Dillon is one such person. An indigenous woman serving on the tribal council of Pee Dee Indian Association, she has been affiliated with PDC for years and has a deep understanding of the domestic violence issues facing women who live in rural settings. It is not uncommon for their abusers to be well acquainted with members of local law enforcement. Understanding this, many women feel it is futile to call for help and remain isolated by geographic boundaries. They live in fear that their abuser will not leave; therefore, they endure more violent abuse. They also fear losing financial support, being harassed and stalked, and losing their children. This is just a short list of barriers for victims of domestic violence, which limits their ability to leave an abusive situation.

Through the PDC, a nonprofit volunteer agency dedicated

to the reduction of sexual assault, family violence, and child abuse, Schleich helps tend to the needs of women who find themselves in these dangerous and demeaning situations. Volunteers and advocates like her across the Pee Dee are experienced working with survivors and assisting them with identifying ways to increase their safety and acknowledge their risks. They make themselves available 24/7 including via a crisis line. Confidentiality is maintained and support services are offered in-person or by phone. Schleich helps connect clients with these various resources understanding that help is available not only to empower them, but to restore their dignity. She knows a victim's experience often goes far deeper than what is seen.

That's why empowerment is such a crucial aspect of Schleich's important work. By providing a safe, nonjudgmental environment built on belief and trust, there is hope for victims in rural communities that accept advocacy. Special considerations are given to vulnerable populations such as seniors and those with physical limitations and developmental disabilities. These populations are more susceptible to physical neglect/harm and financial constraints from the abuser. It's all in keeping with the mission of the PDC.

"Through the efforts of Pee Dee Coalition in its entirety, the region will be a safer, more compassionate community," said Schleich, who aims to continue advocating for the empowerment victims so they may one day understand they are not just victims, but victors.

If you are experiencing domestic or sexual assault, call the Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault crisis line at (800) 273-1820.

## Pee Dee Coalition Announces

# BREAKING FREE

## Virtual Distance Challenge

**30 Miles In 1 Month Challenge**  
Complete 30 miles at your own pace

or  
**Longest Distance Challenge**

See how far you can go!



Register at: [HTTPS://BREAKINGFREE5K15K.ITSYOURRACE.COM/](https://breakingfree5k15k.itsyourrace.com/)





# CARING HEARTS: THE ANTIDOTE HELPING TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

by De'Angela Haynes



Patricia Quillen

According to Project Muse's article, "Domestic Violence, Past and Present," before the 1970s, judges and police officers did not see husbands beating their wives as a major offense. Husbands were given a slap on the wrist, told to calm down, and the wives were told to stop annoying them. Popular culture depicted wife beating as a joke, and psychiatrists saw it as a pathology of the underclass or of individual women. This

problem was either denied or explained away.

Yet in the 1970s, feminists documented the widespread incidence of wife beating and asserted that it was not just working-class husbands who assaulted their wives, but all classes of men. They defined wife beating as one extreme in a spectrum of male efforts to dominate women and argued that rape was a crime of violence, not sex. Feminists founded shelters where women could take refuge, demanded that the police do more to protect women, and advocated for battered women in the courts (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/449295>). That is the history of how the term "domestic violence" came about. Tragically, that did not put an end to this societal cancer. Just like the feminists of the past, there are still those with caring hearts who serve as an antidote today. Patricia Quillen, founder and director of Caring Hearts of the Pee Dee (CHPD), epitomizes the name of her organization.

A faith-based, Christian 501(c)3 organization, CHPD is a two-fold ministry that assists battered women and their children. They provide temporary shelter until permanent placement can be found. Their desire is to educate, build awareness, and provide resources to women and their children who are currently experiencing or have experienced domestic violence.

Quillen established CHPD in 2011 out of her brokenness and love for people as well as her experience as a domestic violence victim earlier in her life. At that time, she was not aware of available services to assist her in ending the abuse she endured. As she searched for answers, she developed a personal relationship with God and her life has never been the same. She

knew that if she suffered from abuse, there were many women like her who did not feel they had a voice or did not know where to turn for help. Quillen promised herself and God that she would do all she could to help women and children that were in need. She decided to further her education to gain the skills and knowledge needed to make a difference in the lives of others. Helping people in need is her calling.

As a Christian counselor and minister, Quillen attempts to use the holistic approach in helping individuals who need her services. Within the last few years, CHPD has begun helping senior citizens with food, clothes and transportation to and from appointments when funds are available. They also partner with other organizations to serve more individuals in need of services, and work with schools and the Boys and Girls Clubs.

A native of South Carolina, she is married to Jacob Quillen. Together, they have four children from previous marriages. They are rearing a 10-year-old grandson (Kayden) of whom they are in the process of adopting.

CHPD provides health education, food, clothing and toys for children during this holiday season through the Victim Service Community Outreach Programs for Women. It is intended to address the issues of women, domestic violence, neglect and poverty one woman at a time, all while changing their lives from a life of desolation to destiny, lack to abundance and poverty to purpose. It is caring hearts like this that serve as the antidote to end domestic violence.

The organization depends on their faith, our sponsors and community resources to help them in their mission to make a positive impact in the lives of others. If you would like to donate, become a sponsor or volunteer, call (843) 732-4722 or email [caringheartsofthepeedee@gmail.com](mailto:caringheartsofthepeedee@gmail.com).



## STAND UP

Together we can end Domestic Violence

1 in 3

Women have been victims of physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime

3

Women are killed each day by current or former intimate partners

1 in 7

Violent crimes are between intimate partners

OCTOBER IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH  
WILL YOU STAND UP WITH US?



together we can make a difference





# PROGRAM GIVES SPECIAL NEEDS CLIENTS A SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE

by Jennifer Robinson



Ruth Blocker

**DARLINGTON** – People with disabilities are a vital part of our community who deserve to be cared for with the training and skills necessary for their personal success in all areas of their lives. The Darlington County Disabilities and Special Needs Board (DCDSNB) upholds that all persons have the right to choose where and how they learn, live, work, play and socialize.

Disabled persons may endure challenges that limit their functionality, but that does not change the fact that, like everyone else, they want to be included and feel as if they matter. Agencies like DCDSNB offer opportunities for service participants to engage in activities with disabled persons. They partner with local businesses to offer jobs to higher functioning disabled adults and introduce them to independent living. Local businesses acting as service participants offering employment include Polyquest, Nucor, Vulcraft and Sunoco.

The businesses sponsor employment opportunities and the DCDSNB issues pay based upon the contract agreement. Service participants earn paychecks and take pride in going to their respective community banks to cash them. They enjoy the feelings of independence that come with earning their own money and becoming productive citizens. Some of the tasks service participants undertake on the job include working with resin, performing lawn care, washing cars and other duties performed under the supervision of the DCDSNB staff. The hours are typically 6:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Ruth Blocker, executive director for the Darlington County Disabilities and Special Needs Board, is proud to offer a workforce

for the persons with disabilities.

“We offer the workforce program to not only provide self-sufficiency, but to remove the stigma of DCDSNB being viewed as an adult day care,” she said. “We didn’t want to just present them with workshops but give them hands on experience.”

Blocker spoke highly of three service participants: Ronald Williams, Willie Wallace, and Kendrick Martin. Williams has experience with yard crews and works in lawn care, while Wallace has bailing experience and Martin performs other tasks with the yard crew.

“They look forward to working every day,” Blocker proudly noted.

She also gives kudos to Felicia Scott, who provides transportation for the service participants. She picks them up early to get them to work on time and returns them home following their shifts. The DCDSNB provides independent residential living, with eight community training homes (CTH2) that house four adults and two intermediate care facilities that house eight women and men with 24-hour care. The service participants follow CDC COVID-19 guidelines, which mandate they be fully vaccinated and tested weekly. They also practice social distancing.

Blocker, who has served as the board’s executive director for 16 years, says she is passionate about working with disabled people. She has a personal connection to someone with a disability, so learning about them and how to care for them informs the way she performs her duties as executive director. She considers it “an honor and privilege” to provide these services and more for the agency’s special clientele.

Learn more about the Darlington County Disabilities and Special Needs Board and the agency’s programs at <http://dcdsn.org/home.html>.

## YOUNG MEN SHOW DISABILITY IS NOT A DISADVANTAGE

Submitted by Nancy Ord, Job Coach, SOS Care



First day for Ezra Tribble and Brandon Douglas

**MYRTLE BEACH** – SOS Care would like to introduce three fine young men who have been given the opportunity this year to learn and show their skillsets and work ethic – despite the pandemic.

Ezra Tribble, Brandon Douglas and Chris Tran are all employees of Bojangles. Ezra and Brandon both started working in March 2021 and are doing a fabulous job. Ezra has a loving, outgoing personality. He welcomes customers, keeps the lobby pristine and has amazing support from home and the workplace. A congenial fellow, he has made quite a few friends at his new job, and they all support and guide him.

Brandon also started in March 2021 and works hard in the kitchen helping make biscuits and cleaning dishes. Another location of the restaurant gave Chris an opportunity to learn all kinds of new skills: greeting customers, sanitizing tables and chairs, and cleaning trays. We are all so proud how far he has come.

All three of these young men are growing and learning so much in the workplace. Like Ezra’s mom likes to say, “A disability is NOT a disadvantage.”

As a job coach, I love seeing our community embrace, accept and respect our adults with autism and intellectual disabilities. They are able, gifted, hardworking and so much more. And they are showing it.

Our goal at SOS Care is to assist our employment-seekers in finding integrated competitive employment. Our employed adults are thriving, and we appreciate Bojangles for being one of several partners in our community to build an inclusive workplace.

If you would like more information about SOS Care and our many programs for children, teens and adults with autism or intellectual disabilities, please visit us at [sosCareSC.org](http://sosCareSC.org) or follow us on Facebook at SOS Care.



Chris Tran learning new skills



# PROVIDING INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR MARION AND DILLON COUNTIES

by Anna Bowman



Sharonda Dudley



Jennifer V. Arambulo

**MARION** - Since 1974, Marion-Dillon County Board of Disabilities and Special Needs (MDCBDSN) has provided services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism, head and spinal cord injuries and other related disabilities. The agency's motto, "Branching Out to Become Independent," reflects its commitment to empowering people to reach their fullest potential.

Jennifer V. Arambulo and Sharonda Dudley, job coaches/employment specialists with MDCBDSN, are tasked with contacting and coordinating with area businesses to partner with the agency in order to place clients in different jobs. As job coaches, Arambulo and Dudley continuously monitor the individuals who are working in the community.

Arambulo, who works in Marion County, is proud of the local businesses that have partnered with the agency.

"We have a strong relationship with Maxwood Furniture, KFC and Walmart in Mullins, S.C.; Burger King, Zaxby's McDonald's, Farmer's Furniture and Marion County Library in Marion, S.C.; and KJ's IGA, Dollar Tree, Bojangles, Kids Ltd Learning Center and Georgia's Beauty Salon in Dillon, S.C." Businesses/employers that hire people with disabilities are also given tax credits.

In order to prepare clients to seek employment, it's a team effort to ensure that each client is ready to enter the workforce. Arambulo explains, "Together with Day Program staff, residential staff, we work with our clients in teaching, training and preparing them for independence. On a daily basis, we teach personal hygiene and grooming, daily chores such as washing dishes, cooking, cleaning, etc. We also teach them job skills that are needed for employment and explain to them expectations of employers to its employees, work ethics, money management, getting along with others, etc. We also provide transportation to our residential consumers who are scheduled to work. We assist them in getting their schedule and coordinating their schedule with their respective employers, coach them/train them at the worksite if needed, and we keep up with their employers with their performance at work."

## MDCBDSN Clients' Testimonials



Rasha Graves

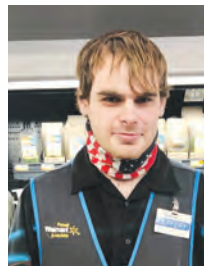
**RASHA GRAVES** -I work as a material handler at Maxwood Furniture in Mullins. My co-workers and supervisors say that I am good at it. My job also played a big factor in that now I have a driver's license. I can drive myself to work. I'm more independent now. I've been working with Maxwood Furniture since July 2020.

**TERRANCE GILCHRIST** -I work as a cook at KFC in Mullins. I love that I get to work, meet people. I love my co-



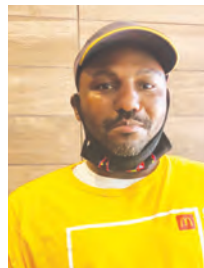
KFC Crew - Brittney Davis, Terrance Gilchrist and Hunter Legette

workers, and it helps me to become independent. I have been with KFC in Mullins since May 2021.



Jeffery Richardson

**HUNTER LEGETTE** -I work as a cook at KFC in Mullins. I like to cook, and I like to serve the food to customers. I have been with KFC and with McDonald's since May of this year. My aunt was the one that enrolled me with the services of SCDDSN. I have been receiving services with MDCBDSN since April 2019.



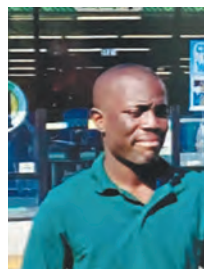
Travis Boyd

**JEFFERY RICHARDSON** -I work as meat/produce associate at Walmart in Mullins. I love my job, and my team leaders tell me that I am doing a great job. I worked for almost a year at Maxwood Furniture as a material handler. My mom was the one who enrolled me with MDCBDSN, and I have been with them since 2017.



Lavasa Felton

**TRAVIS BOYD** -I have worked as a crew member at McDonald's in Marion since August 2017. I like having friends at work, and I like bringing the food to the customers. Mrs. Jennifer Arambulo helped me with my application, and she went with me during my interview and orientation at McDonald's in Florence. I have been with MDCBDSN since 2009.



JaQuan Reaves

**LAVESA FELTON** -I work as a cashier/crew member at Zaxby's in Marion. I like working. I like getting customer's orders and preparing their orders as well. I've worked at McDonald's as a crew member, and prior to that, I also worked as a cleaner for the Marion County Library in Mullins. Mrs. Jennifer Arambulo took me for the interview at Zaxby's. I have been with MDCBDSN since 2002.

**JAQUAN REAVES** -My job position is a stocking associate. I love to be around people in the community. I have been in my position for a year and five months. My job coach, Ms. Sharonda Dudley, prepared me for the interview, and she assisted me during my job interview. She guided me on how to dress during the interview. My grandmother was the one who found out about the MDCBDSN.

Jennifer and Ricky Arambulo are the parents of a son, Jerico Elli Arambulo, who is a freshman at USC. She attended college in the Philippines and graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology. She is a member of St. Ann Catholic Church in Florence and is an active member of the Filipino Community.

Sharonda Dudley is the mother of four lovely children and a 2001 graduate of Dillon High School. She is a member of the choir and has been an active member of Manning Baptist Church since 2010.



# TRANSITIONAL HOUSE HELPS WOMEN MOVE OUT OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

by Anna Bowman



Angela Graves

**MYRTLE BEACH/SOCASTEE** – Angela Graves’ journey from darkness to light is one of resiliency. She is a woman who found her voice and dedicated her life to ensuring that other women on the same dark journey have the resources necessary to guide them toward their own positive light.

There is a gospel song that says, “I’m glad I don’t look like what I’ve been through,” which describes Graves’

victorious metamorphosis from struggling with homelessness, drug addiction, domestic violence, and losing her precious children to the foster care system to becoming an empowered woman. Not only did she overcome her problems, but she established a safe house for homeless women to ensure they are treated with respect and have access to resources to create a positive and productive life.

Graves’ past homelessness went through many phases.

“At the onset of homelessness,” she said, “I was single. Then, I married and had five children who went through homelessness with me.”

Seeking home/support from her estranged family and even her friends did not yield the results she hoped for. Soon, depression set in.

“I was at a loss and my life began to spiral downward,” Graves recalled, adding that, during this time, things went from bad to worse. “I started to depend on alcohol and drugs. I lived in my car some nights, some nights in a home, and some nights I was just sleepless trying to make sure my children were safe. At my darkest point, my life stopped moving forward, and my children were placed into foster care.”

That’s when she realized that alcohol and drugs were detrimental to her and her family. She made the decision to stop being a victim and move towards victory. Methodically, she made powerful moves, separating herself from family, friends, relationships and environments that were caustic, then relocating from her home state of New Jersey to South Carolina.

Graves said that once she moved to South Carolina, she was introduced to Bishop Alfred Williams and First Lady Dioandra Williams, her friend, Alester Linton-Pryor, and Bishop David L. Baxter. Through her church family, she was introduced to individuals who would help her get connected with available resources. During this process, Graves found the strength within herself to find additional resources that would allow her to make the necessary changes to get her children out of foster care and develop a stable and workable lifestyle for herself and her family.

Based on her experience with living in homeless shelters, Graves felt there were certain facets about transitional homes that she would like to see improved.

“Having been homeless and seeing the lack of resources, especially a safe and guarded home for women, and working with other shelters that seemed to lack necessary resources, I felt the need to start Yahweh Metamorphosis Movement, to be that ‘light’ in the darkness for women who had been, or, are going through what I had overcome,” she said. “I am an overcomer!”

Her dream began to manifest, and in January 2021, she opened a transitional home in the Myrtle Beach/Socastee area for women and children. Yahweh Metamorphosis Movement is an organization dedicated to serving individuals who are battling with addiction, mental health, and homelessness. YMM prides itself on providing resources and education to these individuals and their entire family.

“Together with our community collaborations we can create a

Movement to Metamorphosis mankind one day at a time,” Graves said.

The newly formed transitional home can accommodate six to eight women for a period of six months up to a year. Extensive stays may be arranged depending on the situation. Women have discovered the transitional home via the company’s brochures, social media, radio, churches, and the Little River Medical Center. Graves is hoping to connect with county agencies and various others that are working closely with domestic violence victims to obtain necessary resources, donations, etc.

Volunteers are welcome as well as supplies such as toiletries, books, pens, pencils, etc. Individuals who are willing to work with the clients to provide transportation are an urgent need, as well. For additional information about the Yahweh Metamorphosis Movement’s transitional home, to make a donation, or to volunteer, call (862) 281-9583 or email [Agavesoutreach@gmail.com](mailto:Agavesoutreach@gmail.com).

## HARVEST HOPE FOOD BANK FACING PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

by Adalia Ellis



Nicole Echols

Harvest Hope Food Bank (HHFP) has been filling the gaps in food accessibility for those in need for more than 40 years. Nicole Echols, the Pee Dee Branch executive director, says that in the past two years, they have experienced big changes. Like many organizations and businesses, the pandemic has made it necessary for the food bank to adjust how it serves clients.

Whereas people once came inside to pick up food and talk with the staff and volunteers, drive-thru and contactless food distribution has now been implemented.

The faces of those served have also changed. There are more people in need now, many of them out of work or laid off with kids at home. The population that formed the volunteer base is also vulnerable: retired seniors. A number of HHFP’s partners in food distribution are manned by volunteers who fall into this at-risk demographic. As retired seniors got sick and stopped volunteering for fear of contracting COVID-19, the food bank lost the ability to distribute goods as they previously did.

The focus now is on taking the food to those who need it via mobile food pantries. As a result, HHFP can reach more people. Volunteers pack boxes, which are then driven to where the need is greatest. To continue providing this service, however, food, funds, friends and volunteers who can help distribute the food are needed. The organization makes it easy to support them. Visit their website at [www.harvesthope.org/get-involved](http://www.harvesthope.org/get-involved) to sign-up as a volunteer based on your availability. You can also give a monetary donation to support the upcoming holiday season.

During the pandemic shutdown, the food bank remained open every day. To care for her own well-being while meeting the increasing demand for food, Echols walked and meditated every morning so she could pour positive energy into others as they poured energy into her.

“I would come back home ready to take on the universe” she said. And that’s something she and her team continue to do so they can tirelessly serve others in this small corner of the universe.



# EMPOWERING THE HOMELESS IN FLORENCE by Anna Bowman



A simple act of valor led Michael D. Brooks to leave his job once he learned that his female companion was receiving unwanted sexual advances from their boss. The decision for the couple to exit their employment rather than engage in a physical confrontation with their boss

ultimately led to an unpredictable financial catastrophe for Brooks.

After leaving his job in 2019, Brooks was unable to find employment. In fact, it would be nearly a two-year journey from jobless to homeless and back to happiness. "The consequences of the choice I made that day led me to lose everything I owned: car, house and even my dignity." Brooks began to live with family and friends, but not wanting to be a burden on them, he decided to enter the House of Hope of the Pee Dee, a shelter for the homeless in Florence.

He recalled becoming extremely despondent as he oftentimes flashed back to his successful upbringing and wondered how he had managed to arrive at a point in his life where he needed to gather what little possessions he had into a bag and enter the doors of a homeless shelter. As a former on-air personality and host of the popular community service radio show "Tell It Like It Is" on WYNN 106.3 FM and Glory 98.5 AM, Brooks would occasionally encounter people who knew him and wondered how he became homeless. He didn't realize at the time, but his ordeal would allow him a chance to not only meet amazing people but to also inspire him to become an entrepreneur.

One of those amazing people Brooks met during his journey was Betty Rutherford, housing case manager with the Eastern Carolina Housing Organization (ECHO). With her assistance, he was able to move into an apartment. And, as a veteran, Brooks was introduced to Corbett Anderson, executive director of the Veterans Resources Center of Florence, who not only assisted Brooks with furnishing his apartment, but also provided cab fare for him to attend Florence Darlington Technical College, workshops and job fairs. The training program with Ruiz Foods led to a position that has given him an opportunity to get his life back on the right track.

While at the House of Hope, Brooks was overwhelmed at the amount of assistance and programs that were available for the homeless. "As I learned about various programs that gave away food, clothing, medical help, etc., I became an advocate for other homeless residents, stopping people on the streets, wanting to share all the information I had learned about--so many great programs/resources available to assist in getting their lives back on track the same way in which I had," he said. One of the most outstanding programs he encountered during his stay in the shelter was Homeless Connection, which held monthly meetings at the Poyner Adult Education School in Florence and was like a networking event, distributing a wealth of information/resources to the homeless population.

Today Brooks is gainfully employed with Ruiz Foods, housekeeper division. He recently launched a new company, MDB House Buyers, and as a solution specialist, he buys/sells houses and assists individuals with legitimate credit repair to purchase their own home. "I'm interested in helping people to succeed, like the staff at the House of Hope, Veterans Resources Center of Florence and the Eastern Carolina Housing Organization, who assisted me on my journey back to becoming both mentally and physically empowered."

As a business owner, Brooks will be able to employ others, and hopefully, some of his future hires will be former homeless individuals.

He acknowledged that he would like to someday, in the immediate future, host a radio talk show/podcast to enlighten the homeless population/general population about all the resources available to individuals who are homeless or on the verge of becoming homeless.

For additional information about MDB House Buyers, call 843-564-BUY4 (2894), or visit the website [www.mdbhousebuyers.com](http://www.mdbhousebuyers.com).

## NOURISHMENT FOR THE BODY, MIND & SPIRIT Submitted by Ms. Terester McAllister, MS, Director



Left: Terester McAllister-Kassa, Estella Reaves Felder, Rozenia Ellis and Lisa Armstead. Right: Shyron Weaver, Jannie McAllister, Adelaide Brown, Mina Pringle and Gloria Luke

Highway 51 does not just connect Florence County to Williamsburg and Georgetown counties. For the last three years, it has also connected hungry people to much needed food and services. Inside a little white building, Sisters 4 the Future serves at least 500 meals to people in the community who are experiencing food insecurity, homelessness, or a lack of resources.

Sisters 4 the Future is a non-profit organization whose goal is to help less fortunate members of our community: seniors, parents, and others. Our nutritional meal program for seniors operates as a soup kitchen to provide healthy, nutritious meals to all who come through our doors. We are committed to improving the quality of life and restoring the dignity of those we serve by providing a hot meal to seniors and any member of our community in need of one.

Several other services are available to meet people's needs, such as introductory computer skills training for seniors and a parenting support group. We provide fellowship and love to any member of our community. Sisters 4 the Future's core mission is to strengthen the community through education and by building trust through the work of our fellow "Sisters" and volunteers to create unity and well-being among one another, so no one goes uninformed, hungry or malnourished.

Yes, Sisters 4 the Future has "more than soup" in their kitchen. On Tuesdays, we provide a bag lunch meal and on Thursdays, a healthy hot meal and food box to all who walk through the door -- no questions asked. In addition to the individual meals, educational programs are provided for seniors and after school care for children, who are also given a meal. In November, Sisters 4 the Future hosts an annual "Love thy neighbor" holiday meal to show appreciation for their participants and volunteers and ensure that those in the community know they are loved and welcome. This year, it will be held on November 19th from noon to 2 p.m. Sisters 4 the Future partners with Harvest Hope, the United Way, DSS and Florence-Darlington Tech to help execute our mission and continue to serve "more than soup" from our kitchen.

For more information on programs, classes and events, visit <https://sisters4thefuture.wixsite.com/mysite/about>.



# JULIE MAXHAM SHARES THE LATEST ON THE TINY HOUSE PROGRAM

Articles by Les Echols



Julie Maxham

House of Hope in Florence, SC has a history of being an impactful ministry and pillar in the community. Since they opened in 1990, the agency has served countless people facing homelessness. It continues to serve the homeless and underserved population with Christian values and practical services that positively impact lives.

Diversity Works sat down with Julie Maxham, director of development for House of Hope, to gain insights on some of the challenges the nonprofit faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**DW:** Tell us how tough this year has been with this pandemic. How have you pivoted to fit the needs of your residents?

**JM:** In 2020 and 2021, the House of Hope faced many issues. A big part of the program at the men’s shelter is getting them working regularly, saving for their future, and into Reformers Unanimous for accountability. When COVID hit and everything shut down, the jobs our residents had couldn’t be done virtually. For a time, no one could move forward. We moved them back into jobs as quickly as possible, but it set some back. We dealt with outbreaks several times, which, again, shuts down all programs. At the Courtney McGinnis Graham Community Shelter, after an outbreak, the CDC shut us down for two weeks, and we needed to figure out how to house 20 people for two weeks. We found hotel rooms for all of them, and a generous donor covered the costs. Every week our staff meetings are and have been about how to continue to serve our guests and residents through this pandemic. All throughout the last 18 months, we have had to pivot weekly on rules and regulations, as new recommendations come out. Most of our staff and residents have been vaccinated, which has helped to slow the need for quarantines after exposures.

**DW:** What is the day-to-day like at House of Hope?

**JM:** For the men in our long-term program, they get up at 6 a.m. and get ready for their day. From 6:40 to 7:15, they have devotionals. At 7:15, they start chores, make beds, clean up bathrooms etc. At 7:45, they gather to pray for the day and sing a short song and then head off to start their day. For the men who are in phase one, their day will be spent with Bible study, cooking, cleaning, and laundry. In higher phases, it means working, either as a volunteer or at a paying job. In the evening, they gather for dinner. Most nights they will either have chapel, Bible study, Sunday night church or Reformers Unanimous.

At the Courtney McGinnis Graham Community Shelter, our guests generally start lining up at 2 p.m. to be ready for the 4 p.m. check in. Once they are in, they change into scrubs so their clothes can be laundered, check their personal items into a locker and go to their room. They can shower or rest until dinner. After dinner, they can watch TV. In the morning after breakfast, they can choose to check out or stay in. If they stay in, they can read a book, watch TV or just rest. Everyone has the chance to meet with a social worker to help assist with “next-steps.” Guests can stay for up to 30 days.



Model of Tiny House

**DW:** The community has been excited about the ‘tiny house’ concept that House of Hope is implementing in Florence. Tell us about the progress of the tiny house program and how many people it will assist.

**JM:** We anticipate being able to have our first tiny house residents, (women and children), as early as mid-October. All future residents

will begin at the community shelter to apply and be screened. People who move into the houses will be working either through educational programs or job advancement to become prepared to live independently. Residents can stay for up to 2 years. This is a life-recovery program and will include church attendance, Reformers Unanimous, and other structured programs like the men’s program.

**DW:** Getting people into the workforce has been a challenge for several industries in the past couple of years. Tell us about your programs helping individuals with education and jobs.

**JM:** We work with many companies throughout Florence to employ the men who come to us. In addition, we work with them through mentoring and the Jobs for Life program for additional soft skills training. For the women we will serve, we are working with Florence-Darlington Tech, HopeHealth and McLeod to offer certificate programs that will lead to great paying jobs. Our goal is to introduce them to Christ and set them on a path for independence.

For more information on House of Hope and its many programs, visit <http://www.hofh.org>.

## LOCAL AUTHOR CONQUERS DRUGS, HOMELESSNESS WITH HELP OF LOCAL SERVICES



Demoris B. Hickman

Author and motivational speaker Demoris B. Hickman has struggled with personal demons and addiction for several years. But when House of Hope came into his life, he began to see positive changes in his life, habits, and attitude. Hickman describes his life as having had numerous ups and downs throughout the years, but says he hit a personal all-time low in 2016 when he became

homeless while addicted to alcohol and drugs. He likened his story to the biblical story of the Prodigal Son.

“I felt like I was content living in a pig pen” said Hickman. “I was becoming increasingly removed from reality, as my only goal was to find drugs no matter how far I had to walk to get them. It was then that I knew I had to seek out a faith-based program to help me with my addiction.”



## LOCAL AUTHOR CONT'D

Hickman found assistance in the House of Hope men's program. Once he went there, he met HOH employees Mack Myers and Sam White, with whom he was immediately endeared because of their hospitality and genuine desire to help. But after nine months, Demoris found himself back on the street with no stable home or income.

"I returned to the streets and was too proud to go back," he said. "I was embarrassed after doing so well and returned to a life of addictions. I felt like I let myself down, but at the same time I felt I was strong enough to fight it on my own."

After some time, Hickman finally went back, and this time stayed at the Courtney McInnis Graham Community Shelter. He admits it was a struggle because when he went back, he was physically and mentally beat up. But thanks to faith and the unwavering help of the staff, he felt better.

"It's like it's where I was supposed to be," said Hickman. "One of the ways in which the program helped me was by taking me to church every Sunday. They helped me recover and become spiritually renewed. I started regaining not just my physical strength but my spiritual strength as well. The church helped me to get myself together. I got a job in Florence, was doing better, and was able to secure a home to live in and move forward.

The House of Hope and Courtney McInnis Graham shelter are great programs. They assist with basic needs and give you a second chance at life. The men's home endeared me to church and mentors, but also gave me so much hope, showed me love, and assisted me with all the tools to start over."

Hickman says he is still in recovery but that he is better and continuing to maintain his sobriety.

"I am proud to say that among the victories God has allowed me to have, I have become a published author," he shared. "My first book, *A Man Without It*, is dedicated to my mother, Thomasena Brown. The book is an autobiography about me, the challenges I faced, and the countless stories of my mother trying to save my life. My next book is a Christian fiction novel called *A Child Like Mine*, and it is scheduled to be released in late 2021. I am also doing motivational speaking to inspire youth and young men. It's not about me, it's about those that I can impact around me with my life and my story. My driving force is God, and I feel like I am on the road headed to success with God leading the way."

For more information on Hickman's books, contact him at (843) 917-8901 or [morris30.motivated@gmail.com](mailto:morris30.motivated@gmail.com).

## HOW THE HOUSE OF HOPE CHANGED HER LIFE by Adalia Ellis



Tamar Taylor

Before moving to South Carolina in 2008, Tamar Taylor lived in Birmingham. Her son's father was abusive and had begun going to her job, so she entered a domestic violence shelter at the YWCA. When she arrived at the shelter, he was able to track her down and started having conversations with the director, so Taylor was transferred to a shelter

in South Carolina. She left that shelter and went to the one for those who are homeless. For five to six years Taylor moved around a lot and had no consistent mailing address. During that time, she lost custody of her children. Unfortunately, she continually became involved with the wrong men, some of whom because she needed a place to stay.

Taylor acknowledges that she made bad decisions. In 2013 she was arrested for crimes related to theft and check kiting. She was not able to leave the state of South Carolina because she had a federal indictment pending. During this time she was in jail, but because the indictment was pending, she was transitioned from jail to the House of Hope. This was Taylor's only option as she had burned too many bridges with people who might have taken her in and with other shelters.

It was her time at House of Hope that changed Taylor's life and led to her changing her circumstances. It was there that she experienced unconditional love for the first time in the person named Vereen. "She was God's hands," Taylor said. Vereen walked with Taylor through the struggles. She literally held her hand, encouraged her and stood up for her. Vereen taught her to trust in God and have faith that he would carry her through.

The staff trusted God to guide them. Each person has individual needs, and they all relied on God to guide them in service to those in their care. "That's why they are so successful. They do the suffering with you," said Taylor.

Taylor was facing 30 years in prison. Vereen took her out to eat before she turned herself in and walked her into the federal building when it was time. Taylor was in prison for two years and was released to a halfway house called Alston Wilkes. While there, she began working at House of Hope as night manager. While working at the House of Hope, she was able to save up funds and relocate to Alabama where she now lives and works.

When asked how the community can help address homelessness, Taylor said, "Duplicate the House of Hope. Their staff. Their motto. When you trust the heart of God, you don't worry about His hands. He works differently in each of our lives. And sometimes what seems like a hardship was His way to get you where you need to be."

Taylor claims 2022 as her year to be able to make a donation to the House of Hope. "When you see growth, you know God is in it. There is no way to help homelessness without God."



## HOW TO SUPPORT THE CAREGIVERS IN YOUR LIFE



November is National Family Caregivers month. For millions of Americans, it is more than a page on the calendar. Caregiving is a daily part of their lives. It is important to recognize the sacrifices caregivers make for loved ones. If you don't have personal experience with caregiving, it is difficult to imagine just how hard it can be.

One such caregiver is Patricia Gustin, a member of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 998 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She has been a caregiver since 2015 - first for her mother, and then for her oldest sister.

"If I can say one thing that helps one person that would be gratifying," Gustin said.

Gustin notes that as a caregiver, your life gets turned upside down because you have all of these additional responsibilities and tasks. It's a lot more than just medical care. Gustin was soon making twice as many trips to the grocery store - one for herself and one for her mother. She was having to step in and manage her mother's finances as she declined mentally and physically. It was a painful experience for her.

"People don't know what it's like unless they've been there," Gustin said.

It was especially painful when people would question why she was upset or tell her that she "just needs to get over it." There is one key thing she wishes people who aren't caregivers understood better.

"Caregiving is a monumental task that a person has to take on. If you are not a caregiver, allow them to talk about their experiences. Try to be patient and listen. Understand that this person is going through a lot."

The strain of caregiving took a toll on Gustin's health. She had panic attacks and lost her appetite. It was stressful and upsetting. Her doctor told her that if she didn't slow down, she would be the next in her family to suffer a heart attack. Fortunately, Gustin's

family understands the sacrifice of caregiving, and is willing to help. Siblings share the grocery shopping and take turns driving their sister to church.

Gustin stresses the importance of self-care. "You are no good to anyone else if you don't take care of yourself. If something happens to you, imagine what will happen to them." Gustin practices self-care in many ways.

"I take time for myself. You need your own respite. Even if it's just for an hour. Take time and clear your head."

For her, break time includes watching a funny movie, reading a book or engaging in a hobby. She also makes a point to stop working after 8 p.m. so she can get a good night's sleep. Gustin has also sought the help of a professional counselor.

"I'm not embarrassed to say that I have a very good counselor," Gustin said. "She is a rock to me."

Her counselor encouraged her to keep a journal, which allows her to get thoughts on paper. It is a healthy form of self-expression, and it allows her to express her feelings.

"You don't have to walk around happy all the time. And you don't have to walk around with a scowl either. Allow yourself to get your emotions out."

American Legion Auxiliary members nationwide are focusing on the importance of supporting caregivers. ALA National President Kathy Daudistel has made caregivers an essential part of the Auxiliary's 2021-2022 administrative year. The organization's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation program promotes the ALA's mission to enhance the lives of veterans, military and their families. One of the key ways everyone can enhance the lives of veterans and families is by honoring the sacrifices of caregivers who provide for them. This focus is consistent with the organization's spirit of Service Not Self, as well as its mission to honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of veterans, military and their families, at home and abroad. The group encourages veterans and their caregivers to explore resources available through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs before they need them.

To learn how you can get involved by volunteering or donating to the American Legion Auxiliary, visit [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org).

## HOME HEALTH CARE REQUIRES A HEART FOR SERVICE by Adalia Ellis



Mayor Barbara Hopkins

**MARION** – Franklin Home Health Agency carefully selects nursing personnel whose warmth, kindness and professionalism enhance their academic qualifications. Sellers Mayor Barbara Hopkins, who is the agency's office manager, said she works to ensure that those who need care get the best treatment possible.

When considering who would best fit their caliber of homecare providers, she looks at the candidate's commitment to helping the client, someone who demonstrates professionalism, shows compassion and is also highly trained. Anyone who wants to work in home care with Franklin Home Health Agency needs to complete a comprehensive background check and physical examination but does not have to be certified and bonded.

These qualities and qualifications are essential because the people who are receiving the assistance need to feel respected. They

have lost the most basic level of self-reliance: the ability to care for themselves. To trust someone to assist with personal hygiene, housekeeping, medication and doctor appointments, dressing and grooming, teeth brushing, toileting, washing dishes and grocery shopping – just to name a few – requires highly trained, compassionate people.

Hopkins has been working at Franklin Home Health Agency since 2012.

"I love it. I love the people," she said, "To be a helper, you must become a servant of God. You've got to have compassion to help someone."

When she started at the agency, they had five clients. They have grown so much over the years that they now have 108 clients and 98 caregivers. When considering this kind of helping profession, Hopkins says, "To put the right caregiver with the right client, you have to get to know the caregiver first as you train them to go out in the home to take care of the clients. It's not for pay. You've got to have love and compassion in your heart."



# Appreciating Our Caregivers

## LOTTIE'S HOME CARE DELIVERS SERVICES WITH COMPASSION by Adalia Ellis



Tyechia Brown

Lottie's Home Care is a non-medical, in-home care provider owned by Tyechia Brown of Florence, SC. She opened her company for business in April 2021. Being a recent business, she is building her staff and clientele; currently, she has three employees.

Brown spent many years working in hospice care, and although her company does not provide medical in-home care, she is able to use her years of experience to understand what a client may need. She describes herself as a caring, passionate, and compassionate

person.

"I love being able to lighten a family's load or simply put a smile on a client's face," she said.

Brown was inspired to transition out of hospice care as more and more people were wanting to keep their loved ones at home. It brings

her joy to be able to make this possible. She and her team assist in the home by carrying out tasks such as daily routine activities, bathing, appointment reminders and assistance getting to doctor's appointments. They also provide companionship. The goal of Lottie's Home Care is to make life better in the comfort of their client's homes.

When caring for others, it becomes important to also care for yourself. Creating that balance in your life allows you to care for more people more often. Elder care can be a demanding and intense service to provide both physically and emotionally. Brown finds the balance between caring for others and caring for herself by placing God first in her life.

"With Him, I will conquer anything," she said.

She takes time for herself by occasionally going on a road trip, having a spa day or just a day alone. She also surrounds herself with love and family, which she considers crucial to remaining grounded and living a healthy life.

"If I'm not at my best, how can I deliver the best care to my clients?" she said.



## ADOPTION AWARENESS

## A CHOICE TO MAKE IS FILLING THE GAP IN PREGNANCY-RELATED SERVICES

*Submitted by Theresa Leach, Center Director/Office Manager*



Theresa Leach

When Bethany Christian Adoption Agency closed, it left a void in Florence and the surrounding areas for those facing an unplanned pregnancy. In 2009, a small group worked to fill the gap by founding A Choice to Make Pregnancy Resource Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that provides free pregnancy-related services to the community. It operates strictly on donations, financed entirely by individuals, churches and businesses.

Since opening, approximately 1,724 clients have received our services. Pregnancy tests are performed to confirm the pregnancy, and when a client qualifies, a limited obstetric ultrasound is offered that shows the intrauterine viability of the pregnancy and verifies the gestational age of the baby.

When our clients plan to parent, we offer ongoing education and pregnancy support and donated materials such as diapers, wipes, bottles, clothes, blankets, toiletry items, and maternity clothes. If the client chooses adoption, we will discuss details about the process with them and give them a list of agencies to contact. Our office will also set up a phone conversation with the adoption agent at the client's request. A Choice to Make's location can also be a neutral location for meetings with the expectant mother and those from the adoption agency.

Clients who are asking about the option of abortion receive counsel



2019 House

as well as accurate, truthful information about what the procedure involves, along with a discussion about the effects on the physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of the woman, man, and families involved.

A Choice to Make does not perform or make referrals for abortions, but if the client decides to follow through with the termination of the pregnancy, we offer a class for women and men on post-abortion counseling.

For the past 12 years, it has been staggering to know that adoption is still not viewed as the better alternative to abortion. Instead, clients think that abortion is the lesser of the two evils. "I could not do that to my baby, give it away, and if I were to carry the baby to term, I might as well keep it," is the reason often given during counseling.

When considering the outcome of unplanned pregnancies, less than 2 percent will choose adoption as their parenting plan and place the baby in a family that is ready to parent. For every abortion, four to five families are waiting to adopt. With every opportunity, we hope to educate others about adoption as a positive alternative to abortion.



Boutique





## IN HOPES YOU CONSIDER ADOPTING

Submitted by *Melanie Dozier Colclough, MPA*



*Melanie Colclough*

My husband, David, and I had discussed adoption as a means to building our family even before we were married. In fact, long before we ever started dating, we both separately considered adopting. As part of our faith walk, we kept ending up working with kids in foster care. First as guardians ad litem, then as mentors to kids, we knew that adoption would definitely be a part of our future. Five years ago, we answered the call to be parents to a sibling group of four: two boys, who were ages two and three at the time, and a set of five-year-old

twin girls. Several years later, we learned about their biological brothers, and God opened many doors. Now we have a brood of six. Sure, our adoption story had many twists, turns and challenges, but we wouldn't do anything differently. I couldn't imagine our lives without these six little souls.

Adoption is such a blessing, but we know the prospect of it seems daunting to many. As we celebrate National Adoption Day, I'd like you to seriously consider opening your life to a child waiting for a forever home. Now before you say, "I can't adopt," here are a few things I'd like you to consider.

We need you. According to Adopt US Kids, there are currently more than 400,000 children in foster care in the United States alone, and these children have not only been separated from their parents, but they are often separated from their siblings also. Far too frequently, siblings are split up for any number of reasons, often for the simple fact there is nowhere to house them together. Foster kids are often placed in multiple foster homes in the matter of a year, bouncing from place to place with the few possessions they have shoved into a couple of garbage bags. These kids may only see their siblings for an occasional two-hour visit, if at all. This means they know no security or stability, and naturally, they often feel unloved or uncared for. Then, to punctuate all this, eventually (if they aren't adopted or reunited with their family) they turn 18, and "it's time to go." Over 20,000 children "age out" (Adopt US Kids) of foster care annually without a permanent family and without the life skills, emotional or financial support necessary to succeed in life. This is where you come in. The system needs caring people--people who are willing to adopt, willing to foster, willing to mentor or even just willing to provide luggage.

Don't let fear be a factor. Many people have asked us about adoption over the years. The most consistent comment I hear is, "I've considered it, but I'm afraid to adopt a child who isn't mine." I get it, but consider this. If you're afraid, what do you think those kiddos feel leaving a familiar environment and entering a very cold world overnight, alone with only a few personal items in a garbage bag? They are usually encountering the unknown, alone and ill-prepared. They are shifted from one home to the next without much explanation, consultation or choice. Don't get me wrong, adoption is a huge endeavor that shouldn't be taken lightly. Our fears as adults, however, are far less ominous or warranted than the very real and immediate needs of the thousands of kids waiting to be adopted. We as adults have the tools and resources to overcome the challenges that cause us sleepless nights, but these kids

don't. Putting aside your fears about adoption can change the entire life trajectory of a foster child, and it will prove to be a blessing in your life like you never expected.

Still not ready to adopt? Adoption is a lifelong decision, and if you're still not sure, it's okay. Please get more information. If you ultimately decide adoption is not for you, there are still many ways you can still make an impact.

- **Be a foster parent** – There are not nearly enough good, qualified homes to provide shelter, love and protection to the kids in the system. Consider becoming one.
- **Become a guardian ad litem** – If you can't adopt or foster, be a guardian, and be the voice for the kids in court. Most communities have a way for you to volunteer to help.
- **Help an adoptive family out** – When we first adopted, our church family was our lifeline. They went into overdrive, finding furniture, clothes and a laundry list of other essentials we needed to support multiple children. They babysat, offered gift certificates to Walmart, sent over lasagna dinners and gave us gently used children's clothes.



*The Colclough Family*

- **Donate to support organizations for adoptive families** – A close friend and fellow adoptive parent was struggling to balance life post-adoption, and she found lifechanging support from a local organization in her area that helped with afterschool care, counseling, summer camps and a plethora of other services. These organizations often rely on private donations to operate.
- **Write your congressman** – The system is imperfect, as we all are, and it needs reform. Research the problems, and then advocate for the change.

I certainly hope my words spur someone into becoming an adoptive parent, but the point is, even if adoption is not for you, you are needed. Please do something. We need your support.

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress..." (James 1:27).





# Appreciating Our Veterans

## DUTY, DISCRIMINATION AND DETERMINATION Articles by Les Echols



Johnny Legette

**MULLINS** – This month, Diversity Works caught up with Mr. Johnny Legette. Legette did a total of 23 years of military service including active duty in the Army and National Guard. Being in the military at a time when African Americans were not always welcome, Johnny had an interesting take on service and sacrifice.

**DW:** Tell us a little about yourself and your service

**JL:** I joined the Army and was stationed in Fort Bliss, Texas during the Vietnam War

era. I didn't have a long-term plan or dream of joining the military. I had driven my best friend to join. After speaking to the recruiter, I decided to take the test and go as well. The next day, I was off to basic training and a new career. It was the best thing that could have happened to me, and if I could do it all over, I would not change anything.

**DW:** Tell us about the sacrifice that military families make for our country

**JL:** Family members make huge sacrifices. I retired in 2000, but the pay today may be a little different than it was back then. We sacrificed our lives each day. In other words, the pay was not enough compensation for the sacrifices we were making.

**DW:** Tell us about your career and what it was like making the transition into civilian life

**JL:** I was an electronic technician. My job was to make sure radar was functional and operational. I made our tracking radars operational.

When I first entered the Army, I was in the Army school of electronics. The pace was extremely fast, and I thought about getting out of the class for fear that I couldn't keep up. The instructor was extremely tough, but I was encouraged by a colonel to stay in the class and continue because it was a field that African Americans were not offered back then. We were reassigned an African American instructor, and I ended up finishing in the top five in my class.

Years later, I saw the first instructor. He said "I expected you to be kicked out of the Army by now." As the colonel suspected, the first instructor wanted me to quit. This served as my inspiration to work harder. I finished my career as a Sergeant E5.

**DW:** What were some of your biggest challenges?

**JL:** I witnessed everything from racial tension to harassment, but unfortunately, nothing was done in many cases. There were even unsuccessful attempts to hold me back from being promoted. Then when I came home, it was difficult as a Black man to get a job in South Carolina. I was an electronics technician, and when applying for jobs I was told I was overqualified. I was actually offered a job cleaning hog pens at one point.

**DW:** Tell us your thoughts on the importance of serving

**JL:** The importance of serving was such an honor that it's something I can't explain or put into words. Being able to be there for this country I love so dearly gave me so much pride.

Every time I see the flag or hear the National Anthem, it brings tears to my eyes. I was set to be activated in Desert Storm, but while we trained for desert combat in the Mojave Desert, the war ended before we left for Iraq. As crazy as it sounds, we were ready to go to Iraq. I had such a sense of duty, honor and pride, and this country that I love is worth me dying for.

## CRIME PREVENTION

### FINDING A PERMANENT SOLUTION WITHOUT A TEMPORARY ACTION



Lorenza Brown

Lorenza Brown is a retired police officer who has spent much of his career in public safety and helping the community. His law enforcement journey is a family legacy and dream. His father, Charlie, was the first Black police officer in Latta. His brother, Tim, is also a retired police officer from Francis Marion University. Brown served as an officer in Mullins, 11 years in the Department of Corrections and six years with the county jail. He is also an entrepreneur, firefighter and emergency medical technician.

After a suggestion from a friend and careful thought, Brown decided to start a security business. "With so many years of law enforcement, it made sense to get into security. I weighed the pros and cons and decided I was highly qualified to take this step, so I started my business, Smith & Brown Security LLC. While I have the experience, my wife, Amie, has helped me to become more organized and brand the business. She makes sure our attire and professionalism and all our paperwork, is in order," he said.

As we discussed National Crime Prevention Month with him, Brown noted that changes in society affect crime prevention for the worst. "When

I was growing up, I was instilled with the values of protecting life and property. In many instances, those values that used to be the norm have changed. Add to this the fact that crime has gotten beyond what it was 20 years ago. Because of this, what we looked at as common sense or traditional practices years ago are no longer so common," he continued.

Crime prevention is vital, not just for police officers, but for citizens who want their communities to be better also. Brown gave several ways citizens can play a key role in assisting law enforcement with crime prevention in communities. Buying a new TV set and leaving the box outside, for example, is a way criminals can tell that you have a new television at your home. He also cautioned against leaving the porch light on for extended periods and suggested using lights with a timer on them. Lastly, he stressed not letting people on social media and online outlets know you are not home.



Amie and Lorenza Brown

"Citizens want you to be everywhere, and understandably so. But by using these simple methods, citizens can help citizens better avoid some criminal elements," Brown concluded.

# COMMUNITY PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN CRIME PREVENTION by Adalia Ellis



Sheriff James Hudson

**DARLINGTON** – Sheriff James Hudson of Darlington has been protecting and serving communities for 27 years, 15 of which were dedicated to advocating for community involvement and responsibility as effective tools for crime prevention.

Particularly troubling to him is the rise in gun violence in recent years, especially among young people.

“When 15- and 16-year-olds are carrying guns, they don’t have enough understanding about life and consequences,” said Sheriff Hudson.

In some communities, these are learned behaviors regarded as methods for settling disputes. These crimes reveal underlying conditions that are hard for communities to acknowledge, such as the impact of poverty, lack of education, and mental health issues. Law enforcement agencies tried to slow these crimes by putting more boots on the ground and identifying, infiltrating, and shutting down groups that encouraged violent crimes.

But it is difficult to find and bring to justice those who commit such crimes because of community ties. They often have loyal relatives and friends who are hesitant to come forward. For these community members, Sheriff Hudson asks the question,

“Do you want safety and peace of mind? I choose safety and peace of mind. I refuse to live in a community where these crimes are committed. It is not fair to other community members or other taxpayers.”

To address the underlying causes of crime, the community has a vital role to play, he said. By choosing to not only recognize the problems but to find ways to help are crucial to creating safe, peaceful neighborhoods. The community is made up of businesses, schools, helping professions, young people and elders. When all aspects of the community work together, it gives rise to positive momentum that increases access to jobs, educational opportunities to help each generation progress further than the one before it; and good will to ensure each citizen is safe and secure.

Law enforcement is an extension of the community and was created to serve and protect. But don’t go calling them to intervene for the little things, such as a child who refuses to go to school. What law enforcement can assist with is setting up a neighborhood Crimewatch. A community that looks out for one another is a community that can better prevent crime.

A strong collaboration between the community and law enforcement is the key to safety in our neighborhoods. Speaking up when you see something wrong and doing your best as parents, teachers, business owners and family members will help create communities in which all citizens can thrive in safety. Those who are on the frontlines of crime prevention, like Sheriff Hudson, will surely welcome your efforts.

## LT. TERRANCE FORD URGES COMMUNITIES AND LAW ENFORCEMENT TO WORK TOGETHER by Les Echols



Lt. Terrance Ford

Starting in 1984, October was designated as National Crime Prevention Month through a Presidential Proclamation and since then, the National Crime Prevention Council has been working with local law enforcement, government agencies, civic groups, schools, businesses and other organizations to help them spread the word about crime prevention and personal safety. With shrinking law

enforcement budgets across the country, the role that each of us can play in preventing crime is more important than ever.

Lt. Terrance Ford has served more than 20 years with the Florence Police Department. As a lieutenant in a patrol division over a squad, Ford manages personalities and outside influences that affect the officers, along with their safety and growth to allow them to be more helpful and productive.

Ford, one of five siblings, graduated from Georgetown High School and joined the U.S. Navy for which he served 8 years. He was stationed aboard the USS Richard E. Byrd out of Norfolk, VA, USS DeWert out of Charleston and Commander Patrol Wing 11 at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida. He went on to join the Florence Police Department in 1999. He served in Criminal Investigation for 3 1/2 years and was a member of the Emergency Response Team for 17 years serving in various roles, including co-team leader.

Ford spoke passionately about crime prevention and how important it is for economic development and growth of a community.

“The importance of crime prevention is essential to the overall growth and well-being of the residents, businesses of the City of Florence and the Florence Police Department,” he said. “Without crime prevention, we would not be as successful in trying to achieve a better quality of life. If crime is high, people and businesses will think long and hard about establishing roots in a community where the quality of life is low. When crimes happen, it affects people financially, emotionally and, unfortunately, at times physically. Prevention starts with the Florence Police Department and citizens collaborating to deter and detect all facets of crime. As police officers, we are only in the neighborhoods during our shifts. The citizens live there and sometimes have a better knowledge of what is happening there, so it is important that the citizens and the Florence Police Department build and cultivate a rapport based on trust and accountability.”

Ford also detailed how citizens can assist in crime prevention.

“A suggestion that we have been issuing for years is do not leave anything of value in your car, whether it is in plain sight or not,” he cautioned. “We also suggest that you record your serial numbers on items of high value and keep that information in a place where they are accessible in case they are stolen. Pay attention to your surroundings and keep an eye out for your neighbors and fellow man.”

Lt. Ford is a graduate of Columbia College class of 2020 where he graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Art in Criminal Justice. He is also a driving instructor certified through South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy (SCCJA), and a TACMED Instructor and Active Shooter Response instructor through the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC).

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS



## MORE THAN 3 MILLION HOMEOWNERS ARE SAVING MONEY



Despite mortgage rates hitting historic lows during the last year, many homeowners still haven't considered refinancing their mortgage - essentially, replacing an existing mortgage with a new mortgage loan that has new terms and potentially a lower interest rate. Homeowners in

lower-income brackets may be convinced they won't qualify for refinancing because of high debt compared to income, poor credit scores or lack of savings to cover closing costs.

However, new refinancing options are available to help make monthly housing payments more affordable. Fannie Mae - which helps make the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage and affordable rental housing possible for millions of people in America - recently released RefiNow, an option that makes it easier for lenders to help eligible homeowners earning at or below 80% of the area median income refinance at a lower interest rate and reduce their monthly mortgage payment.

"Lower-income borrowers typically refinance at a slower pace than high-income borrowers," said Katrina Jones, vice president of Racial Equity, Strategy & Impact at Fannie Mae. "Especially for those who have a high- or adjustable-interest rate loan, refinancing may help make housing costs more affordable and sustainable by lowering their mortgage payments, reducing the total amount of interest paid over the life of the

loan or providing more stable monthly mortgage payments." The new RefiNow option requires that eligible homeowners achieve a savings of at least \$50 in their monthly mortgage payment, but they can potentially save up to \$100-\$250 per month, according to the Federal Housing Finance Agency. It also offers savings on up-front out-of-pocket appraisal expenses up to \$500.

"We can put money-saving refinance options in reach for more homeowners by removing some perceived barriers - such as appraisal costs - to improve affordability and promote sustainable homeownership," said Jones.

Jones provided three reasons to consider refinancing now:

- \* Interest rates are low - Mortgage rates remain low, despite moderate increases. According to Fannie Mae research, experts expect the 30-year fixed mortgage rate to average 3% through 2021, before beginning to rise in 2022. The takeaway for homeowners: There's still time to consider refinancing.

- \* Lower your monthly mortgage payments - Refinancing at a lower interest rate may help decrease monthly mortgage payments, which could increase monthly savings. Refinancing may also help reduce the total amount of interest paid over the life of the loan, depending on the terms of the new loan and the existing loan.

- \* Getting started is a phone call away - Homeowners should contact several mortgage lenders to discuss refinance options to find the best option and terms for their situation, and should always compare offers and shop around.

Homeowners wondering if refinancing makes financial sense can access Fannie Mae's Refinance Calculator and learn more about refinancing options at [KnowYourOptions.com](http://KnowYourOptions.com).



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# ABB TO ADD TELLER PAVILION IN DOWNTOWN CONWAY

Submitted by Michele Rogers, Brand Ambassador



**CONWAY** – Anderson Brothers Bank (ABB) announces construction of a new teller pavilion adjacent to its existing branch building at the corner of Main Street and 5th Avenue in downtown Conway. The new pavilion’s architectural design is quintessentially Conway, but its technology is state-of-the-art. The design was created to enhance the ABB customer experience, preserve existing oak trees, and enrich the pedestrian and driver experience at one of Conway’s busiest intersections.

“We are thrilled to expand our existing building to better serve our Conway clients,” said Richard Carroll, vice president-city executive, Conway. “Anderson Brothers Bank always seeks to positively contribute to our community. We’re proud that this project improves the experience not just for our customers, but for everyone passing through this area of the city.”

The new teller pavilion will serve as an addition to the 1930s gas station building Anderson Brothers Bank adapted for its use in 2015. ABB called on the same Columbia-based architecture firm that designed the adaptive reuse of its existing building to help them envision additional ways to serve their loyal customers. Through design charettes

and a feasibility study, the team determined that adding a teller pavilion to the north of the existing building offered the most elegant solution.

Project designers worked with City of Conway arborists to protect the site’s existing oak trees and increase the root bed for the largest tree. Oak trees provide selective screening for the new pavilion, minimizing its visibility from Main Street. Landscaping engages the sidewalks along Main Street and 5th Avenue, augmenting the pedestrian experience around the site.

In keeping with ABB’s commitment to the local community, the new pavilion’s architecture honors its Conway context. It uses the same Lowcountry vernacular style as the existing bank building. Trellis work, timber beams, brick columns, board and batten siding, and standing seam metal gable roof are all reflected in the new pavilion.

“As a native of Conway, I am especially invested in honoring the city’s architectural character,” said Mark Timbes, a principal with Garvin Design Group and the project’s principal designer, “This project afforded us the opportunity to adapt Lowcountry vernacular elements to suit ABB’s needs for a cutting-edge facility that felt both comfortable for customers and appropriate for its context. We’re very proud to help ABB better both its site and its services in multiple ways.”

While the pavilion’s architecture is traditional, its technology is state-of-the-art. Teller staff stay in place inside the existing bank building and serve clients through two-way video. Bank customers enjoy a futuristic digital teller experience in a familiar setting.

“One of our primary goals for the expansion was to provide our customers with even faster and convenient service,” said Creighton Yates, branch manager at Anderson Brothers Bank Conway Main. “Digital tellers enable folks to stay in their cars and provide a safe and comfortable interaction with bank staff. The new tellers make it easy to get in and out and on with your day.”

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### ANDERSON BROTHERS BANK





## ABB PROMOTES ASHLEY FLOYD

Articles Submitted by Michele Rogers, Brand Ambassador



Ashley Floyd

**MULLINS** – Anderson Brothers Bank is pleased to announce the promotion of Ashley Floyd to Branch Operations Coordinator of the McIntyre office located at 232 West McIntyre Street in Mullins. Floyd has been employed with Anderson Brothers Bank since April 2014 when she was hired as teller in the McIntyre office. In her new position, she will provide administrative and supervisory support within the branch office to ensure effective

and efficient customer service and teller operations. She will manage work activities of branch tellers by overseeing, planning and scheduling duties while conferring with retail sales and service leaders to resolve operational issues and occurrences.

Floyd is a graduate of Lake View High School and recently attained a business degree from Horry-Georgetown Technical College. She resides in Dillon County with her husband, Ryan, and son, Chase.

“Ashley is a tremendous asset to our McIntyre branch,” said Luke Gasque, assistant vice president-city executive with the Mullins offices of Anderson Brothers Bank. “We are very excited to have her accept the role of branch operations coordinator. Ashley excels in knowledge of our products and services and is enthusiastic in providing outstanding customer service.”

## ABB OPENS NEW TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER IN MULLINS



**ANDERSON  
BROTHERS BANK**

Anderson Brothers Bank is pleased to announce the opening of the Anderson

Brothers Bank Training and Development Center. Renovations of a commercial building located at 130 N. Main Street, Mullins have been completed and will be the home of the state-of-the-art training facility. The commercial building was the former Mullins Department Store, which has been closed for several years. It will now have a new purpose and add a fresh look to Main Street Mullins.

The newly renovated 6,000-square-foot training center features a variety of specialized training rooms, offices and meeting spaces. Ashley Bean, Director of Training and Retail Operations, will oversee all training of front line staff, customer service specialists, and employee development in the newest expansion.

“After months of collaboration and planning, we now have an official training center for Anderson Brothers Bank,” said Tamra Cannon, chief retail officer. “This addition will allow us to expand our training platform and enhance the training experience for our employees. Providing exceptional service to our customers is our main goal, and as institutional trends change, this expansion will offer new opportunities to provide ongoing training to ensure all employees can provide knowledgeable assistance to every customer, from our lobbies to our online services.”

### 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 25 branches conveniently located in 17 communities throughout the Pee Dee, Coastal and Low Country

## JORDAN FORMO JOINS ANDERSON BROTHERS BANK AS LOAN OFFICER



Jordan Formo

Anderson Brothers Bank announces that Jordan Formo has joined as loan officer in the Longs branch located at 71 Cloverleaf Drive, Longs. As loan officer, Formo will focus on lending, customer and market development, and financial services to develop new banking relationships for Anderson Brothers Bank.

A resident of North Myrtle Beach, he is a graduate of the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina

where he received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. His studies led him to a career in banking through which he gained experience as a teller and personal banker with Wells Fargo. Formo is involved in the Carolina Finance & Investing Association, the Carolina Fund, and the Entrepreneurship Club.

“We are extremely excited that Jordan has joined our ABB family,” said Bryan Lenertz, vice president and Horry County area executive. “As we continue to grow in Horry County, he will be a valuable asset to our bank and to our customers. Jordan’s ability to assist clients in financing arrangements will make a significant impact in the Horry area.”

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](http://ABBANK.com) or contact Michele Rogers, brand ambassador at (843) 561-0288 or [Micheler@abbank.com](mailto:Micheler@abbank.com).

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# IMPROVE YOUR FINANCIAL HEALTH WITH THESE 4 TIPS



With recent news reports focusing on professional athletes' mental health, the conversation has turned to a broader shared experience. According to a report from Insider, athletes can suffer from mental health issues due to the public and financial

pressures they face when competing. Many athletes have been candid about their difficulties and discussed how they cope. For former U.S. speedskater Apolo Ohno, an important aspect of caring for his holistic health is tending to his financial health.

"Finances tend to get overlooked when talking about mental health," Ohno said. "But in the same way mental wellness affects athletic performance, your finances can have a huge impact on your mental health."

## Defining financial health

Several dimensions make up financial health, like how much you have in savings, how much you're investing for retirement and how much of your income goes toward nonessentials.

According to recent data from Personal Capital and Empower Retirement, 77% of surveyed Americans say their financial well-being significantly impacts their mental and physical health. Additionally, 57% say their financial health directly correlates with their happiness.

So clearly financial well-being is important, but how do you achieve it? Unfortunately, there's no easy answer or a one-size-fits-all solution for achieving financial health. Ohno says for him, it's more about the journey rather than reaching specific milestones.

But there are some steps you can take to start establishing some of the basics of a financial plan. So, if you are on your own journey to find financial wellness, here are a few tips to help you get started.

## Get clear on your short-and long-term financial goals

Fifty-nine percent of Americans say having clear goals is an important aspect of financial health. No matter your goals, try making each of them SMART, meaning they are:

**Specific:** Know precisely what you want to do with your money.

**Measurable:** Know the exact dollar amount you need to achieve your goals.

**Attainable:** Know how you can reach your goals based on your current budget.

**Realistic:** If a goal is out of reach, find ways to make it more attainable.

**Timely:** It's important to assign a specific timeframe by when you want to achieve your goals.

Your SMART goals don't have to stay the same. If you're working on long-term goals, you can review and adjust them annually as life changes.

## Create a budget and know where you stand

A budget can give you a holistic view of your money habits. With a budget, it's easier to manage, track and allocate your spending based on your needs.

Establishing a budget can be daunting, but it doesn't have to be. There are plenty of tools that can simplify the process. Rated as one of the top budgeting apps of 2021, the Personal Capital app is an excellent resource for tracking your finances. Link everything from your checking, savings, investment, loan and retirement accounts to see your cash flow and financial picture all in one place.

This type of free app can also help you figure out your net worth – what you have minus what you owe. While more than half of surveyed Americans say their net worth is a critical component of their financial health, fewer can estimate theirs. "If you can't measure it, it's very difficult to gauge where you're going," Ohno said.

## Build a rainy-day fund

In an emergency, your financial safety net can determine your preparedness. Whether you endure job loss, car trouble or a medical emergency, your safety net can give you extra financial cushion when the unexpected happens. If you don't have one already, there's no need to panic. You can build your emergency fund through automatic deposits to your savings account and by cutting out unnecessary expenses. If you can, save 3 to 6 months' worth of expenses.

## Pay off bad debt

While 35% of surveyed Americans say debt significantly impacts their financial health, another 69% associate being debt-free as a necessity for long-term financial well-being. While paying off debt gives you more independence, not all debt is bad. Mortgages, student loans and business loans can be considered "good" debt. Credit card balances, auto loans and personal loans are usually regarded as "bad" debt. That's because bad debts can come with high interest rates and typically decrease in value over time.

Eliminating your bad debt can take time but isn't impossible. Financial advisors generally recommend paying off debt with the highest interest rate first. Then, as you work your way down, you'll pay less and less as your balance goes down.

"Whether you're an athlete or not, it's important to understand how your financial health relates to your overall health," Ohno said. "Talking about and dealing with money doesn't have to be taboo. When you're aware of your financial wellness, you can face life's ups and downs with confidence."

Apolo Ohno is a paid Financial Hero. He is not a client of Personal Capital Advisors Corporation and does not make any endorsements or recommendations about securities offerings or investment strategies.

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*Submitted by Synovus*

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Our company is founded on the principles Jordan modeled the day that mill worker's dress was torn—integrity, character and the principle of treating people right and doing the right thing. This foundation has endured over the years, and while we've grown from helping customers and small businesses

across three different centuries to financing modern corporate expansions, we're still proud to be part of our local communities and to do the right thing.

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A financial services company based in Columbus, Ga., Synovus has approximately \$55 billion in assets. We provide commercial and retail banking, and a full suite of specialized products and services, including private banking, treasury management, wealth management, mortgage services, premium finance, asset-based lending, structured lending and international banking through 285 branches in Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Florida and Tennessee. With more than 5,000 team members, Synovus is a Great Place to Work-Certified Company and is on the web at [synovus.com](http://synovus.com) and on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram.

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# PARENTS OF A SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS TOO.



As the parent of a special needs child, you know how rewarding—and challenging—caring for your loved one can be. And even though you’ve got it all under control right now, you can’t help worrying about the future. After all, someday your child will have to go on without you, and you know how expensive it can be to maintain your child’s quality of life. That’s why a special needs trust (also called a supplemental needs trust) can be a tremendous source of comfort.

A special needs trust is a legal instrument that helps concerned parents like you set money aside for your child’s future care. Best of all, it does it without reducing your child’s eligibility for public assistance programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI). For obvious reasons, it is important that it be prepared with the input of qualified tax and legal advisors. Let’s take a look at how these trusts work:

## **A trust protects your child’s assets—and eligibility.**

If your child relies on government assistance, it’s important to know that many of these programs have strict asset limitations (usually \$2,000). A special needs trust can keep your child from exceeding these limits by making sure any assets he or she would otherwise inherit go directly into the trust. That way, you don’t have to worry

about jeopardizing your child’s eligibility for assistance, and you can be sure that any money you earmark for his or her care will be used exclusively for that purpose.

## **You can fund a trust with a wide variety of assets.**

You can use almost any combination of assets to fund your special needs trust: stocks, bonds, real estate—even the proceeds from a life insurance policy (provided you name the trust as the beneficiary). In fact, a whole life insurance policy can be a cost-effective way to fund the trust, since they both pay a death benefit

(provided premium requirements are met) and any cash value they generate will continue to grow tax-deferred until your death.

## **Make sure you use a qualified professional.**

Your child’s future is too important to leave anything to chance. While special needs trusts have been around for years, they are complex legal instruments that have to be set up properly. Be sure to work with an attorney who has plenty of experience in this area, as well as a thorough knowledge of wills and estates.

It takes a special person to care for a special needs child—and to adequately prepare for the child’s future. With a special needs trust, you can take comfort in the fact that you have done everything you can to give your child the resources he or she will need to lead a long and happy life.

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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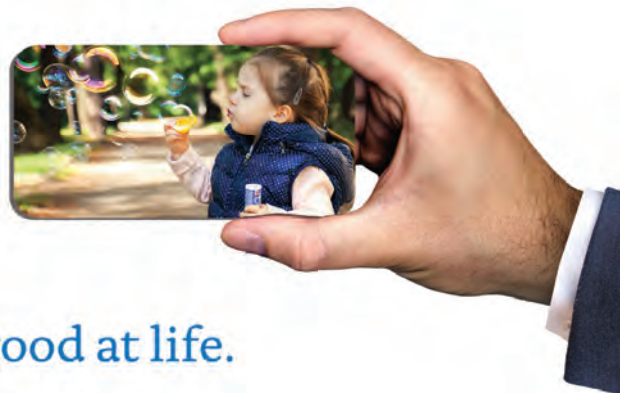
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## 5 FINANCE TIPS TO CONSIDER AHEAD OF FALL TUITION DEADLINES



The second half of summer brings a welcomed sense of familiarity for families across the country as back-to-school season approaches, and enthusiasm is particularly strong after more than a year of uncertainty upended the education system as we know it. While a widespread return-to-campus is a particularly exciting time at the college level, some families may also feel a sense of apprehension, especially in the wake of COVID-19.

In fact, affordability and dealing with the debt burden that often goes hand-in-hand with a degree is the top concern of both parents and students, according to the Princeton Review's 2021 College Hopes & Worries survey. With many parents trying to balance daily expenses, savings progress and the cost of college

simultaneously, supporting four years of higher education can be a struggle. Some may even be prioritizing college payments over their retirement contributions (not usually recommended by financial advisors), or other investments.

The good news is that with proper planning, parents can continue making progress toward saving for their own future while also helping ease the cost of college. In addition to long-term tools (like 529 College Savings plans), there are ways parents can get strategic about how they finance the remaining gap that exists when tuition comes due later this summer.

It's possible to help a loved one achieve a better financial future without sacrificing yours. Here are a few tips to consider:

- \* Consider the short- and long-term impacts of cosigning for a loan vs. taking out a parent student loan. The key difference is who takes responsibility for the loan, which can impact your finances for years to come.

- \* Understand if your retirement savings can handle the increased expenses of paying for your child's education out of pocket or by borrowing money. It is absolutely critical that you don't derail your retirement.

- \* Encourage your student to take full

advantage of work-study opportunities if available as part of any financial aid package. Between class and extracurriculars their schedule might be extra busy, but many end up developing valuable relationships and/or work experience while minimizing the amount borrowed - both of which can benefit everyone's financial posture in the long-term.

- \* Resist the temptation to borrow extra money for discretionary spending. While tempting to take out an extra thousand here or a thousand there to help ensure your student can enjoy their college years, compounding interest can make these splurges very costly when you consider them over the lifetime of the loan.

- \* Evaluate the repayment option on private student loans rather than simply defaulting to the deferred option. The key is to prioritize the amount you pay right now with the amount that you pay over the life of the loan. Deferring your payments might not always be the best option.

An added bonus: get your student involved in the decision-making process! Not only will they learn something, but providing them with the added context around any financial commitments made may inspire them to make healthy financial decisions along the way.

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## DOCTORS URGE PREGNANT PATIENTS TO GET VACCINATED

Submitted by Leslie Cantu/MUSC Catalyst News



Dr. Rebecca Wineland

One group that is especially lagging in COVID-19 vaccination also happens to be at higher risk of severe illness – pregnant women. The lack of vaccination is concerning to doctors as they watch the more contagious delta variant sweep across the nation.

“What I’ve been telling patients is ‘Go get the vaccine today. Immediately. It will decrease your risk of death, it will decrease your risk of ICU

admission, and it will decrease your risk of long-term comorbidities from having COVID,’” said MUSC Health Charleston’s Rebecca Wineland, M.D., who specializes in treating high-risk pregnancies.

That advice holds true for everyone, but especially pregnant people. Although a pregnant woman isn’t more likely to catch COVID-19, she is more likely to become seriously ill if she does catch COVID-19. The risks include the respiratory distress, which is common in COVID-19 patients as well as ICU admission, pre-eclampsia, premature birth, NICU stays for the baby, stillbirth or miscarriage and death.



Dr. Germina Suffrant

MUSC Health Florence’s Germina Suffrant, M.D., has witnessed this in Florence. She recalls a patient last year who was young and in good health, although slightly overweight, who quickly progressed from shortness of breath to intubation to emergency C-section.

“She was in the hospital for weeks, and she’s still suffering the consequences of that,” Suffrant said, noting that many other patients, even

those with mild symptoms, have delivered early.

On July 30, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine issued a joint statement strongly recommending that all pregnant women get vaccinated, regardless of trimester. National groups held off on recommendations when vaccines first became available because pregnant women hadn’t been included in the clinical trials, although some participants did become pregnant during the course of the trials. Since the vaccines have become available though, tens of thousands of pregnant women have been safely vaccinated, according to ACOG and the SMFM.

“The recent surge of the delta variant, along with the safety profile of the vaccines, has led our national guidelines to strongly recommend vaccination for all pregnant and lactating women,” Wineland said. “We also suspect that maternal antibodies from the vaccine transfer to the unborn baby and provide some protection to the newborn.”

The delta variant has caused a resurgence of cases, and the vast majority of people hospitalized with COVID-19 are unvaccinated. Wineland described the situation as devastating, saying the most common reason her patients give for not being vaccinated is that they thought pregnant women could not get the vaccine.

“They were surprised when I told them,” Wineland said.

Suffrant agrees that distrust of vaccines in general, which has been growing for the past couple of decades, and concern about the mRNA type of vaccine, which relies on a technology previously unknown to the general public, have contributed to vaccine hesitancy among her pregnant patients.

“We understand the fear, but we do see the consequences of having COVID in pregnancy,” she said.

She urges patients to get the vaccine, emphasizing that it is safe and will not only protect the mother but also her unborn child.

## MUSC HEALTH FLORENCE MEDICAL CENTER CARDIOVASCULAR REHABILITATION PROGRAM CERTIFIED BY INDUSTRY LEADER

Submitted by MUSC Health Florence



MUSC Health Florence Medical Center is proud to announce the certification of its cardiovascular rehabilitation program by the American Association

of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation (AACVPR). This certification recognizes MUSC Health Florence Medical Center’s commitment to improving the quality of life of patients by enhancing standards of care. Cardiovascular rehabilitation programs are designed to help people with cardiovascular problems (e.g., heart attacks, coronary artery bypass graft surgery) recover faster and live healthier.

The program includes exercise, education, counseling and support for patients and their families. To earn accreditation, MUSC Health Florence Medical Center’s cardiovascular rehabilitation program participated in an application process requiring extensive documentation of the program’s practices. AACVPR Program Certification is the only peer-review accreditation process designed to review individual programs for adherence to standards and guidelines developed and published by AACVPR and other related professional societies.

“I couldn’t be more proud of our cardiovascular rehabilitation team’s efforts in providing the best care,” said Mo Bourji, non-interventional cardiologist and medical director of the Cardiovascular Rehabilitation Program. “This certification demonstrates the team’s dedication to helping get our patients back to the life they love to live.”

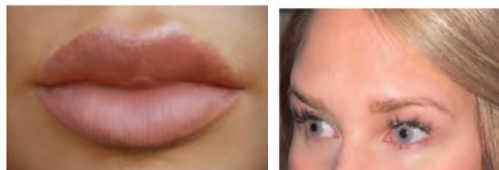
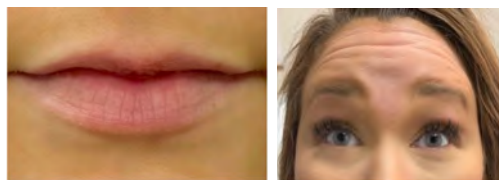
The AACVPR Program Certification Committee reviews each program’s application, and certification is awarded by the AACVPR Board of Directors. In 2018, AACVPR moved to an outcomes-based process with performance measurements that represent more meaningful outcomes. AACVPR-certified programs are leaders in the cardiovascular and pulmonary rehabilitation field because they offer the most advanced practices available and have proven track records of high-quality patient care. AACVPR Program Certification is valid for three years.



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MUSC is implementing a series of strategic initiatives to eliminate health care disparities, build MUSC leadership, students, and workforce to reflect our communities, and elevate a culture of “OneMUSC”.



## A MATTER OF TRUST: REENGAGING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR IN CLINICAL TRIALS

*Submitted by Ryan Barrs, MUSC*



*Program Coordinator for SCTR, Charnele Handy, talks to Argentino Calvo at his appointment for the Novavax vaccine trial through MUSC*

**CHARLESTON** – For Argentino Calvo, a retired firefighter and paramedic from Bluffton, South Carolina, joining a COVID-19 vaccine trial was not just a personal choice but an investment in the health of his community. Calvo participated in the Novavax vaccine trial at MUSC, which was part of a large-scale study that recruited more than 30,000 patients across 119 study sites in the United States and Mexico.

Calvo, whose wife is an oncology nurse, has since become a COVID-19 ambassador to his local Latino community, breaking language barriers to ease anxiety surrounding clinical trials and vaccine development.

“Being Hispanic, most of the Latino community knows me in my town,” said Calvo. “Sometimes non-English speaking people only get half of the message, so I am trying to pass on the knowledge that I have.”

Clinical trials determine the fate of most any medical intervention, be it a drug, device or vaccine. Unfortunately, clinical trial participants don’t always accurately represent the wider population. A 2021 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* analyzed 230 U.S.-based vaccine clinical trials from 2011 to 2020 and found that, out of nearly 220,000 study participants, more than 75% were white. Compared with census data, people of color were underrepresented, and fewer than half of the trials even reported ethnicity.

Barriers to recruiting people of color into clinical trials include disparities in access to health care and a distrust of medical research due to past abuses. Notorious examples include the failure to provide penicillin to Black male participants in the infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Study – even after it was found to cure syphilis – and the 1951 nonconsensual use of tissue from Henrietta Lacks, a Black mother of five who was a patient at Johns Hopkins.

Marvella E. Ford, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Public Health Sciences and the associate director of cancer disparities and population sciences at Hollings Cancer Center, understands this distrust well. Ford participated in Tuskegee University’s first ethics conference in 1996, which met to discuss the ramifications of the Tuskegee study.

A number of survivors of the study were also present. Instead of expressing distrust in clinical research, however, Ford recalled that they voiced concerns through their attorney, famed civil rights lawyer Fred Gray, that poor clinical trial diversity would mean their community would not benefit from the latest medical advances. Gray explained that his clients feared that their suffering would have been in vain.

“Mr. Gray said the men were proud of the fact that, because of



## A MATTER OF TRUST CONT'D

what they went through, we now have safeguards in place to protect future generations of trial participants,” said Ford.

These safeguards include institutional review boards to scrutinize the ethical and scientific merit of clinical trial protocols, data and safety monitoring boards to oversee the safety and effectiveness of the treatments being tested and an informed consent process that gives participants ongoing information so they can decide whether to enroll or stay in a clinical trial.

Charnele Handy, clinical trials program coordinator for the South Carolina Clinical & Translational Research (SCTR) Institute at MUSC, uses her scientific background and perspective as an African American woman to build trust with participants of color.

“As an African American and a female, I can give you a little more comfort in feeling that I understand and empathize with the trauma we’ve experienced,” said Handy. “Let me show you that I’m part of a team that’s working to move forward.”

Warren Marcus, a Gullah Geechee sweetgrass artist and caretaker, was in the AstraZeneca vaccine trial at MUSC, which recruited more than 650 people in Charleston. While he was initially hesitant to participate, Marcus had a pleasant experience in the trial.

“When you think of clinical trials, there’s that fear of being a lab rat,” said Marcus. “But now, having gone through it, I would gladly do it again to make life better for others.”

Participation from communities of color in clinical trials helps to ensure that the treatment is safe and effective for everyone, as different populations may respond differently to medical interventions. To improve clinical diversity, Handy said that it is vital to acknowledge the injustices of the past and facilitate open communication between

diverse groups of scientists, health care providers and local community members.

“Don’t dismiss the trauma,” she cautioned.

Ford, who also serves as the co-director of the Black Faculty Group, has worked hard to get the word out to the Black and Latino communities that it’s vitally important to participate in trials as well as to receive the COVID-19 vaccine – especially with such a high prevalence of severe cases in minority populations and the recent uptick in numbers. At the same time, she stresses the importance of building trust and confidence in health care in these communities.

“We want to be a resource for community members,” she said. “We want to meet with them and talk about their concerns.”

Calvo appreciates Ford’s approach and noted, “It’s not just one person’s problem – it’s everybody’s. I would encourage everyone to participate in clinical trials.”

“You’re not just doing it for you,” agreed Marcus. “You’re doing it for generations to come.”



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## SAVING LIVES THROUGH MONOCLONAL ANTIBODY IV THERAPY

Submitted by Andrew Boardwine, Communications Specialist



Jennifer Lynch, FNP-C, and her nurse Shannon Auman offer Monoclonal Antibody IV Therapy (mAb) for COVID-19 positive patient

CareSouth Carolina (CSC) has seen patients from all over the state of South Carolina and even North Carolina make their way to the Hartsville office to receive treatment that many have deemed as lifesaving. CareSouth Carolina's Hartsville Suite B team—led by Jennifer Lynch, FNP-C, and her nurse Shannon Auman—offers Monoclonal Antibody IV Therapy (mAb) for COVID-19 positive patients.

The therapy is an hour-long IV infusion that has been developed for the treatment and prophylaxis of viral infections like COVID-19. The goal of this therapy is to decrease hospitalizations and emergency room visits due to symptoms of COVID-19 and to prevent the patient from progressing to severe disease. This treatment is also used to prevent potential long-term damage from COVID-19.

### CareSouth Carolina makes the mAb treatment process easy

Getting approval for mAb treatment can be a confusing and time-consuming process. In the case in the battle against COVID-19 and its symptoms, time is of the essence.

One of the reasons that CareSouth Carolina has seen patients from all across the Carolinas has to do with the ease of the process. To perform an infusion treatment, clinics have to have a referral from a doctor, and then the patient has to be scheduled. In some local cases, this has meant patients would have to wait seven to eight days to receive treatment. At CareSouth Carolina, Lynch and her team make the process easy because everything



CareSouth Carolina's Hartsville Suite B team saving lives through Monoclonal Antibody IV Therapy

is done under one roof. All Lynch needs is a positive COVID-19 test result, and she can write the order herself. As a result, people can be seen in a more timely fashion, and the treatment is able to get their symptoms under control before they progress to worse stages, which could include hospitalization and ventilation.

Regeneron National Field Director David Fields paid a visit to CareSouth Carolina's Hartsville Suite B team in early August when he heard about the work they were doing with mAb treatment. Fields said he was blown away with how easy they made the process and the accessibility that CareSouth Carolina provided to its communities.

As of Aug. 6, CareSouth Carolina has performed 565 total Monoclonal Antibody IV Therapy treatments.

### Monoclonal Antibody Therapy Success Stories

A CareSouth Carolina provider had a family member who used the Monoclonal Antibody IV Therapy and showed significant improvements after just a single treatment. "I just wanted to thank you [Jennifer Lynch and her team] for taking care of a family member," the provider said. "They had a very positive experience and complimented the team's work ethic



## SAVING LIVES CONT'D

and hustle. They said, ‘It was 1:30 p.m., and they hadn’t even had lunch!’ This family member is feeling much better today, and I think that is largely due to the infusion, as they were quite pitiful yesterday due to feeling very ill. So, thank you again for your perseverance and dedication to this task among your already lengthy list of responsibilities. I imagine it is overwhelming, but it is making such a big difference in the lives of our patients!”

Renee Gainey and her son Matthew Thomas had been patients of Lynch’s for several years. Gainey had been careful in practicing COVID-19 precautions due to Thomas’ underlying health conditions, including blindness and Type 1 Diabetes, but tested positive for the virus after several coworkers got sick. She began mAb treatment right away, and it kept her symptoms from progressing past the mild stages. While Thomas tested negative several times, he eventually began running a fever and tested positive two weeks after her test. He began the mAb treatment, as well, and his symptoms began to improve within days. Had it not been for the treatment, Gainey said she believes there would have been a much worse outcome.

Another CareSouth Carolina provider, Dr. Jana Ebbert, also saw the positive effects of mAb treatment through her own battle with COVID-19. Ebbert and her husband both contracted COVID-19 in early June following Memorial Day, and their symptoms progressively deteriorated over the course of the following few days. Ebbert said she hadn’t heard much about Monoclonal IV Therapy at the time, but they both decided to try the treatment in CSC’s Hartsville office.

“The night before we started the Infusion Treatment, my daughter was in town, and I remember showing her where the life insurance policy information was because we were very fearful,” Ebbert said.

The mAb treatment was started for both Ebbert and her husband. The two received treatments for two days at the Hartsville office before being admitted into the hospital where they continued to receive mAb treatment. Ebbert’s husband spent some time in the ICU, but the treatment proved effective enough to reverse their symptoms and keep them both from progressing to ventilation.

“It turned things around for us,” Ebbert said. “I really believe it saved our lives. Had we not started the treatment when we did, the outcome could’ve been a lot worse.

Ebbert, who works in CareSouth Carolina’s Bennettsville Main office, says she now refers every single COVID-19 positive patient over to the Hartsville office for mAb treatment.

“Anybody who is testing positive, I’m sending over to Jennifer. I think it’s that important,” Ebbert said. “Even if they’re just showing mild symptoms, I’m still sending them over because it’s important for them to get those antibodies, even if it’s only one treatment. This is especially important for those who are not vaccinated.”



## HOPEHEALTH OPENS NEW FLORENCE LOCATION

Submitted by Donna Tracy, Communications Coordinator



HopeHealth began seeing patients in early September at its newest location serving the west Florence community at 3380 Pine Needles Road.

The 10,000 square-foot facility provides primary care services with Dr. Krista Kozacki; Sydney Murphy, physician assistant; and family nurse practitioner, Tim Weaver. An in-house pharmacy is expected to open by the new year.



Krista Kozacki, MD



Sydney Murphy, PA-C



Tim Weaver, FNP

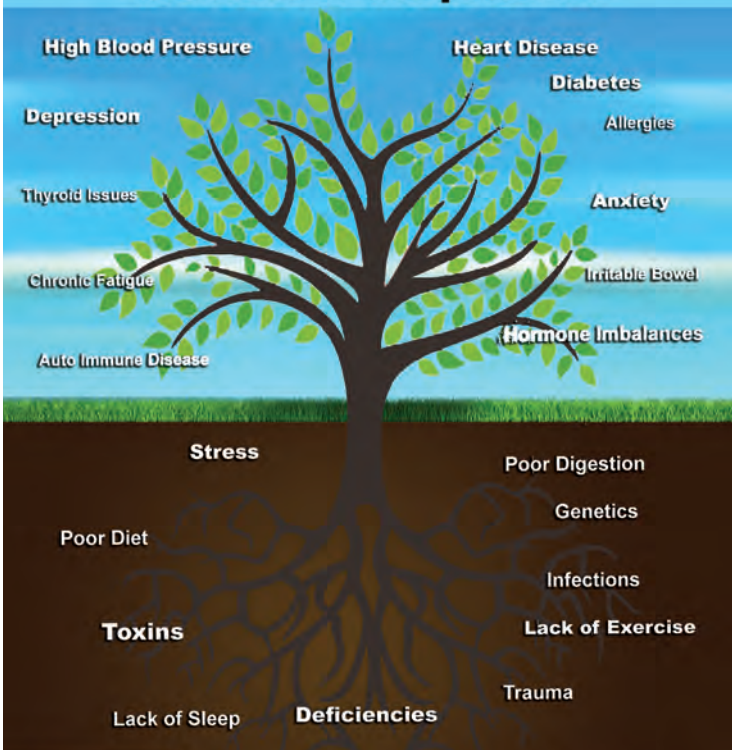
**Dr. Kozacki** joined the HopeHealth team in August 2011. She is a board-certified physician specializing in family medicine and has spent nearly 20 years practicing medicine in the Florence community.

**Sydney Murphy** is a physician assistant. From Darlington, she is a member of the American Association of Physician Assistants and the South Carolina Association of Physician Assistants.

**Tim Weaver** joined HopeHealth as a family nurse practitioner in June 2018. A native of Darlington, with more than 20 years’ experience in health care, he is certified by the American Association of Nurse Practitioners.

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# STROKE THROMBECTOMY: A REVOLUTION IN FIGHTING CLOTS Submitted by Dr. Jay Dolia



*Dr. Jay Dolia*

When a stroke occurs, part of your brain shuts down and so does a part of you. A blood clot can cause strokes to happen and block the blood flow to your brain. For each minute this is happening, you're permanently losing 1.9 million neurons. For each hour this blockage occurs, your brain ages by 3.6 years. If the clot is large enough, it could be fatal. This is why stroke is the fifth leading cause of death and the leading cause of adult disability. The most vital tool modern medicine has to fight stroke is a procedure called stroke thrombectomy. The race to stop the stroke, however, starts by calling 911 and getting to the right hospital in time.

## **Why is stroke thrombectomy so important, and how is it different from other stroke procedures?**

Thrombectomy is a revolutionary life-saving procedure for the treatment of strokes. It involves using a flexible tube with a tiny wire mesh cage on one end. It is then inserted into an artery near the patient's wrist or groin and carefully guided up through the body into the brain. The cage then closes around the clot, which is plucked out, allowing blood to instantly flow freely again. If performed quickly, numerous research studies have proven a thrombectomy can significantly reduce the risk of death or disability from a stroke.

Before the availability of thrombectomy in 2015, the only treatment for patients suffering from an acute stroke was the "clot busting" drug called tPA, administered through an IV. But tPA is not likely to work on very large clots that block big arteries supplying the brain with blood and oxygen. These are the blockages that cause the most significant brain tissue damage and the worst outcomes for patients. Thrombectomy has revolutionized treatment in these cases.

## **Is thrombectomy possible in every hospital?**

Providing a world-class thrombectomy service is complex and requires a stroke neurologist. While the procedures and services involved have been implemented 24/7 in many large urban areas, the staffing and investment required for its implementation in rural areas are significantly lagging. My mission, and that of MUSC Health Florence Medical Center, is to reduce the disparity in thrombectomy access in rural areas beginning with the Pee Dee region. Every missed thrombectomy is a missed opportunity to help someone walk again, hold the ones they love, or even say "I love you" using their own voice.

## **What is the best way to make thrombectomy services available to everyone in the Pee Dee?**

The key to success is getting the patient to the right hospital with the right team fast. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of stroke is crucial. Calling 911 initiates this vital process. Paramedics can quickly and accurately identify stroke patients and direct them to the nearest thrombectomy stroke center, which is the most efficient way to ensure we all have access to this life-saving treatment.

## **What makes thrombectomy such an exciting procedure?**

Imagine you have in your possession the most powerful tool in the world. Now imagine the power of this tool will reduce disability more so than any other surgery in the world. It is more powerful than some chemotherapy treatments and five times as effective as similar treatments for heart attacks.

For me, the tool is thrombectomy, and we have it in our hands at MUSC Health Florence Medical Center to help return your family member home. It has changed the game for stroke patients, taking the prognosis from terrible to the prospect of a cure. The idea that someone can have a major stroke, recover, and continue to lead an active and independent life is a reality with this procedure. As an interventional neurologist, it's my

job to provide comprehensive care and practice individualized medicine for every one of my patients suffering from a stroke.

Dr. Jay Dolia is a neuroendovascular surgeon at MUSC Health – Neurology, in Florence. If you would like more information, call (843) 669-0927, or visit [MUSCHealth.org/florence](https://www.musc.edu/health-care/florence).

# YOU CAN'T BEAT A HEALTHY HEART!

*Submitted by Parinita Dherange, MD, MUSC Health-Cardiology*



*Dr. Parinita Dherange*

## **Let's have a Heart-to-Heart about Heart Arrhythmias**

Just like a home, your heart has rooms (chambers), walls (heart muscles), doorways (valves), plumbing (heart vessels), and an electrical system (conduction system). Any abnormalities in the electrical system of the heart can cause arrhythmias leading to abnormal heart rhythms. Arrhythmias may be completely harmless or bothersome, and sometimes even life-threatening. They can affect the heart's pumping function and, as a result, cause other organ failures. With arrhythmias, the heart can beat either too fast, too slow, or erratically. Certain arrhythmias may increase your risk of developing conditions such as stroke, heart failure and, in some cases, lead to sudden cardiac death.

## **What are the common causes of arrhythmias?**

Some of the common causes or risk factors for arrhythmias include an active heart attack or scarring from a previous heart attack, high blood pressure, blocked arteries in the heart (coronary artery disease), structural changes in the heart from cardiomyopathy, overactive or underactive thyroid gland, diabetes, sleep apnea, covid-19 infection, side effects of medications, electrolyte imbalance or genetics. Other lifestyle risk factors include drug abuse, smoking, drinking too much alcohol or caffeine, stress or anxiety.

## **What are the signs and symptoms of arrhythmias?**

Arrhythmias may not cause any signs or symptoms. Some arrhythmias may have noticeable symptoms, including a fluttering sensation in the chest, racing heartbeat, slow heartbeat, chest pain, shortness of breath, feeling of anxiety, fatigue, lightheadedness or dizziness, sweating, fainting or near fainting. These symptoms could be due to premature heartbeats or your heart racing or beating too slowly. Other signs and symptoms could be due to ineffective pumping of your heart because it beats too slow or too fast.

## **How can we identify and treat arrhythmias?**

Arrhythmias can be detected by conducting invasive or non-invasive heart-monitoring tests. These tests include an electrocardiogram (ECG), Holter monitor, event recorder, echocardiogram, implantable loop recorder, stress test, or electrophysiological testing and mapping.

Treatment for arrhythmias may or may not be necessary. Usually, treatment is required if the arrhythmia is causing significant symptoms or if it puts you at life-threatening risk. Slow heartbeats can be treated by implanting a pacemaker, a small device that sends electrical impulses to your heart and can speed up your heart rate. Fast heartbeats can be treated with medications or cardioversions. Sometimes it may require catheter ablation. This procedure uses extreme cold or radiofrequency energy in which a small spot of heart tissue is damaged (ablated) to create an electrical block along the pathway causing an arrhythmia. Individuals who are at high risk of sudden cardiac death may require an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD). An ICD detects abnormal heart rhythm and sends out low- or high-energy shocks to reset the heart to a normal rhythm.

Dr. Parinita Dherange is an electrophysiologist at MUSC Health – Cardiology, specializing in cardiac arrhythmias. To schedule an appointment, please call at (843) 674-4787.





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# HOPEHEALTH LIFESTYLE COACH EARNS STATE RECOGNITION

Articles submitted by Donna Tracy, Communications Coordinator



Sonda Jett-Clair

Sonda Jett-Clair of HopeHealth's Diabetes and Nutrition Institute team has been recognized by the South Carolina Public Health Association as the Lifestyle Change Coach of the Year. The award is presented by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control each year to an individual who has made special contributions in diabetes prevention and has proven results through program participants' weight loss.

Jett-Clair, chronic disease prevention coordinator at the HopeHealth Medical Plaza, received the recognition virtually

during the 19th Annual Chronic Disease Prevention Symposium.

"Sonda is a natural speaker and motivator and meets people where they are and is innovative and realistic in helping them figure out small, sustainable steps to meet health goals in our Diabetes Prevention Program," said Anita Longan, diabetes center coordinator. "She is realistic and motivational at the same time in helping people meet goals and navigate challenges and options, and she single-handedly helped get the DPP program certified."

"Her friendly, engaging manner encourages her class participants to share their preferences, needs and values, which then helps them overcome unhealthy lifestyle habits," said Longan.

"When you know better, you can do better!" said Jett-Clair. "If I can reach one person and motivate one individual who has pre-diabetes to make some lifestyle changes, then I feel like I have accomplished something, so I try to give people the tools so that they can know better and make some changes."

The Diabetes and Nutrition Institute is part of HopeHealth's services and provides a comprehensive approach to disease prevention and management. The institute includes:

- Nutrition classes such as Cooking Matters and It's Your Health Take Charge
- Chronic disease prevention and management patient classes such as Diabetes Self-Management Education, Diabetes Prevention Program and Walk with Ease
- Nutrition counseling
- Medical nutrition therapy
- Diabetes care services, including retinal eye scans and foot care
- Endocrinology

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](http://hope-health.org).

## HOPEHEALTH ACHIEVES 75% VACCINATION RATE



HopeHealth has surpassed a 75 percent COVID-19 vaccination rate across the

organization. While HopeHealth does not currently require the COVID-19 vaccine, the 75 percent vaccination rate is an industry high.

"We provide education and incentives to our staff regularly and continue working to increase that percentage even more," said Tiffany Straus, director of community relations. "As always, we are keeping close tabs on the situation and meeting regularly to discuss policy updates."

"This is a great achievement which will keep our teams and patients safe," said Dr. Heather Leisy, director of preventive medicine at HopeHealth. "Vaccination is the best way of fighting against the virus."

HopeHealth leadership has encouraged employees to get vaccinated since the vaccines became available to staff. Many were able to receive the vaccine at initial drives for health care employees provided by McLeod Health Care and Medical University of South Carolina Florence Medical Center, while others received the vaccine through employee health, their own providers and other vaccination locations in their areas.

In addition, staff such as Tanya SoJourney, corporate compliance manager, internally shared their reflections on the vaccine. "When I first heard about a potential vaccine for COVID 19, I believed a wait-and-see attitude was the best course of action," said SoJourney, who added that she was petrified of taking it for fear of a severe local reaction. However, once she found out she had a grandbaby, Valor, the rest was history.

"I had an appointment to get my first dose in January and received my second dose in February. The only side effect I had with either shot was a sore arm."

Then tragedy struck. SoJourney's brother-in-law, who had not been vaccinated, was hospitalized with COVID and passed away. His only high-risk factor was age. "I truly believe that if he had been vaccinated he would still be with us," she said.

With nearly 600 employees, achieving a 75 percent vaccination rate significantly helps keep our communities healthy.

"We encourage everyone who has not yet been vaccinated to do so," said Leisy. "We can all do our part to protect our community. Getting the vaccine not only protects you, but also those more vulnerable to the disease."

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 nearly 60,000 patients. To become a patient, call 843-667-9414, or visit [hope-health.org](http://hope-health.org).



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# TRICKS TO AID YOUR WELLNESS ROUTINE



The topic of wellness is a bit intimidating. With so many different trends, ways to diet or hit the gym, it can be overwhelming. With her busy and on-the-go schedule, Ana De La Reguera's wellness routine is flexible and effective. Check out

Ana's four easy tips to make you feel your best.

## Suit up as soon as you wake up

"Between my busy work and travel schedule, it's difficult to do the type of exercises I really enjoy, like tennis or dance classes. So, if you're like me and have a difficult time being consistent with going to the gym, I recommend changing into your gym clothes as soon as you wake up. That way, after breakfast, you're already suited up and committed to working out."

## Squeeze in those veggies

"Don't get me wrong, I love eating my carbs and bacon, but I truly believe that being proactive about squeezing veggies into every meal and eliminating heavier, processed foods is a healthy habit that keeps me going. One of my easy, go-to rituals is having a green juice in the morning. It's a burst of freshness and boosts my energy for the day."

## Revitalize your smile!

"We often don't pay attention to the importance of gum care until it is too late! And as we age, we could develop gum issues. Recently, I learned the importance of taking care of not only my teeth but also my gums. And ever since, I have made gum care a regular commitment.

My favorite toothpaste is Colgate Gum Renewal. It helps target and repair early gum issues and keeps my smile healthy and revitalized."

## Make time for "me time"

"We're all busy. Whether it's responsibilities at home or work, many of us focus so much on doing it all that we forget to focus on ourselves. I always try to designate a time in the day where I'm spending it for myself. Having time to drink my coffee, a bath at night, or tending to my garden - those moments for myself have made me so much happier than when I'm constantly on the go."

## Be intentional about living life with smiles and positivity

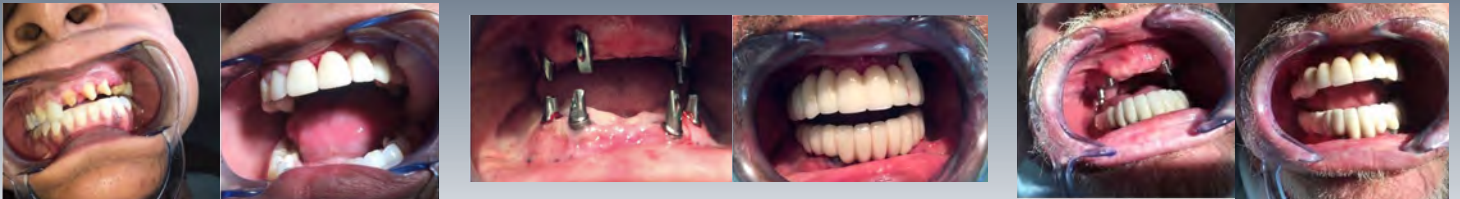
"Being positive is an intentional act, and we all have the power to choose the energy we put into the world. I like to remind myself to smile, even in the most mundane situations, like during my commute to work, because that brings more positivity into my day, and that rubs off on the people around me."



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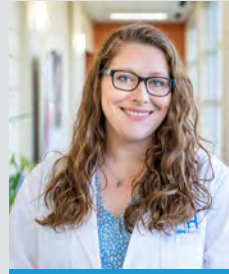
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## HOPEHEALTH WELCOMES NEW PROVIDERS

Submitted by Donna Tracy, Communications Coordinator, HopeHealth



Amanda Coker Burnette, MD

**Dr. Amanda Coker Burnette** joined the HopeHealth Medical Plaza in Florence. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the College of Charleston, and a Doctor of Medicine from the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. She completed her residency at AnMed Health Family Medicine program in Anderson, S.C. From Florence, Dr. Burnette is a member of the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Family Physicians.



Debbie Garrison, MSN, APRN, FNP-C

Family nurse practitioner **Debbie Garrison** joined the HopeHealth Medical Plaza in Florence and serves patients in the Access Hope program. Garrison earned an associate degree in nursing from Florence-Darlington Technical College, a Bachelor of science in nursing from the Medical University of South Carolina satellite program at Francis Marion University, and a Master of science, Family Nurse Practitioner, from Francis Marion University in Florence, S.C. From Florence, Garrison is a member of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and Sigma Theta Tau International Society.



Caitlin Jordan, MSPAS, PA-C

**Caitlin Jordan** is a physician assistant Jordan serving patients at the HopeHealth Medical Plaza in Florence. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Public Health from the College of Charleston in Charleston, SC, and a Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies from Francis Marion University in Florence, S.C.

From Lake City, Jordan is a member of the South Carolina Academy of Physician Assistants and the American Academy of Physician Assistants.



Veronica Ridpath, DO

**Dr. Veronica Ridpath** graduated cum laude from the University of North Carolina-Charlotte with a Bachelor of Science in psychology with minors in biology and classical studies. She obtained her Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine from Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, where she was a National Health Service Corp scholar.

A lifelong resident of the Carolinas, Dr. Ridpath is a member of the North Carolina Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Addiction Psychiatrists, and the American Psychiatric Association. She has special interest in LGBT mental health and inclusion, improving access to psychiatry services, and patient-centered care. Dr. Ridpath serves as a mentor to medical students through the American Osteopathic Academy of Addiction Medicine.



Padigar Shyamanand Tantry, MD

**Dr. Padigar Shyamanand Tantry** earned a doctorate from Tbilisi State Medical University in Tbilisi, Georgia. He completed an internal medicine residency at University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine/HCA West Florida Consortium in Brandon, Florida, and an endocrinology fellowship at USF Morsani College of Medicine in Tampa, Florida. Board certified in internal medicine, Dr. Tantry speaks English, Hindi, Oriya, and Kannada. He is a member of the Endocrine Society, American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, American Medical Association, American College of Physicians, and the Hillsborough County Medical Association.



## 4 WAYS LONG-TERM CARE CAN WEATHER THE NEXT EMERGENCY



COVID-19 has shaken communities worldwide. Despite strenuous efforts by caregivers and medical professionals alike, people needing long-term care and living in communal care settings have suffered gravely. According to a New York Times database, almost one-third of U.S. coronavirus deaths have been tied to nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. As a post-pandemic world nears, a new question emerges: What can be done to safeguard long-term care before the next public health emergency?

### 1) Understand the options.

Communal living - especially for populations with higher risk - increases the odds of disease transmission. However, nursing homes and communal care facilities are often the default for long-term care in the United States. One safe alternative is home and community-based services (HCBS), which enable people to receive long-term services and supports as they age or live with disabilities.

With HCBS, people can remain in their own homes and hire caregivers they know and trust. This approach is often called self-directed services or self-direction. People using self-direction decide who provides their long-term support services as well as when, where and how. From personal care to meal prep, transportation to skilled medical services, self-direction puts the person receiving services, or their designated family member, in control.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) encourages HCBS. During the pandemic, HCBS has helped reduce transmission of COVID-19. Some companies specializing in self-directed care also found less disruption with HCBS. At GT Independence, a company that supports self-direction, COO Holly Carmichael reported no service interruptions and found more people choosing self-direction for safe and stable long-term care.

CMS also notes that HCBS provides gainful employment to family members or friends who are already providing informal care. Fortunately, self-direction is recognized in all 50 states, although programs and names vary; local aging and disability service offices provide guidance on getting started.

### 2) Follow and enforce CDC safety protocols.

Regardless of where someone chooses to receive care, strictly following CDC safety protocols helps to instill habits that protect the well-being of those receiving long-term support. Personal protective equipment (PPE), such as masks, should be used by people needing support and any caregivers who reside separately, whenever and wherever services are provided. Also, distancing people receiving services from caregivers who are unwell or who have been exposed to viruses minimizes risks.

As guidelines rapidly evolve, especially for those who are vaccinated, those receiving care and their caregivers are encouraged to visit the CDC website for the latest recommendations.

### 3) Encourage paid sick leave.

Caregivers typically don't receive paid sick leave, which often has unintended consequences. Without paid leave, caregivers may feel financial pressure to work while ill. Not only may this slow their own recovery, but it increases the risk of exposing the person they care for to illness.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) has made it possible for people receiving long-term services and support to provide paid sick leave to their employees or caregivers due to pandemic-related reasons. Regular caregivers can address their health, protect their employer and avoid financial stress. At the same time, people receiving care can work with their self-direction partners to find substitute care. Such partners may maintain networks of vetted caregivers to ensure continuity of service and support.

The FFCRA has been a lifeline for many caregivers, and it has already been extended twice. Lawmakers should be encouraged to make paid sick leave a viable option for caregivers beyond the pandemic.

### 4) Prioritize HCBS options.

HCBS programs have proven successful in terms of quality of life and cost effectiveness, but caregivers and programs need recognition and support to ensure people understand their options. A 2018 Bureau of Labor Statistics report indicated the average healthcare support worker made \$28,720, and a Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute study shows homemaker workers average \$13,300 a year. Increased pay would help retain and attract qualified caregivers. Direct-support professionals are needed to reduce HCBS waitlists for safe and effective services.

More people are experiencing the positive impact of HCBS. Prioritizing this option can reduce strains on local healthcare systems while reducing stress and financial burdens on families. Funding can help inform people of their choices, get them enrolled and expand benefits for participants. It can also help cover transition costs from institutional settings to an individual's home, helping remove the cost barrier.

The American Rescue Plan has allocated more funding for HCBS programs nationwide and participants and caregivers have the opportunity to influence their state and local representatives on how to best improve the program in their areas.

COVID-19 took long-term care providers by surprise. By learning from experience and working to expand access to HCBS, families and caregivers will have better choice and control to minimize impacts next time.



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## TIPS FOR CARING FOR A LOVED ONE WITH ALZHEIMER'S



Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's can be rewarding, but has its challenges. Early diagnosis, having open communication and doing some simple activities can significantly help in caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's. Fortunately,

there are also resources and assistance to help caregivers and their loved ones not only cope but find moments of genuine joy.

Here are ways to help your loved one cope with Alzheimer's or dementia.

### 1. Seek early diagnosis

New research shows that the brain starts to change years before you may see severe symptoms. While an Alzheimer's diagnosis is extraordinarily difficult for everyone involved, early diagnosis can make a significant impact on quality of life, giving patients and families the opportunity to plan and find an appropriate level of care.

Common symptoms to watch for:

- \* Forgetting recently learned information
- \* Trouble completing ordinary tasks
- \* Disengaging from work, hobbies or socializing
- \* Difficulty following a conversation
- \* Using the wrong words for everyday things

If you see these signs in your loved one, make an appointment with their healthcare provider.

### 2. Open a dialogue about Alzheimer's

Starting a conversation about Alzheimer's with a loved one is daunting.

For seniors, it can trigger fear, anxiety, or grief. Adult children may understandably delay this conversation, which can make things worse. Once the senior already has impaired judgment or memory loss, it may be too late for rational conversation. Approach the topic - and your loved one - with sensitivity. Having the conversation allows them to express their feelings and concerns and to participate in important decisions. You can also reassure your loved one that you'll provide ongoing support.

### 3. Learn techniques for Alzheimer's and dementia care

Providing a calm environment and predictable routine can help your loved one cope with the confusion, agitation and anxiety.

\* **Plan regular activities and exercise.** Persons with Alzheimer's or dementia will be less agitated if they're involved in activities that interest them. Activities do not have to be strenuous to be beneficial.

\* **Focus on nutrition.** Alzheimer's may affect a person's sense of taste and smell, plus the ability to feel hunger or fullness. Serve meals in a quiet, comfortable place, free of distractions. Offer easy-to-eat finger foods, plus calorie-dense foods like peanut butter, dried fruit, high-protein drinks and food bars.

\* **Stay calm when they're agitated.** Reassure your loved one you're there to help. Distract them with a pleasing activity, such as listening to music or looking at photos.

### 4. Don't delay important decisions

Take care of financial, legal and long-term care planning issues as soon as possible. Try to involve your loved one in decision-making, if they are still capable of providing input, and consider their wishes related to future care and end-of-life issues.

With a positive attitude, patience and help when you need it you can provide much-needed care and support for your loved one.



# WHY A PERSONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM IS CRUCIAL



With more people than ever choosing to age in place - that is, continuing to live in their own homes - medical alert devices and modifications to make seniors' homes safer and more accessible don't have to break the bank. Installing ramps,

railings, and ensuring medication adherence are simple steps you can take to ensure your loved one's comfort as their range of mobility changes with age.

As the needs of those we love evolve, technology has adapted to help allow seniors to continue living independent, confident lives while also providing peace of mind to their families. Gone are the days of medical alert devices that require a working knowledge of technology or are too pricey for the average retiree. Instead, the best senior medical alert systems on the market have accessible, intuitive technology that aid in opening the worlds of seniors who are choosing to age in place amidst the pandemic and beyond.

## Selecting the right personal emergency response device

Beyond living safely, seniors should feel empowered to live confidently. Personal emergency response systems, or medical alert devices, offer those who age in place the autonomy to continue life at home without the need for an around-the-clock caregiver and the comfort of knowing help is just a push of a button away should they need it.

Wearing a personal emergency response device can provide an

added sense of security and can decrease the anxiety surrounding falling at home. However, the perceived stigma associated with their use may prevent some aging adults from taking advantage of their benefits.

Many medical alert necklaces and devices are easily recognizable as such and do not offer protection outside the home, limiting the self-sufficiency of the wearer. Aging adults may not be prepared to admit that they require additional help but providing them with a device that is discreet and suits their lifestyle can aid their transition as they begin aging in place.

## A device for every lifestyle

For a personal emergency response system that helps inspire confidence, BLACK+DECKER Health presents goVia - the discreet, on-the-go alternative to traditional personal emergency response devices. goVia products include monitoring at-home or on-the-go for those who aren't ready to stop exploring. The wearable devices are lightweight and can be worn as a wristband, necklace or even clipped onto a belt for protection outside of the home. With location tracking via GPS, cell service and triangulation, aging in place has expanded beyond the four walls of a home.

## Freedom to age with autonomy

One in four adults older than 65 will fall each year, according to the National Council on Aging, making a personal emergency response system crucial for adults who are aging at home. With five devices to choose from, goVia offers an extra layer of protection for explorers, those homebound, and everyone in between.

Aging in place should not mean sacrificing freedom. Give your loved one the support needed to age independently and help defeat the stigma surrounding personal emergency response systems.

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The benefits of being part of Betha's retirement community are endless, even in our current world's state of recovery from a global pandemic. In light of the uncertainty coronavirus has brought to all of our lives, many seniors may question the wisdom in entertaining yet another life change created by moving to a retirement community.

Betha Retirement Community is a vibrant residential community that embraces senior adults from all walks of life. A community of SCBMA (SC Baptist Ministries of Aging), Betha opened its doors in 1960 with a mission to help seniors thrive. As a continuing care retirement community (CCRC), Betha offers a full continuum of living options for residents so their changing health needs can



be met without requiring them to relocate. Betha has living arrangements compatible for senior adults at every level of care. Their cottage community consists of singles and couples who are totally independent but want to be a part of the safety and security that living within a community offers. Neighboring residents look out for one another, share in activities and common interests, and don't have to worry with the maintenance issues of being a homeowner. Betha Retirement Community structures its pricing with planned increases so their residents know exactly how much their living expenses will be in the future without the unpleasant surprises a recovering economy can bring. Residents live securely knowing that any maintenance required in or around their homes will be handled promptly by Betha's competent team who are ready to respond to any resident's request.

Betha's new state-of-the-art healthcare center opened in 2021. Within the new center is an on-site primary care clinic where residents can be seen by a nurse practitioner through HopeHealth. The new healthcare center also contains a new state-of-the-art rehabilitation gym

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where seniors both within the retirement community and senior adults outside of the community but referred by physician for rehabilitation can receive physical and occupational therapy. As residents' health needs change, Betha Retirement Community has suitable living options with services ranging from simple medication reminders to assistance with activities of daily living and memory care.

Betha Retirement Community remains committed to getting better every day through expanding and renovating its physical structures to better suit the needs of its residents and by developing more innovative ways to provide care.



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# THE SENSATIONAL BROWN BROTHERS Submitted by Glaceria Mason



*Sensational Brown Brothers with Representatives Terry Alexander, Phillip Lowe and Roger Kirby*

**COLUMBIA** – The South Carolina State House of Representatives recognized and honored the Sensational Brown Brothers of Florence, SC for an exceptional career as gospel recording artists. The House Resolution, introduced by SC State Representative Terry

Alexander (District 59), was presented to the Sensational Brown Brothers on the House floor in Columbia, SC on May 11, 2021. The presentation was timely and complemented their latest accolade: the induction into the newly opened National Museum of African American Music in Nashville, Tennessee.

The Brown family’s 13 children – nine boys and four girls – were born to the late Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Brown, Sr., of Florence County. Reared in Effingham, SC, the brothers are members of and faithfully worship at Savannah Grove Baptist Church under the spiritual leadership of the Reverend Dr. Ralph W. Canty, Sr. With solid parental upbringing, the siblings have maintained a strong Christian foundation through their belief and faith in God. The original group consisted of nine brothers; however, today the group consists of Norris, Billy, George, and Sam Brown, Cleveland Williams, Gino and Brandon Brown, and their very capable musicians.

The Sensational Brown Brothers have had an uplifting influence on audiences who come out to hear their Christian gospel music. The group has shared their vocal talents in churches and nursing homes, and at family gatherings, street fairs, radio, funerals, and gospel concerts. For 61 years,



*Sensational Brown Brothers with Gov. McMaster and Business Owners Nathaniel & Doris Lockhart*

they have traveled and performed across the U.S. singing original songs and hymns in quartet-style with musical accompaniment; they also have recorded more than 150 songs throughout their long career. Billy Brown, who also acts as the group’s business manager, expressed gratitude on behalf of the members.

“For the Brown Brothers to be recognized by the SC State House of Representatives for our longevity and for being included in the new National Museum of African American Music with other great gospel recording artists is a great honor,” he said. “We thank the Almighty God for sustaining us to witness this recognition and history.”

These accomplishments have earned the Sensational Brown Brothers the distinction of being included in the new National Museum of African American Music. The National Museum of African American Music opened to the public in Nashville on January 30, 2021. Nearly 10 years in the making, the 56,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art museum was established to celebrate and preserve the influence African Americans have had on music. The galleries are based on stories and themes that unveil the historical development of the gospel music genre. It tells the history of Black religious music from spirituals to gospel through the lens of gospel singing families, with illustrations and artifacts. Other gospel singing families inducted with the Sensational Brown Brothers are the Winans, the Williams Brothers, and Mary Mary, to name a few.

To learn more about the museum, visit [nmaam.org](http://nmaam.org)

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# AFRICAN AMERICAN VOICES SHARED IN COVID-19 PROJECT Submitted by Flock and Rally Media



Joseph McGill received the 2021 Leon Love Lifetime Achievement Award.

In its oral history project “Black Carolinians Speak: Portraits of a Pandemic,” the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission invited South Carolina healthcare workers, law enforcement officers, faith leaders, teachers, students and other African Americans to express their thoughts on the pandemic.

Project Director Jannie Harriot said, “Future generations are going to be as curious about the coronavirus’ effect on our communities as we are today about the Spanish flu of 1918. They will likely seek to understand how the disease redefined what it meant to be Black in South Carolina and how the crisis altered the rhythms and traditions of African American life in the Palmetto State.”

Among the interviews was one featuring Joseph McGill, history consultant with Magnolia Plantation & Gardens in Charleston and founder of the Slave Dwelling Project, a popular history interpretive experience that involves spending a night in an extant slave cabin and examining history. McGill said groups began cancelling or postponing their commitments as the pandemic rapidly spread throughout the nation.



A photo submitted by Khalil Singleton of Lexington County shows how students had to adapt to virtual learning when schools were closed to keep them safe.



Acacia Johnson of Florence County combined the tragedy of George Floyd’s murder on May 25, 2020 with the continuous trauma of the pandemic. Her photo depicts a young person struggling to breathe, which can be interpreted as an effect from the virus or from police brutality.

“The one thing that we figured out is that we have to remain relevant, and to remain relevant meant, for me, just going back to the basics,” McGill said. “Instead of sleeping in (the slave cabins) with lots of people, I had to sleep in these places by myself.” He said he took advantage of virtual technology to continue delivering this experience to audiences.

In the spring of 2020, data from the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control suggested that African Americans had been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus. Fifty-six percent of those who died from the virus in South Carolina at that time were Black, but African Americans are only 27 percent of the state’s population.

Material submitted to the portal will be housed in SCAAHC’s collection at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. The project has expanded to 30 counties in North Carolina.

“We don’t want this historic event to be chronicled without the African American voice,” Harriot said. “It’s our obligation to make the historic record as complete as possible by including the Black perspective.”



A drawing submitted by Keith Tolen of Richland County illustrates how vapor droplets, rarely considered harmful, are now dangerous elements of daily life.

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## DON'T BREAK THE BANK WITH WEDDINGS IN THE 'NEW NORMAL'



Weddings are back with a vengeance and with that come spending time and money for gifts, travel, and maybe even being a part of the wedding party. A recent Zelle® consumer behavior report says that 52% of people are likely to attend a large gathering in 2021/2022. Yes, weddings will be a lot for the bride and groom, but what about the wedding crew and guests who are filling up their schedules with celebrations? How do you make sure to respect the happy couple and your wallet?

Here is a checklist of what to do and how to not get too caught up in celebrating that you put yourself into debt for the newly invigorated wedding season.

**1) Prioritize your event schedule:** Many postponed weddings are now back on, which means that your social calendar is way busier than it used to be - no more virtual bachelorette parties in your pajamas. However, please don't feel pressured to do it all. Pace yourself and prioritize which weddings and social events you can attend based on your comfort level and funds.

Pro tip: Look at locations, dates, and times and be mindful of how you will be spending your money. Get this all on a calendar so you can keep track of critical dates, so they don't sneak up on you.

**2) Create a wedding spending budget:** If you are part of a string of bachelorette duties and events, that can take a toll on your wallet. Estimate how much you will be spending for that wedding and if it doesn't meet your budget, have a conversation about what you can be comfortable with and work together with your crew.

Pro tip: Be honest with the bride or groom and let them know that you are committed to helping them celebrate and honor their occasion, but that you need to be mindful of your finances. Ask them what the most important events are.

**3) Give the newlyweds the gift of money:** Through a pandemic and all the difficulties people have faced in the last year, physical gifts and registries have become less of a focus for brides and grooms. A Zelle® study says 76% of people across all generations prefer to receive money rather than an actual physical gift. To lighten the load for you and the bride and groom, send them money via a P2P service like Zelle® with a special congratulatory note in the memo line. If they are already enrolled with Zelle®, they get the money directly in their bank account within minutes and can use it for whatever they choose (and if not enrolled, it just takes a few minutes to quickly and easily enroll to receive the gift money).

**4) Remember to celebrate:** It's been a challenging year, and the great news is that people are starting to gather together again to commemorate new beginnings safely. Try to take a deep breath, go through your checklist and enjoy this moment!



# Ginger Pear Bourbon Martini



## INGREDIENTS:

### Pear Ginger Simple Syrup

- 1/4 cup water
- 1/4 cup honey
- 3/4 pear, chopped
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 piece of ginger

### Cocktail

- 4 oz. Bourbon
- 2 oz. Pear Nectar
- 2 oz. Pear Ginger Simple Syrup
- 1 oz. freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 slice pear & rosemary sprig for garnish

## Directions:

1. Combine water, honey, chopped pear, cinnamon and ginger in a small sauce pan. Bring to a simmer over medium heat. Stir until honey dissolves. Reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Strain and discard the solids. Refrigerate until ready to use.
  2. Combine Bourbon, Pear Nectar, Pear Ginger Simple Syrup and lemon juice in a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake vigorously until chilled.
  3. Serve in a martini glasses with a slice of Pear and Rosemary Sprig for garnish
- Enjoy!



# AMAZING GRACE PARK AND PINCKNEY MEMORIAL INVITE CONTEMPLATION AND COMMUNITY

*Submitted by Stephanie Rizzo, Amazing Grace Park Manager*



**MARION** – The newly opened Amazing Grace Park, Clementa Pinckney Memorial is nestled in the heart of Marion, South Carolina. This 3-acre, \$3 million park boasts a walking trail, a one-of-a-kind climbing structure, art and musical installations and more. While the amenities are wonderful attractions, the park’s purpose is the real shining star. Amazing Grace Park was built in

memory of the late Reverend Senator Clementa Pinckney and the other eight victims of the AME Mother Emanuel Church shootings. The memorial park, which was several years in the making, was driven by Pinckney’s cousin, South Carolina Senator Kent Williams.

On June 17, 2015, the bible study group of AME Mother Emanuel Church opened their doors to a stranger, just as the Bible had taught them. They unknowingly welcomed in a killer, who would senselessly open fire on the class killing nine innocent souls. In the hours and days that passed, the family, friends, and community of the Emanuel Nine set the tone of this tragedy. Rather than showing anger, they chose forgiveness and grace. Charleston made headlines for the peaceful way in which it handled this horrific attack on the Black community. This emulated the way the victims had lived their life. It is that sense of peace and harmony that has carried over into Amazing Grace Park.

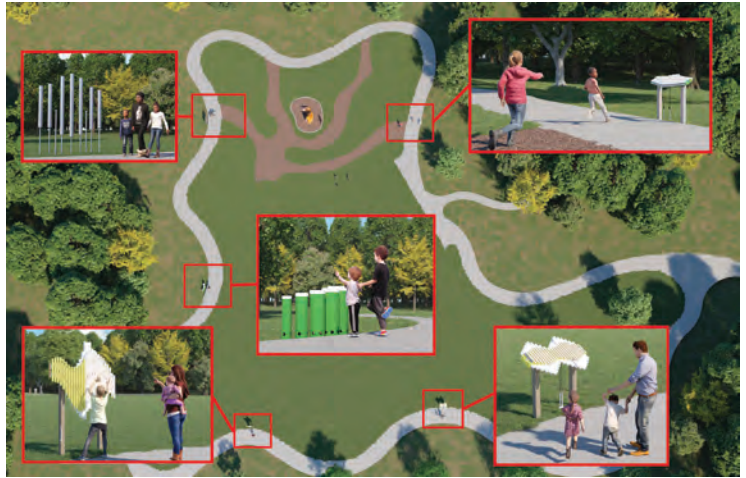
As soon as you step into the park, a feeling of tranquility washes over you. It might be from the memorial fountain, where nine jets represent the Emanuel Nine. It might be the music piped throughout the park. Or it just might be the sense of something more. A bronze bust of Clementa Pinckney, framed by a set of five patinated copper wings, greets you beyond the fountain. The wing installation is entitled *The Ascension* and represents the Emanuel Nine’s rise to heaven. Constructed by artist, Jim Weitzel, the wings are 10-foot-tall at their peak and help set a mood that invites further exploration of the park.

The quarter-mile walking trail winds around the perimeter of the park, past countless plants, shrubs and trees all planted with blooming times, maintenance needs, and overall aesthetic in mind. The on-site pavilion has a covered picnic area, concession stand and restroom facilities. Just behind the pavilion is the main attraction for the kids: Faith the Fox. Faith is a climbing structure made of out Robina wood, which is naturally rot and insect resistant. There are handcrafted benches, tables and eight park swings, all made by Earl Williams, cousin of Senator Pinckney. The swings positioned throughout the park beg you to kick your feet up for a moment and reflect on your surroundings. Amazing Grace Park is enabled

with free Wi-Fi, making it a perfect alternative setting for virtual schooling, working from home, or leisurely scrolling.

With several events on the books already, Amazing Grace Park is the perfect setting for outdoor gatherings. Rental packages will be available for weddings, showers and birthday parties, as well as community events, festivals and more. In conjunction with the Marion County Museum, located adjacent to the park, AGP can offer joint rentals for indoor/outdoor space as well.

For more information, visit [www.amazinggracepark.org](http://www.amazinggracepark.org), or call the office at (843) 289-5031. Find out about upcoming events and activities on Instagram @amazing.grace.park or at [www.facebook.com/agpmarionsc](https://www.facebook.com/agpmarionsc).



*Sen. Clementa Pinckney memorialized at Amazing Grace Park*

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**Saturday, November 27th**  
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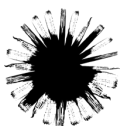
## Light in the South

William McCullough

**crossroads**  
**gallery**

## ArtFields Winners

Patz Fowle, Mike Fowle, Brittany Watkins, Bretta Staley, Charles Eady, Victoria Hagner, Nik Botkin, Coulter Fussell, Charles Anderson, Jim Arendt, Colin Quashie, Haley Ard Tremblay, Forrest Lawson



Hosted by the Lake City ArtFields Collective in partnership with the Florence Regional Arts Alliance.





# SURVEY: AMERICANS' RELATIONSHIP WITH CARS SHIFTS GEARS



Without question, Americans' relationship with vehicles turned a new direction over the last year and a half, and it is evolving yet again. As vaccination rates increase, restrictions ease and a sense of "normalcy" returns, new research revealed trends in the way drivers view, depend on and take care of their vehicles.

## The daily commute is back, but routes are changing

According to Hankook Tire's latest Gauge Index survey, fielded in late spring 2021, while 45% of people say they are driving every day (more than twice as many as this time in 2020), they are going to what were previously considered "usual places" less often. The survey found that one-third of drivers still say they are heading to the office or school much less often than before (33% and 36%, respectively).

But the daily drive isn't the only thing that has shifted. The lasting economic impact of the pandemic combined with increased availability of in-home entertainment and food delivery apps could factor into a more permanent shift in how people are engaging with social, shopping and entertainment options. Most Americans point to curbside restaurant service (46%) and grocery pickup (45%) among the pandemic-driven services they would most like to see stay. Entertainment-based outings are still at lower levels, too, the survey found. Sixty-one percent of people say they are driving to events much less often than prior to the pandemic, and 54% say the same for restaurants. While that could be a ripple effect of continued

event cancellations, it may also speak to a longer-term trend as lifestyles have shifted.

## Dependence on car travel is growing

One in five (19%) Americans bought a new - or used - car because of the pandemic. This emphasizes another trend the latest research unveiled: a steadily growing dependence on vehicular transportation.

Understandably, the pandemic changed the way many viewed highly crowded mass transit options. And while air, train and public transportation seems to be quickly gaining steam again, most (78%) Americans still rank automotive as the mode of transportation they are most likely to use through the end of the summer.

That includes using cars for travel, too. Seventy percent of those planning travel anticipate using a car as their primary method of getting to their destination. Key factors behind the decision include flexibility (49%), an added feeling of safety over other forms of transportation (45%), in addition to general preference (47%).

## However, car maintenance skills still need some tuning up

Despite this increased dependence on cars and road travel, the latest Gauge found that while many Americans have the equipment to handle an on-the-road emergency, they don't necessarily know how to use it. For example, two-thirds (64%) of drivers own a tire jack, but 20% don't know how to change a tire!

However, it is promising that most people (77%) owned their car maintenance tools prior to the onset of the pandemic. Perhaps the next evolution of Americans' relationship with vehicles will be ensuring we're keeping them in tip-top shape, for whatever the road ahead may bring.

Looking down that road, Hankook will continue to monitor the shifting landscape, as, due to the uncertainty of the pandemic and varying local restrictions, these trends may change in the future.

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