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MUSC HEALTH

DIVERSITY WORKS



OCTOBER 2023 VOLUME 13 ISSUE 4

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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 employees that represent best practices in workforce diversity and supplier choices. We feature articles on those displaying inclusionary vision in and for the marketplace and who encourage and provide role models for others.

Through editorial content and other signature promotions, Diversity Works© is a vessel to inform the readership on appreciating and accepting the physical, social, cultural and other differences in one another and to promote better outcomes through interacting with those unlike ourselves. Our mission is to promote the concept of 'community,' in the workplace, to stimulate literacy and save the planet via recycling printed material.

This platform serves our present age with a focus on the Pee Dee region of South Carolina which includes the counties of Chesterfield, Clarendon, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, Sumter and Williamsburg. The magazine targets the general public and is rapidly expanding statewide and globally. Our chief demographic consists of 54 percent male and 46 percent females, middle to top-level management, professorship and fellowship positions.

OUR VISION

To create a more collaborative world where balanced diversity is practiced, to encourage a return to reading and to protect the environment by recycling the ink and paper products our materials are printed with.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S HEART



Glacia Brown Mason
Editor

Greetings Diversity Works Readers!

Welcome to the fourth quarter of Diversity Works Magazine! The fall/winter season is magical. With the changing of leaves and cooler temperatures brings a welcome refresh to our final quarter of the year. In the excitement of what's to come, be assured that our recurring and special sections are full of useful and informative news of what's happening in our communities within the Pee Dee.

I invite you to refresh your purpose, your perspective and practices by attending Diversity Works' Fifth Biennial Diversity Focus Training and

Luncheon on Thursday, November 9! Be the forward-thinking employer, employee or staunch supporter of diversity, equity and inclusion in our community. Attendees will gain the most up-to-date insight on industry practices and increase knowledge of productivity and profitability. Come, network and train with like-minded local business professionals and glean useful tried and true practices on creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce. It's not too late, **Register Today!**

In our business section, take note on what Dr. Nika White shares on cultivating an inclusive workplace for marginalized professionals. Here, you'll find the in-depth results of the City of Florence's recent two month-long communications survey, conducted to improve communications and increase civic engagement. Did you let your voice be heard? Be informed that applications for the 2024-2025 MPD Electric Cooperative scholarships will be available January 2024. For more information, visit MPD Electric's website at mpd.coop. In this section, arm yourselves with knowledge we can all use from local entrepreneur and State Farm Agent Starlee Alexander as she shares personal property and casualty insurance information. Read information on insurance designed to protect you from damage and loss. Check out the happenings in the City of Lake City as they recently entertained SC Congressman James Clyburn to share their progress as they move forward as a place to live, work, play and visit. That's right, our business section has these stories and so much more. You'll find Diversity Works congratulating Honda on 25-years of building powersports products at their Timmonsville facility! As the fall/winter holiday season approaches, support the Pee Dee community by shopping local for your holiday needs and gifts in Downtown Florence. Be supportive as you read how shopping local benefits the community.

In this edition, learn how SC education leads the way, yet again as local colleges and universities are consecutively named top ranking schools by US News & World Reports! In the same congratulatory sentiment, hats off to HGTC for earning yet again, the Gold Status designation as a military friendly school, supporting military service members, veterans and their families. In support of educational inclusion, learn about the exciting field trip students in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program took with PDRTA to learn how to use public transportation. You won't want to miss the article by Superintendent Kandace Bethea as the Marion County School District focuses on literacy by partnering with the SC Department of Education to train K-3 teachers with intensive literacy training using LETRS (Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling).

Congratulations and thank you, go a long way when shared with those who educate our children. Keep your eyes peeled and

read the story, better yet, put your hands together and join in congratulating Principal Jackee Lynn of the Darlington County School District on her appointment to the SC State Board of Education. In addition, keep clapping as we celebrate Dr. Ershela Sims as the new FDTC Chairman of the Board! Read and congratulate Jamaican-born, 'Teacher of the Year,' Marlene Mitchel-Golding from the Lee County School District in Rembert, SC! Our education section brings you these stories and a plethora of more to build your, in-the-know status of what's happening locally. Kudos to all of the amazing Pee Dee educators and those who support them for all you do in and outside of the community!

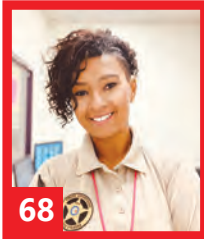
Our cover story this quarter is from leading local employer Ruiz Foods. Congratulate its new Chief Operating Officer Kimberli Carroll, as she takes the helm and continues the practice of DEI at Ruiz. Read Carroll's impressive story and, "...find the company that shares your values; become as good as possible in what you want to do; always be hungry; expand your base of knowledge," says Carroll.

Our special sections this quarter is the place you'll find great read articles in observation of breast cancer, bullying, domestic violence, mental illness, hungry and homeless awareness, crime prevention and caregiving appreciation. Be sure to mark your spot and not miss our fourth quarter special section as we celebrate and honor survivor/warrior stories with our Then and Now segment from local breast cancer survivor/warriors. You'll definitely want to stay informed about new health changes that may affect you and those you love in our health section. For example, did you know that men also are affected by breast cancer? See the breast cancer facts by McLeod Health and read the article on men's health, because the more you know.... Our health section also includes a sobering article about gaining insight to your family's health history. Have the conversation, ask the questions needed to be informed, you'll be glad you did. Share with your community the news of a full-service CareSouth Carolina community pharmacy recently opened in Dillon. Additionally, if you keep reading, you'll find and welcome the latest news on MUSC medical professionals joining the team, it's always great to have options in health care. Congratulations to the DAISY award recipients! Do you struggle to get a good night's sleep? Read new MUSC Physician, Dr. Andres Escobar's article on sleep apnea and learn the different types of apneas and how to know the signs.

I'm reminded of a famous R&B group who penned the song, 'For the Love of Money.' In our financial section, read and be encouraged to educate yourselves about your finances by the great articles found herein. Make it your practice or your New Year's resolution to educate yourselves, young people and friends on financial literacy. Read about it in Diversity Works, take notes and act for a secure financial future.

Diversity Works bring you the latest and most current news quarterly. Have you missed an issue? Find us at diversityworkssc.com and get up to date. Diversity Works thanks our local businesses who support diversity, equity and inclusion for your continued advertising and sponsorship. We encourage you, our loyal readers, to support those advertisers found here as we continue to create an inclusive community in the Pee Dee region.

The staff at Diversity Works Magazine, hopes that the last quarter of 2023 brings you a combined sense of confidence, inclusiveness and peace. We hope that something you have read has informed and inspired you to practice DEI daily. May favor be yours for a happy and inclusive holiday season. Write to you again in the New Year.... happy reading!



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Embracing Grace:

Cultivating an Inclusive Workplace for Marginalized Professionals



Submitted by, president and CEO, Nika White Consulting and Author of, 'Inclusion Uncomplicated: A Transformative Guide to Simplify DEI,' published by Forbes Books.



Dr. Nika White

GREENVILLE-In today's diverse and interconnected world, cultivating an inclusive workplace environment is a paramount goal for organizations aiming to thrive. As a DEI practitioner and woman of faith, I believe that incorporating the principle of grace can play a transformative role in creating an inclusive space for marginalized professionals. In this article, I explore the significance of grace in the workplace and how it fosters empowerment, resilience, belonging, psychological safety, relatability and greater acceptance of others.

1) Grace Gives Room and Power to Become:

At its core, grace is about giving others the space and encouragement to grow and develop. This creates an environment that supports personal and professional growth in the workplace, regardless of an individual's background or identity. By offering support, mentorship and opportunities for advancement, organizations can empower marginalized professionals to reach their full potential, contributing their unique perspectives and talents to the team's collective success.

2) Grace Provides Enablement to Try Again:

We are all human and bound to make mistakes. However, in a workplace culture that embraces grace, mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth rather than a reason for defeat. When marginalized professionals are given the space to learn from their errors without fear of undue repercussions, a culture of continuous improvement and resilience is fostered. This enables individuals to bounce back stronger, ultimately leading to personal and organizational success.

3) Grace Provides a Sense of Belonging:

Belonging is an essential need for every employee, especially those who may feel marginalized due to race, gender, religion or other factors. Grace creates a supportive environment, free from judgment and bias, where individuals can fully be themselves. When employees feel a sense of belonging and

acceptance, they are more likely to be engaged, contribute ideas and build meaningful relationships, fostering a positive and collaborative atmosphere within the workplace.

4) Grace Provides Psychological Safety:

Psychological safety is the foundation for open communication and authentic expression. By cultivating a culture of grace, where individuals are not afraid of being ridiculed or undermined, marginalized professionals feel safe to speak up, share their experiences and offer valuable insights. This empowers individuals and leads to better decision-making, increased innovation and a more inclusive work environment.

5) Grace Makes the Workplace Relatable:

Human beings naturally seek connection and understanding. When marginalized professionals are embraced with grace, their unique experiences and perspectives are acknowledged and valued. This creates relatability, facilitating genuine relationships between individuals from different backgrounds. As a result, the workplace becomes more diverse, dynamic and enriched by a tapestry of ideas and viewpoints, which is essential for sustainable growth and success.

6) Greater Acceptance of Others:

One of the cornerstones of grace is the acceptance of others, regardless of their differences. By actively fostering a culture of grace in the workplace, organizations signal a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. This encourages employees to embrace and appreciate the diversity of their colleagues, leading to greater empathy, understanding and acceptance. Through grace, bridges are built, biases are challenged and an inclusive work environment is created.

Final Thoughts:

Incorporating the principle of grace in the workplace is not only a way to honor the experiences and identities of marginalized professionals but also a strategic move that benefits the entire organization. By providing room for growth, enabling resilience, fostering belonging, promoting psychological safety, enhancing relatability and encouraging acceptance of others, grace cultivates an inclusive and empowering workplace culture. As DEI practitioners and believers in the power of grace, we can create lasting change, one compassionate action at a time. Let us embrace grace and transform our workplaces into spaces where everyone can thrive and succeed.

2023 **DIVERSITY**
FOCUS TRAINING
Our Community! Our Future!

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 Lunch & Learn Keynote Presenter
 Owner of Greg Jenkins Consulting, LLC
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Denis Davis
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 iHeart Media, Florence

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Increase Production & Profitability Through Diversity Focused Training

2023 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING

Our Community! Our Future!

At the 2023 Diversity Focus Training and Luncheon, our hope is to inspire **CHANGE, COMMITMENT and ACCOUNTABILITY** through bringing together hundreds of employees, companies and community leaders, along with organizations, as they train to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices in the workplace. The key is to make DEI goals actionable, measurable and evidence based. In the

end, having more harmonious relationships, centered around varied thought among individuals, increases productivity as well as profitability.

This DEI training can help build a safe and equitable workspace for employees. It has the potential to help an organization uncover hidden biases and address unfair hiring and development practices. It can also benefit company culture, boost growth potential and change the lives of your marginalized employees – all while adding to the bottom line.

The 2023 DEI training will work in helping employees at all levels and in all departments to better work with colleagues of differing identities and backgrounds. It aims to build awareness and skills which help to cultivate a safe, compassionate and equitable office culture where everyone feels valued.

INTRODUCING 2023 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING FACILITATOR

Denis Davis



Denis Davis is the senior vice president of iHeartMedia Florence. With over a quarter of a billion monthly listeners in the U.S. and over 129 million social followers, iHeartMedia has the largest national reach of any radio or television outlet in America. As the leader in multiplatform connections, it also serves over 150 local markets through 858 owned radio stations, and the company's radio stations and content can be heard on AM/FM, HD digital radio, satellite radio, on the Internet at iHeartRadio.com and on the company's radio station websites, on the iHeartRadio mobile app,

in enhanced auto dashes, on tablets, wearables and smartphones and on gaming consoles.

Davis is the midday host on Eagle 92.9. Radio Program features include discussions of the biggest stories of the day in news and entertainment, plus interviews with celebrities, newsmakers, or experts. Davis has been on-air in Florence for 20 years! A graduate of North Carolina State University. He started his radio career in Raleigh, NC in 2001, moved to Florence in 2003 and has hosted afternoons on 103X for 18 years, then moved across the hall to Eagle 92.9.

Davis is a husband and father of two. He is a dog owner and also enjoys sports, travel, golf, cooking, grilling, cars and home improvement projects. Davis is a volunteer for various organizations and loves to serve in his community.

INTRODUCING 2023 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Greg Jenkins



Greg Jenkins is a dedicated and passionate DEI consultant, practitioner and life-long learner. Jenkins completed a successful 28+ year U.S. Army career that ranged from overseas duties in Germany, South Korea and combat duty in Iraq to include several stateside assignments culminating in Washington, D.C. While serving in uniform Jenkins' performance, leading Military Equal Opportunity efforts resulted in developing a model program for other U.S. Army Equal Opportunity and human relations

advisors.

His performance further resulted in his selection to the Army's Diversity Task Force at the Pentagon, which helped to establish the Army's inaugural Diversity program, policies and products. He was instrumental in the planning and execution of the Army's Diversity Marketing Campaign achieving world-wide coverage for the Army's 1.4M soldiers, civilians, and their family members. Jenkins has directly served and represented senior executive leaders at the local, state,

corporate and Department of Defense levels.

His work with various corporate, governmental and nonprofit organizations, along with educational and community leaders resulted in improved business outcomes, civic relationships, shared knowledge and expanded professional networks and relationships. Jenkins is experienced in operations and administration in various positions across multiple roles in military, business, and nonprofit environments. As a leader and facilitator, Jenkins has provided training, facilitation and oversight for 10 thousand attendees, ensuring quality and relevant diversity, equity, inclusion and leadership training and education for mid, senior and executive level managers and leaders.

Jenkins continues to serve in leadership positions for nonprofits and provides high-performance facilitation, instruction, research and analytics, strategy, curriculum development and delivery for his own firm and with other DEI partners. Jenkins holds a M.A. in Human Resources Development and is a Certified Professional in Talent Development (CPTD). He is a recognized global DEI social media influencer and passionate volunteer who actively mentors new DEI practitioners and provides executive coaching for business professionals, U.S. Military service members and veterans.

INTRODUCING 2023 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING PRESENTER

Dr. Willette S. Burnham-Williams



CHARLESTON-Dr. Willette S. Burnham-Williams is the inaugural enterprise chief equity officer at the Medical University of South Carolina, MUSC, the states only comprehensive academic health science center. Burnham-Williams is the academic health science center's senior strategist for diversity, equity and inclusion. During her tenure she has successfully led the planning and implementation of MUSC's inaugural strategic plan for diversity and inclusion. A member of the President's University

Leadership Council, she spearheads major strategic goals and objectives for transforming the organization's culture of inclusion and engagement for over 25,000 employees and 3,000 students.

During Burnham-Williams' career she has held leadership positions at four distinct institutions of higher education in South Carolina - Williamsburg Technical College, The Citadel Military College of SC, The College of Charleston and the Medical University of South Carolina. Her tenure at each organization has contributed to developing and strengthening her expertise in student affairs administration, organizational strategic planning, institutional effectiveness, resource allocation, fundraising, crisis management, facilities management, access, equity and workforce and student engagement and inclusion

as well as co-curricular program development. More importantly, at every institution she led inaugural roles and transformed outcomes that positively impacted historically underrepresented and marginalized members of the organization.

Burnham-Williams holds a Bachelor of Arts from Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut and a Master of Education and Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration from the University of South Carolina. She completed two post doctorate certificate programs: one in Health Care Executive Leadership in Diversity and Inclusion from Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., and the second from Harvard University's Summer Institute for Educational Management (IEM).

A proven leader in developing strategic diversity initiatives and multi-faceted programs in small and large, public and private organizations. Burnham-Williams experienced senior leader with over 30 years of progressively complex executive-leadership roles

Burnham-Williams is intuitively skilled at taking a consultative and collaborative approach to successfully drive organizational change management initiatives and shift organizational culture and priorities. Burnham-Williams has a strong, demonstrated business acumen, which she uses to help organizations align their diversity and inclusion strategic initiatives with their business needs, values, mission and vision.

She is the mother of three adult children, grandmother of seven amazing human beings and the wife to an adoring husband.

Her favorite Bible verse comes from Luke 12:48 KJV, "But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."



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INTRODUCING 2023 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING PRESENTERS

Gianella Quinones & Ron Harvey



SPARTANBURG -Gianella Quinones is originally from Lima, Peru. Her family migrated to the United States in 2000 and Quinones grew up in Mississippi, where her mom and brother currently reside. She attended Mississippi University for Women and majored in Psychology and Spanish. After graduation, Quinones moved to Washington State and completed a Master's in Marriage and Family Therapy in 2014. In the summer of 2019, Quinones moved to Spartanburg, and she has enjoyed life in the Upstate.

Quinones has a passion for community service and is committed to raising mental health awareness and advocating for mental health equity and migrant justice. Quinones currently leads the Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) and Latinx Outreach Program at Spartanburg Area Mental Health Center, with the responsibility to raise mental health awareness in under-resourced communities in Spartanburg County. She also oversees the statewide emotional support and referral lines SC Hopes and Tu Apoyo (dedicated Spanish line). A strong believer in the power of community, Quinones regularly participates in community events to connect with individuals and listen to the needs of the community. In addition to her primary job functions, Quinones serves in several nonprofit boards and committees: Alianza Spartanburg, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention SC Chapter, United Way of the Piedmont, Spartanburg Initiative for Racial Equity Now, Mom Got Goals, the United Way of the Piedmont Health Equity Vision Council, Adolescent Health Community Advisory Board, SC Department of Mental Health Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and Zero Suicide Taskforce.

Quinones has two boys, Luka and Leo, and she loves spending quality

time with her spirited boys. To recharge and practice self-care Quinones likes to have mini concerts in her car, connect with nature by going on hikes chasing waterfalls, dance every chance she gets and gym time at CrossFit Spartanburg.



COLUMBIA -Ron Harvey is a PCC certified leadership coach, speaker, trainer and facilitator. Harvey is an energetic, engaging individual who believes his purpose is to make a difference by inspiring leaders to excel through learning, growth and adding value to others. He is the vice president and chief operating officer of Global Core Strategies and Consulting (GCSC), LLC.

Harvey serves on the Executive Committee for the Columbia Chamber; He also serves on the board for South Carolina Fathers and Families. He is a past president of the Association of Talent Development Midlands Chapter; and serves on the Communities In Schools Board.

As a leadership coach, he has been described as motivating and "Engaging." Harvey has collaborated with business and government leaders at all levels. He has a specific passion and focus, to add value and make a difference for others.

Harvey earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration, and a Master of Business Administration Degree from Trident University. He also earned a certification in Leadership Coaching from Georgetown University and a Graduate of The Adaptive Leadership Program from Harvard University. Additionally, Harvey is a certified coach with the John Maxwell Team and the International Coaching Federation.



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INTRODUCING 2023 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING PRESENTER

Kennon Feaster-Eytchinson



MARION-Kennon Feaster-Eytchinson is a certified diversity and inclusion leader, passionate about creating a climate of inclusion in the workplace and dedicated to leading D&I strategies that drive innovation and a culture of belonging.

Feaster-Eytchinson has worked at Micron Technology for the past 34 years, most recently as the Employee Resource Group (ERG) program manager and a global Talent Innovation program manager. Feaster-Eytchinson has a passion for ERGs and how they

can transform the workplace, creating cohorts and learning pathways to help ERGs grow and thrive. Feaster-Eytchinson was a founding member of Micron's PRIDE + Allies ERG and was a changemaker for diversity for Micron's LGBTQ+ community. While an ERG manager, Micron saw an 80 percent growth in ERG participation with a total of 10 ERG's, 70 global chapters and over 14,000 team member participation, and helping Micron's ERGs achieve the gold standard.

Feaster-Eytchinson has also provided consulting services for companies wishing to amplify their Employee Resource Groups, and other diversity initiatives.

Feaster-Eytchinson has a Diversity & Inclusion certification through Cornell, a certificate in Gender and Sexuality; Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace through University of Pittsburgh and completed the

Diversity First ERG Academy through the National Diversity Council. Feaster-Eytchinson is currently on the board of Pee Dee Equality in Florence, SC and uses his skills to create learning opportunities for corporations and non-profits to help increase their awareness of underrepresented groups and how better to meet those needs. An Idaho native, Feaster-Eytchinson and his husband relocated to Marion, South Carolina in December of 2021.



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In the July 2023 issue of Diversity Works Magazine, the City of Florence shared that city staff was launching a communications survey. The survey included questions that would assist staff in determining the communication preferences of our customer base to improve overall communications and increase civic engagement. City Council and city staff worked together to review demographic data from participants to ensure we were receiving a good community representation from the survey responses, recognizing that the success of this initiative was dependent upon a diverse response from the community. The survey opened on May 19, 2023, and closed on July 28, 2023. There was a total of 579 participants who took the communications survey with a completion rate of 82 percent.

The survey was conducted via SurveyMonkey, an online-based survey software. Hard copies were also made available at the City of Florence City Center, all City of Florence Community Centers and the Leatherman Senior Center. The survey link was sent out via the City of Florence Facebook and Instagram pages, in the City's e-newsletter publication and included in the July City of Florence utility bill. All city departments that handle transactions were given cards to hand out with receipts and both City Council and staff took survey information to community meetings in June and July 2023.

What did we learn from the responses received through the survey? Approximately 75 percent of survey participants indicated they felt somewhat informed or well-informed about the City of Florence, but suggest the city has room for improvement across many communication channels. There were many helpful suggestions from survey participants, some of which have already been implemented. One example is the addition of a social media post prior to the City Council meeting each month with a link to the complete agenda for the meeting. While this information is accessible to the public on the city's website, the post brings it to the forefront creating more visibility for the community.

Participants indicated that they were most likely to receive news information on social media (79.62 percent), followed by news media (television – 60.62 percent), digital newspaper (39.21 percent), paper newspaper (14.34 percent).

Participants indicated they were most likely to find information about the City of Florence on social media (61.13 percent), the City of Florence website (40.24 percent), local news media (30.05 percent). While responses to the city's website were mixed, respondents who used the website felt more informed about the city than those who do not use the site.

Overall, participants are eager for the city to share more information and to share information more often and through diverse channels. The top five categories participants want to hear about are City of Florence community events, water and sewer utility information, public safety advisories, economic development and City Council and administrative meeting information and decisions. For a deeper dive into the summary results, visit the city's website for the report in its entirety, <https://www.cityofflorence.com/news/2023-communications-survey-results>.

What are the next steps to improving communication efforts by the City of Florence? Within the survey, participants were asked whether they would be interested in a webchat assistant on the City's website to help them locate information (68.74 percent indicated yes) and whether they would be interested in receiving text or push notifications related to City news alerts, or advisories (77.35 percent indicated yes). With the support of City Council, staff studied various communications platforms that would provide another tool to promote transparency and enhance communication.

Following the public procurement process of accepting bids from companies that could provide such a product, a company has been selected that will provide AI technology through a chatbot for webchat, texting and push notification capability.

STAY TUNED! Over the next few months, this company will be collecting data from the City of Florence to customize their chatbot technology to serve City of Florence customers. City staff anticipates that by December or January 2024, we will be introducing this innovative technology to the community.

City Council and staff appreciate all those who took the time to complete the survey and share opinions on how you prefer to receive information from the City of Florence. We greatly value and appreciate your feedback and will continue making improvements to better serve you and advance Florence – Full Life. Full Forward.

GET CONNECTED!

The City of Florence has integrated the use of social media as a tool to expand community engagement. Used to present matters of public interest in Florence, this network also develops a platform of transparency and open communication. Scan the QR code below to get connected and stay connected.

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ADP SPOTLIGHTS SARAH TORRES AS A RISING LEADER by Glaciera Brown Mason



Sarah Marie Torres, ADP

As a top employer in Florence County, ADP Tax Credit has a 70-year history of defining business solutions for human resources. ADP is a leader in business outsourcing services, analytics and compliance expertise and is proudly named for the 17th consecutive year, among Fortune's World's Most Admired Companies.

An experienced global provider of cloud-based human capital management solutions, ADP's success is attributed, in part, to the cadre of outstanding, well trained, diverse and highly

professional employees which carry out its daily operations. In celebration of extraordinary employees, ADP spotlight's one such employee in Diversity Works' fourth quarter issue.

Sarah Marie Torres is a professional bilingual manager of System Setup & Integration and a 23-year career employee at ADP Tax Credit in Florence, SC. Torres began her career in ADP's Call Center as a bilingual representative and steadily climbed the ranks within ADP by volunteering to support projects in nearly all areas of the company. Her experience and determination have earned her the opportunity to work in client services and to grow exponentially in ADP's Implementation Department. Torres shared, "I found my sense of home in the ADP world and learned to create a career at ADP. There I grew into implementing some of the largest ADP clients and took on new responsibilities such as documenting and refining the Tax Credit and eI-9 procedures and system requirements, learning and consulting on new tax credit integrations and custom client integrations, traveled the U.S. supporting our sales partners and conducting onsite client training and transitions." Torres continued her growth at ADP and jointly implemented multi-product clients, including portions of the Applicant Tracking System, VirtualEdge. She assisted in implementing new health compliance clients, amplified, documented internal quality assurance testing and published three separate manuals for the Implementation Team: Tax Credits Implementation, eI-9 Implementations and Integrations Procedures.

In 2017, ADP formed a new team to focus on amplifying, streamlining and enhancing ADP Tax Credit Integrations, these experiences afforded Torres' career to expand even further. Today, Torres manages the integrations and Tax Credits Helpdesk teams, delivering support to external and internal customers, consulting to build the best possible tax credit integration and resolving customer or partner challenges.

With the complexities of business, and the challenges of work life balance, it's not hard to wonder what drives Torres. "I thrive helping guide our clients and partners to making the best tax credit program possible. I love learning the intricacies of their processes, their business priorities, their operating parameters and building something with them that is effective and satisfying. If there is a challenge, I want to tackle it with anyone that is willing to participate and make it a win. I love sharing what I've learned and experienced within this business and industry so my peers and coworkers too, can apply it and build beautiful solutions with our clients and partners."

ADP's workforce is diverse, and it shows. Torres shared her first day impression of becoming a member of the ADP family. "I was struck with how different the culture was. I had not previously been part of an organization that displayed such diversity. Women of all backgrounds and cultures and lifestyles in prominent leadership and support roles. Active support of communities of all kinds and regular reminders of the importance of diversity and inclusion. It was eye

opening to see an organization that supported those ideas and values instead of just talking about them," Torres recalls.

While she looks forward to seeing what else she and her team can accomplish, Torres admits, with any career, there are challenges to overcome. If society has learned anything from Maslow's hierarchy of needs and people reaching their highest potential, we then can understand workplace challenges that aim to tackle "old" mentalities and stereotypes against women being knowledgeable and giving direction especially around technical issues. "Sometimes it is just knowing which career path will lead to fulfilling my basic mental and physical needs," she says. "A great advantage of ADP is the many opportunities within the organization, but that many choices can also make one struggle to decide which path is the right one to go down; continue as an individual contributor or branch into leadership; gain additional experience in a new aspect of the same group or venture forth to learn new services," she says.

And yet, this manager presses forward leading her team and finding inspiration in her fellow associates' success. "When they are able provide exceptional service to a client or partner, I consider it a successful day, when there are more solutions than challenges."

Torres is a native of Brooklyn, NY, who attended technical colleges and studied Information Technology. As a doer, she is active in her

community and volunteers helping English as a second language students and their families navigate secular and scholastic adjustments. She dedicates her free time to family, personal enrichment and her four fur babies all named after literary characters.



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INSIGHT FROM COOPER, FHB'S SUMMER INTERN Submitted by Finklea, Hendrick & Blake, LLC



Cooper Branham

Finklea, Hendrick and Blake, LLC seeks to provide the opportunity for law students to intern with their firm. FHB's internship gives students the ability to learn more about the functioning of a law firm and an overview of the legal system. Over the summer, FHB had the privilege of having Cooper Branham come on board to intern with them. FHB wanted to gain some insight from Branham concerning his internship experience at the office.

Q: What made you choose FHB for your internship?

"I wanted an internship where I could learn everything

on the plaintiff's attorney side, from construction and real estate litigation to personal injury. I asked my friends from the Florence area if they recommended any firms to reach out to and when they recommended FHB to me as a top law firm in the Pee Dee, I knew I wanted to be a part of it."

Q: What have you learned throughout your time at FHB?

"I have learned a lot during my time at FHB. Generally speaking, I have learned what it takes to be a practicing attorney. More specifically, I have learned how to write motions, discovery requests, orders, business transaction agreements and the importance of client relationships."

Q: What are your plans once you graduate?

"I plan to come back to the Pee Dee region after I graduate. I would like to end up in either Florence or Myrtle Beach!"

Upon talking with Branham about his experience at Finklea, Hendrick and Blake, he was asked if any individual attorney or staff member had made a lasting impact on his internship. Branham stated that all the attorneys and staff had helped him with various questions throughout his time at the office. Branham advised that each attorney shared their own guidance and experiences with him, also providing him with the opportunity to shadow them in court hearings, depositions and mediations. It was also stated that even the paralegals and staff within the office made sure to go out of their way to make him feel a part of the team.

The attorneys and staff at FHB are so thankful that Branham was able to join them in the office this summer. FHB wishes Branham the very best on all his future endeavors.



Attorney Patrick Ford and Attorney Charlie Blake with Branham



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HONDA CELEBRATES 25 YEARS Submitted by Honda South Carolina Manufacturing

TIMMONSVILLE

- Honda celebrates milestone with week-long associate celebration and contributions to local community organizations.
- Cumulative investment now tops \$450 million in Honda South Carolina Manufacturing
- Production of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to transfer to Honda North Carolina Manufacturing to enable additional side-by-side production.

Honda is celebrating 25 years of building world-class powersports products at Honda South Carolina Manufacturing (SCM) in Timmons ville by expanding production of popular Honda side-by-side models to meet growing customer demand*. Since 1998, Honda associates have produced more than four million powersports products in South Carolina. Noriya Kaihara, president & CEO of American Honda Motor Co., Inc. (AHM), and the chief officer of Honda North America Regional Operations, joined SCM associates to mark the week-long celebration of their 25th anniversary with a tree-planting ceremony representing SCM's continued growth in the state of South Carolina, as well as charitable contributions to local community organizations.

"Honda's decision to establish in South Carolina 25 years ago has brought our state valuable economic opportunities and has helped build upon our reputation as a leader in the automotive industry," said South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster. "We celebrate Honda's commitment to the people of South Carolina and look forward to a continued partnership for years to come."

Honda began production in South Carolina on July 1, 1998, and SCM is the exclusive global production facility for Honda side-by-side vehicles. In 2018, Honda announced a \$45 million investment to enhance SCM operations to expand side-by-side production to meet strong customer demand for the Pioneer™ series and Talon™ sports models. This month, Honda will transfer ATV production to Honda North Carolina Manufacturing (NCM) in Swepsonville, N.C. to accelerate SCM's shift to side-by-side production.

"For over 25 years, Honda associates in South Carolina have produced high quality products to meet the needs of our powersports customers, and we're excited about the future of powersports manufacturing in Timmons ville," said Hank Real, vice president, Powersports & Products, American Honda Motor Co., Inc. "Today, as we mark our 25th anniversary of production, we celebrate our relationship with our customers, business partners and the people of South Carolina."

Over the past 25 years, Honda has constantly evolved its operations in South Carolina to meet the needs of Honda powersports customers. When Honda began production of the Honda Foreman 400 ATV in 1998, the initial \$30 million, 200,000 square foot ATV manufacturing plant was the beginning of Honda's significant growth in Florence County. The facility added ATV engine production in 2000, and Honda AquaTrax™ personal watercraft in 2003, before starting production of Pioneer™ side-by-sides in 2013. Today, SCM has the capacity to build 100,000 side-by-side models per year, with a cumulative investment of



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more than \$450 million in its operations and employment of about 1,000 associates.

“Our Honda South Carolina Manufacturing team has accomplished a great deal over the last 25 years, and we are just as excited about what lies ahead in the next 25 years,” said Travis Lee, SCM Production Control Department Lead.

Celebrating with SCM Associates and the Local Community

SCM commemorated its 25th anniversary with a full week of activities geared toward the team that has made it all happen – SCM associates. During the week of July 17, the 1,000 Honda associates employed at SCM enjoyed a team meal and other special items each day.

As part of SCM’s ongoing community support, Honda has contributed over \$450,000 this year to local South Carolina programs and organizations, including \$25,000 each to the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Pee Dee Area and to the Family YMCA of Greater Florence in support of the STEAM education programs. Earlier this month, Honda also hosted a South Carolina stop on its nationwide Honda Engineering Roadshow, an initiative that delivers hands-on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) kits called Learning Lunchboxes to students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Each Learning Lunchbox contains 10 hours of STEM content and provides five engineering-focused learning activities showcasing the diversity of STEM careers at modern manufacturing companies like Honda. The program aims to inspire and educate youth and families about the many facets of engineering, including aerospace, chemical, electrical and structural engineering. Together with the Center of Science and Industry, the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Pee Dee Area, Florence YMCA, Harvest Hope and School Foundation, Honda distributed approximately 1,500 kits in the local community.

About Honda Manufacturing in America

Honda has been producing automobiles in America for over 40 years, beginning in November 1982 with the start of automobile production at the Marysville Auto Plant.

In 2022, more than two-thirds of all Honda and Acura automobiles sold in the U.S. were made in America, using domestic and globally sourced parts. Honda’s cumulative auto production in America now exceeds 30 million vehicles.

Honda established manufacturing operations in America in 1979 with the start of motorcycle production in Marysville, Ohio, and today has one of the largest and most diverse U.S. manufacturing footprints of any international company. More than 23,000 U.S. associates support the company’s 12 manufacturing plants in America, supporting operations that have an annual capacity of more than 1.27 million automobiles, 1.52 million engines, 500,000 power equipment products and 300,000 powersports products, as well as the HondaJet advanced light jet and GE Honda HF120 turbofan engines.

Cumulatively, Honda has invested \$19 billion in its U.S. manufacturing operations, including more than \$3.6 billion over the past five years alone. The company also works with 600 U.S. original equipment suppliers, with U.S.-sourced parts purchases of approximately \$492 billion since 1979. Learn more at <https://hondainamerica.com/>.

About Honda Powersports

Honda began motorcycle sales in America in 1959, and today offers a full range of Honda motorcycles, scooters, ATVs and side-by-sides in the U.S. Innovative technology always has been a Honda trademark, showcasing pioneering engine and chassis design that has set the standard for excellence for more than 60 years. All Honda Side-by-Sides are made at the company’s manufacturing plant in Timmonsville, S.C. Learn more at <https://powersports.honda.com>.

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THREE WAYS AI CAN SAVE SMALL BUSINESSES TIME AND STRESS



(BPT) - Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) is creating an extraordinary amount of buzz, and it's catching the interest of people wondering how to take advantage of what it has to offer. If you're a small-business owner, you're likely curious about how it can help you grow and succeed, especially as your

business becomes more complex.

Beyond the initial start-up phase, there are some clear indicators that your business is beginning to scale. For example, you may be expanding your online sales channels or in-person locations, hiring more employees and increasing your inventory - all of which demand more of your time. It's critical to prepare yourself with the best tools and technology for continued success.

Work smarter, not harder

Almost all small-business owners note that they are turning to AI to help them automate low-level tasks, according to a recent Intuit QuickBooks Small Business Survey. They plan to adopt AI to help with marketing and content creation, analyzing customer trends and behaviors and customer service support. Another 28 percent plan to adopt AI tools for managing cash flow and 24 percent say they want to use AI to automate low-level tasks.

If ever there was a time to tune in and understand how AI and technology can help your business, it's now. AI can help reduce the operational burden and automate low-level tasks, leveling the playing field for businesses by giving owners more time and resources to focus on what really matters.

Saving time and streamlining tasks are top reasons why small-business owners adopt AI. Wondering where to start? Here are three examples of how small-business owners are using AI to their advantage:

1. Inventory management

Making sure you have enough inventory at the right time is challenging and time consuming. AI can help analyze your inventory and make recommendations including how often to restock popular items, what items to put on sale to move more product, which items may be worth eliminating and much more.

2. Bookkeeping

Financial management is essential to a business's success. However, most small-business owners don't have a background in accounting or the resources to hire a dedicated accountant. In fact, 47 percent of small businesses wish they could automate financial reports. Fortunately, the AI features in QuickBooks can automate several accounting and bookkeeping data entry tasks as well as generate reports to inform important business decisions.

3. Marketing

A business can't succeed without customers. Getting and growing customers is equally important to the product or service you offer. Nearly 30 percent of business owners would like to automate customer engagement and communications, like email marketing and customer support. Intuit Mailchimp has rolled out generative AI capabilities that help small businesses design on-brand marketing content faster, get copy ideas and inspiration and test variants to deliver more personalized and engaging content to their customers.

For more than a decade, Intuit has been driving AI innovation to help its customers solve their most important financial problems and drive durable growth for small businesses. To learn more about how the company is empowering small businesses with enterprise AI, visit the blog at Intuit.com.



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MPD ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE DONATES TO MARLBORO COUNTY HUMANE SOCIETY

Articles submitted by MPD Electric Cooperative



Matt Haynie (LEFT), CMO of MPD Electric Cooperative presents a donation to the Marlboro County Humane Society

BENNETTSVILLE - MPD Electric Cooperative is pleased to donate \$2,500 to the Marlboro County Humane Society, a non-profit animal rescue organization devoted to saving, rehabilitating and re-homing abandoned and abused animals in Marlboro County. A small staff plus an amazing group of volunteers provide daily care, feeding, housing and medical assistance for animals in need.

In 2021, the Marlboro County Humane Society placed more than 1,300 pets from the animal shelter with rescue partners and transported them across the U.S.

“We are pleased to provide this support,” said Matt Haynie, chief marketing officer of MPD Electric Cooperative. “The humane society’s work rescuing and rehabilitating some of the area’s most vulnerable animals should be commended. It is tough, tough work, and we thank them for their giving hearts.”

To donate or volunteer, visit humanesocietyofmarlboro.org.

The contribution is part of the cooperative’s bank, CoBank, and its “Sharing Success” program. CoBank matched MPD Electric’s contribution to the Marlboro County Humane Society.

MPD ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS

DARLINGTON – Congratulations to the outstanding students from the Pee Dee area who have been chosen for the MPD Electric Cooperative scholarship! Each year, MPD Electric Cooperative awards scholarships to children of current members who plan to or are currently attending any two- or four- year college as full-time students: \$2,500 for those attending a two-year college and \$9,500 to those attending a four-year college.

The following were selected:

Will Bagwell, The Citadel
 Olivia Brunson, Florence-Darlington Technical College
 Anya Cooper, University of South Carolina
 Eliza Dargan, Clemson University
 Jordan Gainey, Midlands Technical College
 Lauren Gaskins, Clemson University
 Mareesa Garrett, University of South Carolina
 Anabella Locklear, Florence-Darlington Technical College
 Zoey McInnis, Francis Marion University
 Tyler Melton, Clemson University
 Thomas Merzlake, Clemson University
 Samuel Richardson, University of South Carolina.

“This year, we received 65 applications from the seven counties we serve,” said William Fleming, president, and CEO of MPD Electric Cooperative. “It was tough narrowing the list, but in the end, we awarded scholarships to a group of exceptional students.”

Each student applied and submitted an essay on how the cooperative has impacted their lives; then finalists went through a rigorous interview process. Applications for the 2024-25 MPD Electric Cooperative scholarship will be available on our website in January.

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Barbara Davis
Your Premier Agent

Fall is here and as the year draws near to a close the best thing you can do is prepare yourself and your family for the new year to come. During the cold months, preparation is key. Many families face uncertainty when accidents occur. When you know your covered, you have peace of mind and a sense of security for you and your loved ones. Don't go into the holiday unprotected. At Hemmingway's Insurance we can Maintain, update, or provide new plans in our many product offerings. Things Happen. And we at Hemmingway's Insurance want you to be prepared. This winter avoid the top 4 winter accidents: **Burst water pipes:** If your kitchen faucet isn't working on a cold winter morning, you could have a frozen water pipe. Frozen pipes can burst and cause water damage, which can be expensive to repair. To prevent burst pipes, let your faucets drip on the coldest days, which will keep pipe water from freezing. Use sleeves or newspaper to cover pipes in spaces exposed to the chilliest temperatures, like basements and attics. **Fallen tree branches:** Large tree branches that extend over a home could pose a problem in the winter. The added weight from ice can cause branches to break and fall on homes or fences. **House fires:** House fires are a common cause of winter insurance claims, as people light candles and fireplaces. These tips can help prevent unwelcome flames. If you lose power, use flashlights instead of candles, and turn off all electric appliances. Keep Christmas trees hydrated so they don't dry out and become fire hazards. Never use your kitchen stove to heat your home. Keep portable heating devices at least 3 feet away from anything flammable and unplug them while you sleep. **No Insurance Coverage:** The best gift you can give is maintaining your insurance. Don't exchange your policy for presents. Having coverage provides more than just provision when someone passes away, it also creates a guaranteed security for the unexpected. Leverage your policy to create generational wealth strategies, education, accidents, and ultimately plan for the unplanned. Plan for the unexpected with us at Hemmingway Insurance. Don't hesitate. Now is the time to take advantage of your future. Here are just a few ways your policy can work for you.

GUARANTEE ADITIONAL FUTURE COVERAGE

No one can predict the future, but you can help clients prepare for it. Provide parents, grandparents, and legal guardians the confidence of knowing their children's future insurability is protected from ailments such as asthma, high blood pressure, cancer, or even a COVID-19 diagnosis. Life insurance can provide the comfort of knowing they will have financial protection if they face one of these challenges later in life.!

CASH POTENTIAL

Use access to potential tax-advantaged savings at life's major milestones. Consider what those resources might mean for college, getting married, buying their first home, starting a business, etc.

REMOVE FINANCIAL BURDEN

Help take the financial burden off your loved ones. Guaranteed Whole life insurance is a type of permanent life insurance coverage designed to provide protection for your family by locking in benefits that can help pay for end-of-life expenses, as well as cash value that can be accessed in an emergency.

LOCK IN RATES FOR LIFE

Help give your children a strong start by locking in premiums at the most optimal time - before potential health changes occur or your children's premiums increase with age. The legacy you've helped them build for future generations is something to be cherished, and something they may never forget.

You deserve more...
WHY CHOOSE US



Every day at our office we strive to create a warm, open environment for you to learn and collaborate on ways to secure the future with our products. You are not just a client, yo are family. Our staff and services make it easy for you to create specialized pricing and services customized for your individual needs. Stop by today and get the service you deserve!



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PERSONAL PROPERTY AND CASUALTY INSURANCE

Submitted by: State Farm Agent, Starlee Alexander



Property and casualty, P&C, is the term commonly used to describe insurance designed to protect an individual from loss or damage to the physical assets he or she owns. For example, a fire may seriously damage or completely destroy a home. Without adequate homeowner's insurance to provide the funds to repair or rebuild, such a loss could be a financial disaster. Homeowner's policies can also provide protection for the home's contents, such as furniture, appliances and other personal belongings.

Many P&C policies also provide liability protection. For example, the owner of an automobile who causes an accident may be required by a court (be found "liable") to pay others for repair of property damage, medical expenses, lost wages or pain and suffering. The dollar amounts of such court decisions can be enormous.

Types of policies

There is a wide variety of property and casualty policies. A number of additional coverages, endorsements, can be added to a basic policy to provide protection against risks found only in certain geographical areas, to protect specific types of property, or to cover a temporary situation. Some of the most common types of policies and endorsements include:

- **Automobile insurance:** Auto policies typically cover repair of physical damage, payments for medical expenses and liability protection. A separate policy is often used to cover recreational vehicles such as motor homes, golf carts, snowmobiles, trailers, ATVs or campers.
- **Homeowner's insurance:** A homeowner's policy can provide protection for both the home and its contents, against a wide range of perils, as well as provide very broad personal liability coverage.
- **Condo unit owner's insurance:** Similar to the homeowner's policy, the condo unit owner's policy differs primarily in that coverage is provided primarily for the contents.
- **Renters insurance:** Renters policies provide coverage for the personal property of an individual renting a home, condo or apartment. A renters policy can also include personal liability coverage similar to that found in a homeowner's or condominium unit owner's policy.
- **Earthquake insurance:** Earthquake insurance is normally offered as an endorsement to a homeowner's, condo unit owner's policy or renters policy to provide protection against loss caused by earthquake. It can also be a stand-alone policy.
- **Flood insurance:** Flood insurance is provided through a separate policy. The federal government stands as the ultimate guarantor for flood policies.
- **Watercraft insurance:** Watercraft policies cover loss and liability for the personal use of small watercraft such as boats or jet skis or for larger craft such as ocean-going yachts.
- **Umbrella liability:** Acts as excess or catastrophic protection to the basic liability protection offered with most other P&C policies. The liability coverage offered by an "umbrella" policy begins where the coverage in a basic policy ends and, in some instances, offers broader protection.

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MOVING FLORENCE FORWARD By Les Echols



the abandoned motel, the property was cleaned and properly abated,” said Jebaily. The next step was a redesign process to beautify and reimagine the park, making it safe for children and bystanders. “Safety for one, was a huge factor in the redesign,” states Smith, whose constituents live in the Levy Park community. “The Pine Street extension, which currently cuts through the middle of the park, will curve behind the park, so children would not be in danger from vehicles,” continued Smith. He added that ideally, this same model of

construction, we needed to raise an additional \$9 million dollars through our community partners to be in a position to submit the grant application,” Jebaily continued.

The next step was to try and secure the additional funding needed to bring the project to fruition. Both Smith and Jebaily spoke about the critical support of the partners who are involved in the project. “County Council members Schofield, Mumford, Bradley and Moore combined to commit half a million dollars from Florence County towards the project. With a major contribution of \$2.75 million from the State of SC through the efforts of State Representatives Alexander and Lowe, an additional commitment from McLeod Health, along with commitments from Duke Energy and Francis Marion University, and an anonymous private commitment of \$3 million dollars, the local match of \$9 million dollars was finally achieved in a race against the clock putting the city in a position to finally submit the application.”

“The Levy Park Reimagination Project, as it is called, could change the face and image of our entire community,” Smith states. “Amenities such as interactive activities, a dog park and an inclusive park area will make sure everyone can enjoy themselves regardless of physical ability,” Smith continued.

Both Jebaily and Smith also acknowledged that they were moved by the outpouring of support from the entire Florence community. “This is a transformative project, and aside from continued input from the Florence community, the one thing we are asking for is prayers for this project to become a reality,” concluded Jebaily. As of October 2023, approval of the U.S. Parks Service Legacy grant is still pending.

A big part of moving Florence, South Carolina forward for the past 20 years has been public and private investment in downtown redevelopment. With more jobs, people and activities coming to the area, community development has been addressed as an equally important item to work on. Two City of Florence Councilmen, Mayor pro-tem George Jebaily and Lawrence “Chippa” Smith, began to investigate a way to use the same redevelopment strategies to help develop one underserved community in Florence.

With a 60 percent poverty rate and several dilapidated areas, the US 76 corridor of East Palmetto Street is an area that has needed redevelopment for years. One of the biggest issues, according to Jebaily, was figuring out where to begin. “There was a dilapidated motel with all sorts of illicit activities taking place, which was immediately next to a park with children, that had not been addressed for decades. As a community, we all knew that something needed to be done to solve this problem. The first step was to get partner funding to purchase the motel and tear it down, which would then allow for the redevelopment of Levy Park.” Utilizing grants from multiple partnership sources provided the initial funding needed for the purchase of the motel and to clear the site.

“McLeod Health and the Drs. Bruce and Lee Foundation became big supporters and partners in the project with their purchase of the motel and subsequent donation of the land to the city to expand Levy Park. With a commitment by the city of utilizing Federal grant money, along with a commitment by the County to assist with the demolition of

accessing grants and partnerships can be used in the redevelopment of other parks and communities in the city.

According to Jebaily, the opportunity for redevelopment funding was spurred on through an outreach conversation. “I spoke with Holly Beaumier of The Florence Convention Visitors Bureau, and she directed us to the U.S. Parks Service Legacy Program for a grant that might be able to assist. The threshold of the grant had been dropped so that a city with a population of 30,000 could apply, this making Florence eligible,” said Jebaily. “Because it is a 1:1 matching grant, with an estimated \$18 million total cost of



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Congressman James E. Clyburn responds to presentations during a working lunch at The Continuum in Lake City with civic leaders. Pictured at the luncheon are Harriett Green, a consultant with ArtFields Collective and the Darla Moore Foundation; Joyce Green, a consultant with the Lake City Creative Alliance, Congressman Clyburn; Lake City Mayor Yamekia Robinson, Lake City City Administrator William A. Hall; and Nekeycha Izzard, utility billing manager for the City of Lake City. (Photos by Donna Tracy)

LAKE CITY— Congressman James E. Clyburn spent a day in Lake City in August learning about progress in our community and hearing from the city’s mayor, administration and other community leaders about some of the city’s needs.

“The City of Lake City is appreciative to Congressman Clyburn for listening to our presentation on the needs of this community,” said William A. Hall, Lake City city administrator. “We are thankful for the opportunity to showcase what we are trying to achieve in this city.”

One of the key projects the city promoted to Clyburn during his visit is the renovations of the former Florence Darlington Technical College home on Cole Road that has started revitalization efforts in the southwest region of the city. The congressman had the opportunity to tour the facility’s ongoing renovations with Lake City Mayor Yamekia Robinson, Hall, and others.



John Hendrix, director of Construction with G.M.K. Associates, shows Congressman James E. Clyburn and Lake City Mayor Yamekia Robinson architectural drawings detailing the renovations at the future community center under construction on Cole Road in Lake City. The congressman visited Lake City Aug. 9, for a working lunch and tour of the community that detailed progress and plans for future growth.

“The facility is city-owned, and we didn’t want it to sit vacant and just deteriorate after classes moved to The Continuum,” said Hall. “Instead, we are already in the process of renovating the existing structure into a community center which we plan to open in the new year. Our goal is to then add an atrium and multipurpose room that can be used for events, community town halls, emergencies and more.”

“Being able to highlight these plans and really show the congressman what this facility means for the local residents and the opportunities it will

afford to the community is essential to helping Lake City continue to grow and prosper,” said Hall.

The congressman’s visit began at The Continuum where Clyburn and his staff toured the facility with Francis Marion President Dr. Fred Carter, Florence Darlington Technical College President Dr. Jermaine Ford and Continuum students. The tour provided insights on workforce development needs for new and existing businesses in the Pee Dee area and the kinds of educational opportunities the unique partnership with higher education institutes provides the students from partner schools across several counties in the congressman’s district.

“It was wonderful to show Congressman Clyburn what is happening at the Continuum in Lake City. He walked with us through classrooms

to see the unique opportunities that high school students have to take classes through Francis Marion University and Florence Darlington Technical College,” said Jeanette Altman, executive director of The Continuum. “He also got to hear from a student who took classes from both institutions, and lives only five minutes down the road. It means a lot to him that students in the Pee Dee are getting access to rigorous classes in a state-of-the-art facility. He believes in supporting opportunities for rural communities, and that is exactly what the Continuum provides.”

Clyburn was also briefed on the impact ArtFields and public art has had on the city. “It is an extreme honor that Congressman Clyburn would take time out of his busy schedule to come visit our small town,”



Lake City City Administrator, right, discusses future plans for a multipurpose addition on a city facility on Cole Road with Congressman James E. Clyburn, center, and Lake City Mayor Yamekia Robinson, left. The congressman toured the renovations of the future community center during his Aug. 9, visit to hear presentations about the city’s progress and future.

said Carla Angus, ArtFields director of community engagement. “I look forward to working together with his team, the City of Lake City and other local organizations to make our community the best that it can be.”

Lake City is a community of 6,000-plus residents who invite you to live – work – play – and visit in the southern part of Florence County. Visit the City of Lake City Facebook page or LakeCitySC.gov for more information about our community.





LAKE CITY— Lake City, South Carolina, has long been a quiet gem in the heart of the Palmetto State. With its picturesque landscapes and tight-knit community, the town has been steadily progressing in recent years, addressing key issues such as infrastructure improvements, economic growth, limited housing availability and the removal of blight.

One of the cornerstones of Lake City’s progress has been its commitment to infrastructure improvements. The city’s leadership recognizes that in order to attract new businesses, residents and visitors, the city has to have a robust and well-maintained infrastructure and several projects are underway to improve aging systems and pave the way for future growth.

“In May this year we were awarded an \$8.4 million South Carolina Infrastructure Investment Program, (SCIIP) grant by the Rural Infrastructure Authority that will help protect the quality of life, address long-term sustainability, and provide new opportunities for growth and development in our community,” said William A. Hall, city administrator. “These funds specifically address wastewater issues and allow us to make improvements to prevent future issues.”

The SCIIP grant funds will be used for a new pump station serving the Cole Road/Davis Street area, rehabilitation of the sewer system at Martha Law Estates and wastewater treatment plant headworks improvements. The city also recently applied for a separate \$14.6 million RIA grant to address stormwater systems on Acline Street.

Additional improvements to the water systems include the construction of a new wastewater treatment lab which broke ground in October 2021. The \$10 million project is nearing completion and will provide a state-of-the-art facility for ensuring the quality of Lake City’s water supply. The construction of two new aeration basins and the replacement of aging equipment have already been completed.

“These projects not only improve our water systems for existing customers, but also provide for the growth of our community and economy,” said Hall. “Already, new businesses are preparing to break ground on Lake City projects along highway 52. Having the right infrastructure in place is essential for our future.”

Lake City’s economy has been, on a steady upswing in recent years bolstered by a diverse range of businesses and tourism. The successful launch of the Animé Gaming and Entertainment Convention, (A.G.E. Con), this summer is setting the scene for the growth of Esports in the area and the annual ArtFields festival has attracted art enthusiasts from all over the country for more than a decade. ArtFields in particular has injected a significant economic boost into the community and enticed some artists to permanently move to Lake City.

Limited housing availability has been a concern in Lake City however and the municipality has taken proactive steps to address this issue, recognizing that a balanced housing market is essential for a thriving economy. The construction of five new homes on existing city-owned residential properties is nearing completion and provides the opportunity for affordable home ownership within the city. Once completed, additional homes will be constructed on other city-owned lots.

Lake City has encouraged the development of affordable housing units, making it more accessible for residents and newcomers alike. The town has also worked with property owners to clear dilapidated properties through a Community Block Development Grant.

“Removing blight has been a top priority for us,” said Hall. “Abandoned or deteriorating properties can negatively impact a community’s image and safety. Working with property owners to remove dangerous structures not only provides the owners with a clean slate to potentially build a new home, but also improves the aesthetics of our community, increases the values of other homes in the neighborhood and encourages other property owners to invest in their homes.”

Additionally, Lake City is proactively working to prevent blight from reoccurring in the future by more strictly enforcing property maintenance codes and regulations. This proactive approach has already shown positive results, as residents and commercial property owners are more inclined to maintain their properties, ensuring the long-term vitality of the town.

“While we still have a long way to go, improving our community helps with the growth of our city,” said Hall.

The city is also committed to rehabilitating and repurposing other city-owned properties into vibrant community spaces. Current renovations on the Cole Road building that formerly housed Florence Darlington Technical College are scheduled for completion by the new year and will then provide a community with an affordable facility for social gatherings, health and wellness programs, events and more.

“This space will become a central location for community gatherings,” said Hall.

Lake City, SC, is a prime example of a municipality committed to progress on multiple fronts. The town has made significant strides in infrastructure improvements, fostering economic growth, addressing limited housing availability and removing blight. As a result, Lake City is well on its way to becoming a thriving, inclusive vibrant community, and that embraces its history while looking forward to a bright future.

The success of Lake City’s transformation is not just the result of governmental efforts but also the hard work and dedication of its residents and local businesses. The collaboration between community members, municipal leaders, and various stakeholders has created a positive environment where everyone can thrive.

In the years to come, Lake City is likely to continue its trajectory of progress, attracting new opportunities and strengthening its position as a desirable place to live, work, play and visit. With its commitment to balanced growth and a vibrant community spirit, Lake City serves as an inspiring model for other municipalities seeking to revitalize and redefine themselves in the ever-evolving landscape of the 21st century.

For more details about Lake City, visit the City of Lake City Facebook page or LakeCitySC.gov. Lake City is a community of 6,000-plus residents who invite you to live – work – play – and visit in the southern part of Florence County.



Flippin Construction takes the first swipes of demolition of several dilapidated structures in Lake City. The company won the bid to demolish the six properties in the first phases of blight removal. (Photo by Jonathan Laster)



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DUKE ENERGY OFFERS HOME IMPROVEMENTS GRANTS TO HELP SC SENIORS

Submitted by Ryan Mosier, Corporate Communications



\$200,000 to South Carolina organizations that help seniors make needed home repairs and improvements.

Duke Energy's Senior Home Repair Program offers qualifying nonprofits the opportunity to apply for grants of up to \$25,000 geared toward critical health and safety home improvements that enable senior citizens to continue to enjoy life in their current homes.

The grant application process is open through the end of October. "South Carolina's senior population should never have to decide between basic necessities and living out their lives in safety in their own home," said Mike Callahan, Duke Energy's South Carolina state president. "A simple home repair or safety improvement can be the big difference." Grant opportunities may cover needs for an individual home or multiple homes, reflecting the needs and mission of the applying nonprofit. Home improvement efforts must be for homes located in Duke Energy's South Carolina service territory.

Grant uses can include installing safety handrails in bathrooms, replacing rotting floors, installing handicap ramps and repairing unsafe steps. Grant funding cannot be used for weatherization, energy efficiency upgrades or solar products and equipment.

This program amplifies the company's expanded focus on affordability that also includes a volunteerism component. Duke Energy employees are volunteering more than 1,300 hours to support these efforts, working on projects such as one occurring today in Spartanburg with the nonprofit Rebuilding Together.

GREENVILLE—

Duke Energy today launched a campaign to promote grant opportunities totaling

Duke Energy Foundation

The Duke Energy Foundation provides more than \$30 million annually in philanthropic support to meet the needs of communities where Duke Energy customers live and work. The foundation is funded by Duke Energy shareholders.

Duke Energy (NYSE: DUK), a Fortune 150 company headquartered in Charlotte, N.C., is one of America's largest energy holding companies. Its electric utilities serve 8.2 million customers in North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky, and collectively own 50,000 megawatts of energy capacity. Its natural gas unit serves 1.6 million customers in North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Ohio and Kentucky. The company employs 27,600 people.

Duke Energy is executing an aggressive clean energy transition to achieve its goals of net-zero methane emissions from its natural gas business by 2030 and net-zero carbon emissions from electricity generation by 2050. The company has interim carbon emission targets of at least 50 percent reduction from electric generation by 2030, 50 percent for Scope 2 and certain Scope 3 upstream and downstream emissions by 2035, and 80 percent from electric generation by 2040. In addition, the company is investing in major electric grid enhancements and energy storage and exploring zero-emission power generation technologies such as hydrogen and advanced nuclear.

Duke Energy was named to Fortune's 2023 "World's Most Admired Companies" list and Forbes' "World's Best Employers" list. More information is available at 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.

SHOPPING LOCAL FOR THE HOLIDAYS STARTS NOW

Submitted by Florence Downtown Development Corp.



Agathoulas Boutique (Photo credit Florence Downtown Development Corp.)

It may only be October, but the start of the holiday shopping season has already arrived. Before you start making those lists and checking them twice, take some time to consider where those purchases will come from. If you tend to buy exclusively online or in a big-box store, take a pause and consider these reasons why your money might be better spent at a local small business this holiday season:

1. Shopping Local Supports the Economy – One of the biggest benefits to shopping local is the positive impacts it has on the local economy. If you were to spend \$100 at your favorite local business, \$68 of that purchase would stay right here in the Pee Dee and help increase your community's wealth and standard of living. In comparison, if you were to go spend that same \$100 at a big box chain, only \$43 would remain local. Local businesses also tend to hire locally and utilize the services of other local businesses to keep even more money in the community. Did you know most of the supporters of your local

sports teams are small businesses?

2. Provides Personal and Trusted Service – Most of us probably couldn't name the current owners of the chain businesses operating in our communities, but we can probably name the owners of our favorite local businesses. That's because local owners live with us in the same community, and we can create personal connections with them. These personal connections translate into better service when you can get recommendations straight from a business owner or when an owner can custom order a product you need. Knowing who you are buying from can also help create trust; whether that be trust in knowing you are purchasing a quality product or service, or trust to provide a safe shopping experience.

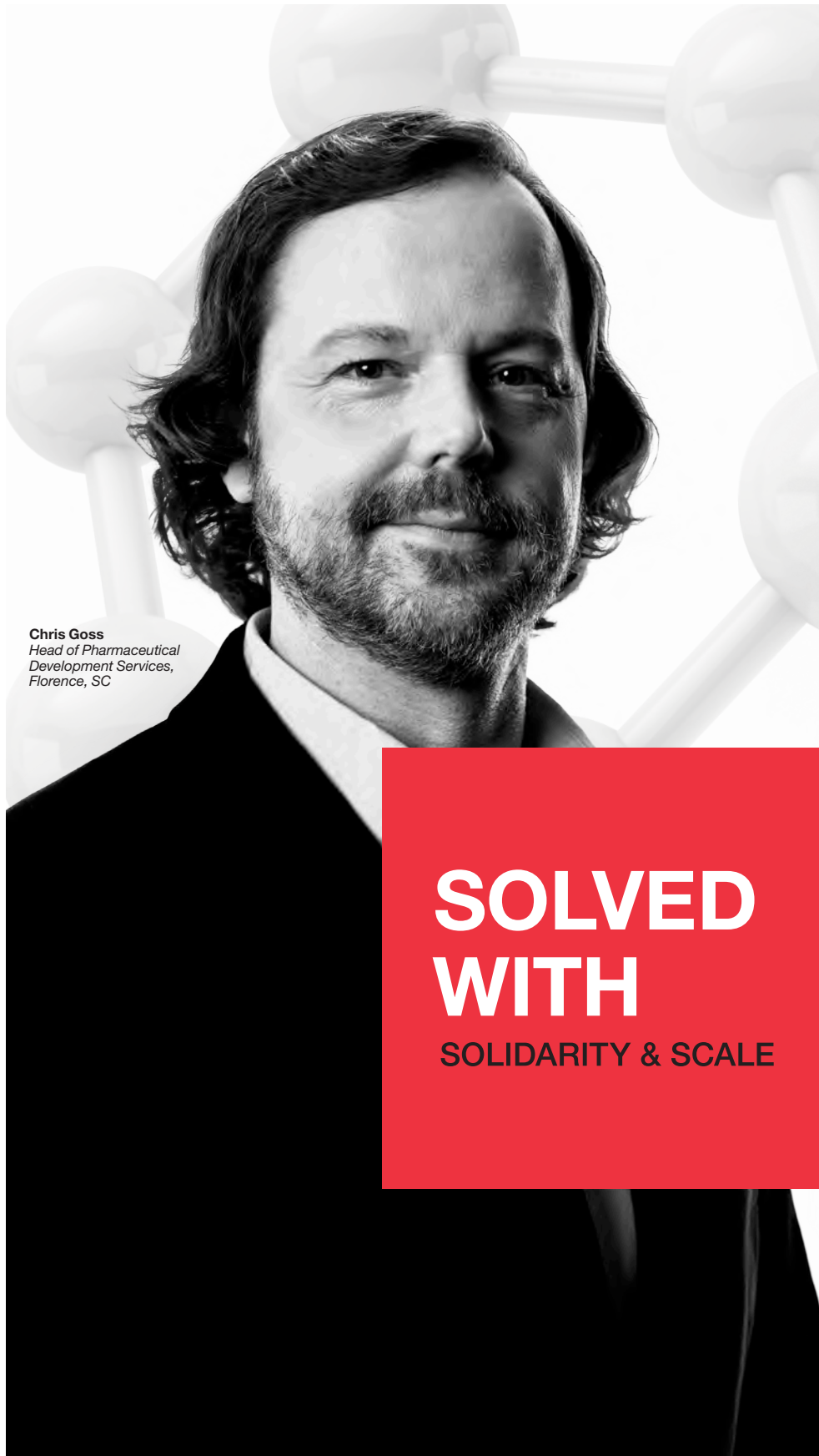
3. Creates Unique Options – Without local businesses, every city and town would have the exact same choices for their shopping, restaurants, and services. Can you imagine how boring that would be? Unfortunately, that scenario could become a reality as local businesses struggle to stay open after years of staffing challenges, inflation and post-pandemic pressures. Local businesses are what help communities stand out, offering unique options that you might not find anywhere else. By shopping local, you help ensure these businesses can continue to keep their doors open.

If you want to shop local this holiday season, a great place to start is in Downtown Florence or at the City Center Farmers' Market held each Saturday from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. at 200 Sanborn Street. With nearly 40 local restaurants, retail and service businesses within walking-distance of each other, Downtown Florence is the place to go to shop local this holiday season. Join us for special deals, discounts and giveaways during the holiday season, and get some of that shopping done early before the big rush. For more information and a directory of businesses located downtown, visit our website, www.florencedowntown.com. Do it for the love of local.

AVOID THE RUSH
HOLIDAY SHOPPING STARTS NOW
in Downtown Florence
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Chris Goss
Head of Pharmaceutical
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Florence, SC

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HOW A SMALL NON-PROFIT TEAMED UP WITH A GLOBAL MANUFACTURER TO BRING THEIR ALS DRUG TO CLINICAL TRIALS

Before she lost her own battle to ALS in 2003, Jenifer Estes started Project ALS, raising over \$17 million dollars for the non-profit in hopes of a breakthrough in the fight against Lou Gehrig's disease. As her family continued the quest, in 2019, they got a hit with a new compound that seemed to stop or even reverse motor nerve damage. The promising new drug would need to begin trials immediately, but as a non-profit, all they had was a half gram of material and a journal article, and the deadline was approaching quickly. That's when Chris and his team at Thermo Fisher Scientific sprang into action. They worked around the clock to come up with an ingenious solution to scale a half gram of material into a kilo of purified product suitable for clinical trials. Now, with more than enough material in clinical trials to potentially treat or cure one of humanity's most pernicious diseases, there's hope for ALS patients.

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MANUFACTURING

THREE STEPS TO CONTROL YOUR EMOTIONS

Submitted by Robin Lewis



Robin Lewis



Spirit-led Coach, Encourager, Author,
Retreat Leader, Daughter of the King

+1-843-319-5390

robin@robinlewislife.com

www.RobinLewisLife.com

HEMINGWAY-Lillian Hosanna is a spunky, fun 12-year-old who is very emotionally sensitive. Her middle name indicates that Lillian is the proclamation of the family! She loves to sing, do theater and develop her sense of clothing style. But if she's unhappy, everyone knows it! Recently, her family was packing to move to a larger house, and she became very sad about leaving friends next door and watching unneeded furniture being sold in the yard sale. She called me and together we created a strategy that worked!

I had her choose a quiet, private spot in their home to tell God how she felt and get those feelings out. (Emotions are to be "in motion," and aren't supposed to stay inside.) Then, once expressed, I told her to begin humming her favorite song. After a few minutes, she was to sing it if she felt emotional room for singing. (This was to redirect her thoughts to rise higher.) She called later and said it had worked beautifully, even better than anything her therapist had ever suggested!

Why did she get that outcome? Because the solution included Biblical principles that, once implemented, will work for anyone.

The Biblical Principles on Emotions & Thoughts



God created us with both emotions and thoughts. Emotions will want to lead our life but are not created to make decisions for us. When we establish our lives

in relationship to God according to the way He created us, then we can learn to follow these three steps for controlling our thoughts and avoiding the negative emotional spirals.

STEP #1: Tell God How You're Feeling.

Psalm 62:8 says, "O my people, trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge." This means we

are designed to first share our emotions with God about anything and everything, in a trusting relationship with Him. When a circumstance pops up and we feel our emotions wanting to react, we can remember that God is with us. That puts our hearts in a position to be open to sharing with Him. As we "pour out our heart," our feelings are released to God, our healer and comforter.

STEP #2: Receive His Peace.



I love the simplicity of Philippians 4:6-7 TPT that reads, "Don't be pulled in different directions or worried about a thing. Be saturated in prayer throughout each day, offering your faith-filled requests before God with overflowing gratitude. Tell him every detail of your life, then God's wonderful peace that transcends human understanding, will guard your heart and mind through Jesus Christ." I call this the "Divine Exchange" – our worries and concerns for His peace! The more fully we release our concerns to Him, the more peace we will receive.

STEP #3: Intentionally Choose a New Focus.

It's not enough to just tell God everything and hope to feel better! If we don't choose what we focus on, the enemy, or any of our own negative thought patterns certainly will! We are created and designed to place our focus on Him (the day-in, day-out remembering that He is with us and for us). Remembering God reminds us He is indeed with us in all things we face, helping us stand firm, helping us grow in strength and character and helping us move deeper into the mind of Christ.

Philippians 4:8-9 are what I call "the sifter verses." If we sift our thoughts through this verse, we can create a stronger faith and a more resilient life that is grounded in

God. Read verses eight - nine aloud: "Keep your thoughts continually fixed on all that is authentic and real, honorable and admirable, beautiful and respectful, pure and holy, merciful and kind. And fasten your thoughts on every glorious work of God, praising Him always. Put this into practice, and the God of peace will be with you in all things."

Don't believe everything you think! Romans 12:2 says, "Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you and be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God's will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in His eyes."

We are responsible for learning to walk in truth and for partnering with God to achieve the freedom He wants us to have. If we've not been taught how to renew our mind, we will continue to experience the same problems over and over. "The same old thinking gets the same old results," right? But the more we renew our mind, discovering limiting or wrong beliefs, and removing mindsets of fear, doubt, rejection and other strongholds, the more unshakable we become! And like 12-year-old Lillian, with childlike faith, these steps will also work for us.

Increase Your Self-Awareness with These Questions

1. Are you willing to discover where you may have some wrong beliefs about yourself? About God? Your life?
2. Ask God to reveal any lies you may be believing in your subconscious mind and write down what comes to mind.
3. What repeating problems are you aware of? Where do you see yourself failing to take responsibility to change your own reactions to certain circumstances?

Want some free help? You're invited to book a free online chat with me! Together we will discover the top three areas where your mind needs to be renewed, and help you create a three-step action plan you can begin implementing right away. This is your time to become unshakable! Visit my website to book your free chat today: www.RobinLewisLife.com.

"If we don't choose what we focus on, the enemy, or any of our own negative thought patterns certainly will!"

Renewing your mind is the quickest way to change your life."

Robin Lewis



PEE DEE YOUTH DAY INITIATIVE *Submitted by Rev. Marvin Hemingway, chair*



Pee Dee Youth Day Initiative Members

MARION-The first Annual Pee Dee Youth Day Initiative (PDYDI) was held on Saturday, July 8, 2023, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Barnes Street Activity Center, 513 Barnes Street, Florence, SC 29501. The theme for this prestigious event was, “Focus on Your Future.”

The idea for this event for the Pee Dee area came from Rev. Marvin Hemingway the founder/CEO of the Marion County Youth Day that has been in place and supporting the youths of communities of Marion for 15 years and it also has a Marion County Youth Day Job Readiness Training Program that assist youths with job training and working in the community for pay of minimum wage.

Hemingway met with Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin in 2021, to discuss his idea and plans for the Pee Dee Youth Day Initiative and a Resolution from the Mayor and the Florence City Council was presented to Hemingway, proclaiming the second Saturday in July every year as the Pee Dee Youth Day Initiative Day.

Hemingway called together leaders and citizens from Florence, Marion, Marlboro, Dillon and Darlington counties to join in on his vision to compose an executive committee with officers as well as to form a Board of Directors.

Hemingway is the founder/CEO of the organization and serving as the chairman, Mullins City Councilman Mayo Phillips serving as vice chairman and medical student Andrew Westfall. Appointed to the Board of Directors are Board Chair Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin of Florence, Board Co Chair Mayor Yamekia Robinson of Lake City, Board members; Brandon Spivey, Merrette Dowdell, Dr. Willena Rembert, Sheila Generette and Rev. Lisa Spears. Other committee members are Tempestt Hough, Shalanda Waiters, Cameron Packett and LaTasha Goodman.

This youth initiative will promote a peaceful and safe living environment not only for our youths but also for their parents and their communities. Our children today face challenging circumstances and risks associated with drug, alcohol and tobacco use, juvenile crime and delinquency, suicide, teen pregnancy, school dropout, domestic violence, sexual abuse, gang activity, bullying, broken families, peer pressure and mental health issues.

Our greatest resources are our children, parents, officials and residents of all the Pee Dee counties, and they can help make a difference with their commitment to reduce and eliminate drug use/abuse, crime, violence, brutality, illiteracy, child abuse and other social ills from our world by setting the examples here in our state and our counties of the Pee Dee.

This initiative of the Pee Dee will provide our children with support and the very best opportunities to lead productive and fulfilling lives, which is a responsibility we all share. Our young people need stability, workable values and good examples by which to live, and those who demonstrate good judgement and common-sense help bring order to all our lives; without guidelines of decency and civility, all nations and societies, and the individuals that comprise them, cannot survive.

The mission of the PDYDI is to provide youth with support and services along with the very best opportunities to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

The vision is a well-educated and healthy Pee Dee school system and environment for all students. The definition of “well-educated and healthy” is a well-balanced level of education, educational activities, and healthy living for all students living in a safe environment.

The first event was a major success with an outpour of youth of all ages with their parents attending for education, food and fun. There were more than 300 youths/parents who attended and over 30 vendors were there to support the event. There was sponsorship from the City of Lake City, Gold Star Urgent Care, Cherry Grove Missionary Baptist Church, Krispy Kreme Doughnuts, Biscuitville of Florence, Trinity Behavioral Care of Marion, Nephron Pharmaceuticals Corporation, Denmark Technical College and the South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs.

In composing the PDYDI proclamation, I was moved by the efforts of the Marion County Youth Day as I watched many youths with the job training program, the “Stop the Bullying, Stop the Violence March,” and especially seeing parents, local leaders and the youth interact together to make a difference in our community and this made it very easy to write the PDYDI Resolution/Proclamation.

Yet, I am not satisfied, I want to insert more visions, ideas and work into South Carolina, and the Pee Dee communities to ensure a peaceful, happy, educated, loving and prosperous living environment. If I can help but only one citizen, that citizen, help and support a citizen, we can start a trend of support for one another.

I look to do more for the Pee Dee as I am now working with the Mayor of Lake City Yamekia Robinson to establish a Pee Dee Denim Day to support women that have been sexually assaulted.

We can make a difference in our communities if we only work together and strive for greatness together. I continued to climb the ladder and stay on the wall even through Prostate Cancer, now two years with treatment, I will survive because of Jesus. Men and women, get checkups, visit your doctor, we can make it if we take care of our bodies.

I love people, I love helping and supporting people, it is a joy that is indescribable when you put a smile on someone’s face or hear a heartfelt thank you.

“Whatever you do, let it be real in Jesus name” is what I live by.



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ESL STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE WORLD FIELD TRIP

Submitted by Ania Giannace Dixon, human resource manager/Title VI coordinator



Human Resources Manager and Title VI Coordinator Ania Giannace Dixon talks to ESL students about PDRTA Services and Programs.

In 2019, Ania Giannace Dixon, connected with Claudia McLellan who is an English as a Second language (ESL) teacher at Florence Adult Education. McLellan is from Peru, and she teaches ESL classes to students who come from all over the world and have limited ability to speak, read and write English. The ESL class

teaches English listening, speaking and writing skills for all level learners, Conversational English, Civic Engagement, Career Options, Cultural Awareness and much more. Dixon first met McLellan when she dropped off PDRTA Transit Maps to her class in 2019. Dixon briefly spoke to her class about the benefits and convenience of using public transportation services. After the presentation, she felt it would be more beneficial to 'show' the students how to use our services. Some students had never been to the U.S. before, and the language barrier was certainly a reason why the students could be hesitant to use public transportation.

As PDRTA always strive to operate all their services and programs without regard to someone's national origin, they felt this would be a great opportunity to inform and educate the public that PDRTA operators are equipped to assist Limited- English Proficiency passengers, and anyone can benefit from public transportation. This is not only a service

to our community, but it also aligns with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The Federal Transit Administration requires us to implement a Title VI program that addresses how we include minorities and Limited-English Proficiency passengers regardless of race, color or national origin.

As a result, McLellan and Dixon decided to have an annual field trip for all students. Every year in September, they pick up the ESL class from their school and ride to the Florence Magnolia Mall on a PDRTA bus. They have breakfast at Chick-Fil-A and hold a presentation explaining PDRTA services to everyone. The students are provided with English and Spanish maps and have the chance to ask questions about specific bus routes. They show them how to download the PDRTA Sync app and take them to the Florence Transit Center where they teach them how to take the bus from their home to get to school or any other place they may want to go.



ESL Students enjoying breakfast and learning about PDRTA Programs and Services.

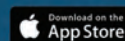
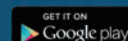
This field trip is always fun, and the teachers and students love it. This year they had 28 students who came from Honduras, Mexico, Russia, Korea, Japan and the Ivory Coast. Not only are these students more confident in using public transportation now, but some have also expressed interest in wanting to drive for them.



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MARION COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT'S FOCUS ON LITERACY

Submitted by Dr. Kandace Bethea, superintendent



Dr. Kandace Bethea

MARION- Marion County School District is doing great things for the 2023-2024 school year! Our top priority for this year will be centered on strengthening our core academic area of reading. Reading is the essential foundation of all other learning. It is crucial for us to continue to prioritize reading education in order to ensure that the students in Marion County Schools are equipped with the skills necessary to succeed in the future.

Only 48 percent of third grade students in South Carolina are

reading on grade level according to the most recent data. The need for building a strong foundation of reading requires immediate action. The South Carolina State Department of Education is learning from "The Mississippi Miracle" in which all K-3 teachers were required to receive training in the Science of Reading (SOR) using an intensive literacy training known as the Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling (LETRS). This investment has tremendously been successful in Mississippi as students are closing the achievement gap in reading.

South Carolina has begun its own LETRS journey and is already beginning to see positive results. This year, as part of the state's Palmetto Project, the South Carolina Department of Education will partner again with Marion County School District and many others

across the state to offer LETRS Training to our K-3 teachers and principals. Teachers are the key to success in reading. Our best assurance against reading failure is to invest in teacher development so that they have the knowledge and tools to be successful. The LETRS professional development is job-embedded and based on the science of reading and will provide the tools teachers need to improve literacy practices.

As Marion County School District moves away from Balanced Literacy model and forward with the SOR and LETRS training, there will be more emphasis on the five building blocks of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The newly updated South Carolina College Career Ready ELA standards include more standards supporting phonics instruction, recognizing that phonemic awareness is considered the most effective predictor of success in learning to read. The best approach to reading instruction incorporates explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, methods to improve fluency and ways to enhance vocabulary (according to the National Reading Panel, 2000). Due to the updated standards guidance, Marion County School District made the move to open court reading. This curriculum is based on the Science of Reading principles. Utilizing a curriculum based on the SOR practices allows teachers to provide quality, standards-based instruction. Open court reading provides teachers with precise directions for teaching phonics and logically sequences instruction.

Marion County School District is excited to embark on this journey to close the achievement gap by focusing on literacy. We understand the importance of reading and how it can open up a world of possibilities for our students. We look forward to seeing the positive changes that come from this initiative.

HGTC EARNS GOLD STATUS DESIGNATION AS A MILITARY FRIENDLY SCHOOL

Articles submitted by HGTC



Conway– Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) is proud to announce it has been recognized with the prestigious Gold Status designation as a Military Friendly School for 2023. This acknowledgment highlights HGTC’s exceptional commitment to providing outstanding educational opportunities and support for military service members, veterans and their families.

The Military Friendly Schools designation is a testament to HGTC’s unwavering dedication to those who have served. The Gold Status designation underscores the college’s ongoing efforts to create a supportive and welcoming environment for military-affiliated students as they pursue their education and career goals.

“We are honored to achieve Gold Status as a Military Friendly School,” said Dr. Marilyn Murphy Fore, HGTC president. “This recognition reflects our commitment to providing exceptional educational experiences for our military community, and we remain dedicated to supporting their success both academically and personally.”

To achieve Gold Status, HGTC demonstrated excellence in various areas, including academic policies and compliance, admissions and orientation, retention and graduation rates, military student support and assistance and campus culture. The Gold Status designation reflects the college’s comprehensive approach to meeting the unique needs and challenges faced by military-connected students.

HGTC’s commitment to its military community extends beyond the classroom, encompassing academic advising tailored to veterans’ needs, flexible scheduling options, a dedicated veterans’ resource center and partnerships with local organizations that offer additional support services.

The Military Friendly Schools designation underscores HGTC’s status as a higher education institution that actively fosters a culture of inclusion, respect and appreciation for military service. The Gold Status recognition exemplifies the college’s dedication to serving those who have selflessly served our country.

For more information about HGTC’s commitment to its military community and its academic programs, please visit www.hgtc.edu.

For more information about applying, enrolling, and registering at HGTC, call 843-347-3186 or visit www.hgtc.edu.

About HGTC



Ninety-five percent of students either transfer to earn advanced degrees or start careers in their respective fields of study. Horry-Georgetown Technical College prohibits discrimination against students and employees. Please direct discrimination and accessibility issues to the Office of Student Affairs at (843) 349-5228.

For additional information about HGTC, call (843) 347-3186. www.hgtc.edu | Twitter: [gohgtc](https://twitter.com/gohgtc) | Facebook: www.facebook.com/gohgtc

HGTC TEMPORARY STAFF OF THE YEAR 2023



Dr. Marilyn Murphy Fore (left), HGTC President, presents Art Gray (right), HGTC Warehouse & Inventory Clerk, with the Temporary Staff of the Year Award 2023 at the HGTC All-College Meeting.

CONWAY– Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) is excited to announce HGTC staff member, Mr. Art Gray, received the Temporary Staff Member of the Year Award for 2023.

As HGTC’s Warehouse & Inventory Clerk, Gray’s role is often behind the scenes, but his impact reverberates throughout the college. His diligence ensures mail, supplies, and equipment reach the right

destinations, contributing to the smooth functioning of the institution.

Throughout his tenure, he has exemplified what it truly means to be dependable and selfless. Each day, he walks through the doors with a beaming smile and outgoing demeanor that sets the tone for an encouraging and collaborative work environment.

“But it’s not just about the smiles; Art is consistently going above and beyond, taking on additional tasks. This exceptional commitment to excellence is an embodiment of our college’s values and mission and has not gone unnoticed. His remarkable work ethic and willingness to assist anyone in need make them a beacon of support. He personifies what it means to have a servant’s heart and be a proud member of our HGTC family,” said Harold Hawley, HGTC vice president for finance and administration.

Gray’s colleagues have the pleasure of witnessing his remarkable qualities as his attitude, respect, and politeness set the standard for others. His simple yet profound gesture of inquiring about the well-being of others shows his thoughtfulness and consideration.

For more information about applying, enrolling, and registering at HGTC, call 843-347-3186 or visit www.hgtc.edu.



Confucius

HGTC FOUNDATION PRESENTS CULINARY PROGRAM SCHOLARSHIPS

Submitted by HGTC



(left to right) Von Todd - HGTC Foundation board member & HTC representative, Lou Kiessling, III - HGTC foundation board member, Tim Tilley - HGTC foundation board chairman, Lindsey Greenroad - HGTC administrative assistant for the International Culinary Institute, Joseph Bonaparte - HGTC, executive director for the International Culinary Institute, Shannon Detzler - HGTC foundation president/CEO, John Draughn - HGTC foundation board member, Dr. Marilyn Fore - HGTC president and Greg Everett - HGTC foundation ex-officio board member

CONWAY-Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) is proud to announce the future of culinary excellence received a significant boost as the Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) Foundation presented an impressive check of \$25,688 to the International Culinary Institute. The funds will support scholarships for deserving HGTC culinary students, fostering their passion and potential in the culinary arts.

This substantial contribution is a direct result of the annual HGTC Foundation Gala, with HTC proudly serving as the Presenting Sponsor. The Gala, a premier event celebrating education and empowerment, garnered support from sponsors and attendees who share the Foundation's vision of making education accessible to all.

"We are thrilled to present the International Culinary Institute with this generous donation, made possible through the unwavering support of our sponsors and Gala attendees," stated Shannon Detzler,

HGTC foundation president & CEO. "The collaborative effort of these partners reaffirms our commitment to ensuring students with financial constraints can pursue their dreams at HGTC and the International Culinary Institute."

The scholarships will provide invaluable opportunities for culinary students at HGTC, enabling them to cultivate their skills and receive a world-class education without the burden of financial barriers. To be eligible for these scholarships, interested students are invited to complete an application through the Financial Aid Department.

The HGTC Foundation extends its deepest gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of the 2023 Annual Gala. With this support, the Foundation is continuing its mission to empower aspiring professionals and ensure they have access to educational opportunities that drive their success.

"The collaboration with HTC as the Presenting Sponsor exemplifies the spirit of community and dedication to education. Their substantial contribution for culinary scholarships demonstrates their commitment to fostering excellence and innovation in the culinary arts," added Detzler.

Through endeavors like the culinary scholarships, the HGTC Foundation remains dedicated to transforming lives and enriching communities by creating a pathway to success for deserving students in culinary arts.

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 strengthen positive relations between the College and the community.

To reach the HGTC Foundation, call 843-477-2105 or visit the website. For more information about applying, enrolling and registering at HGTC, call 843-347-3186 or visit www.hgtc.edu.



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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DCSD'S JACKEE LYNN APPOINTED TO S.C. STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Articles submitted by FDTC



Jackee Lynn

DARLINGTON—The Darlington County School District (DCSD) is celebrating the appointment of Jackee Lynn, principal of Bay Road Elementary School in Hartsville, to the South Carolina State Board of Education. Lynn will officially join the state's governing body for public schools on September 12, bringing three decades of professional education experience to the state's capital.

"It is a great honor to be appointed a member of the South Carolina Board of Education," Lynn said. "It was also an honor to become a

substitute teacher, teacher assistant, teacher, district recruiter, assistant principal and principal. If my love of education and 30 years of experience as an educator can support one student, one educator or one parent of my community, I am all in. Life is about giving and helping each other to be our very best. That has always been my mission."

Lynn will represent the Fourth Judicial Circuit on the state board, which comprises Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon and Marlboro Counties.

"Mrs. Lynn is an exceptional educator and leader in Darlington County," said Dr. Tim Newman, DCSD superintendent. "We are extremely proud of her and honored to call her one of our own. We know she will do everything possible to improve students' educational outcomes and learning environments across this state."

Lynn is also a veteran of the U.S. Army, where she served three years on active duty and eight years in the U.S. Army Reserves. She earned an officer's commission and her Airborne wings during her service.

She holds a Master of Arts in Economics from Virginia State University, a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership from Winthrop University and a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from Virginia Union University. She lives in Darlington County with her husband Tyrone. The couple has two adult children.

"I grew up in a home that honored education and treated education as your ticket to success," Lynn said. "We learned that with success comes the opportunity to serve others. I was taught that if one person rises, a community rises. There was this idea that everyone has gifts and talents, and they should be used to support. I was taught to honor people and to see the best in them. We should help someone else find their 'way,' and in doing that, I would find my own."



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- ACCEPT YOU



FMU RANKED AMONG U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT'S "BEST COLLEGES" *Submitted by FMU*



Francis Marion University (FMU) has again been recognized by U.S. News & World Report as a top Regional University in the South. The university has consistently been ranked among the best universities in the South for over two decades.

This year, the university was recognized in five different categories and showed improvement from last year in the areas of Best Regional Universities, Best Value Schools and Best Colleges for veterans. The

university was also noted as being a Top Public Regional University and Top Performer on Social Mobility.

Additionally, four academic programs were ranked among the nation's best. FMU's School of Health Sciences, home to the Department of Nursing, received the honor of being ranked among the nation's top undergraduate nursing programs. The university's fast-growing engineering program, which is less than ten years old and includes mechanical and industrial engineering, was recognized among undergraduate engineering programs. The School of Business received recognition as a top business school. The undergraduate psychology program was also recognized for the first time this year as a new category was added for this discipline.

FMU President Fred Carter said this year's rankings once again reinforce the quality of the education students receive from Francis Marion.

"We are proud to be ranked among the best universities in the South once again," said Carter. "The rankings are indicative of our continuing commitment to provide a superlative education at an affordable cost, as evidenced by six straight years without an increase in tuition. Of course, they also highlight the teaching and research competencies of our very gifted faculty."

To conduct the annual rankings, U.S. News & World Report divides schools into categories with FMU classified as a regional university, a school that provides a full range of undergraduate majors and graduate-level programs. This category, with 601 institutions, is the largest category.

The specialty ranking areas such as program categories, include universities of all sizes and classifications within a single ranking. The magazine ranks colleges and universities in all its categories using data that reflects academic excellence and various other aspects of university life.



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FDTC BOARD ELECTS NEW CHAIRMAN

Articles submitted by FDTC



Dr. Ershela Sims

The Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) Area Commission voted unanimously to appoint Dr. Ershela Sims of Hartsville as the new Chairman of the Board.

“I am excited for the opportunity to serve as Chair of the Board and I am looking forward to working with the board, President Ford and the staff as we move forward in the implementation of FDTC’s new strategic plan,” Sims said. “FDTC continues to emerge as a leader in the workforce and economic development spaces as we offer programs to support the employment needs of our

local businesses and industry partners.”

Sims replaces Commissioner Paul Seward, who has served the past two years as chairman. The board generally rotates the chair position every two years.

“I have been honored to have the opportunity to serve as the Area Commission Board chairperson for the last two years,” Seward said. “It has been very rewarding to work alongside our new President Dr. Ford and his team as we work to re-build relationships throughout the three counties that we serve.”

Seward reflected on the work that has been accomplished over the past two years including: the progress the college has made in improving relationships with area school districts; the college is now fiscally sound; the enrollment process has seen measured improvements; program offerings have been improved as the college strives to provide a quality education at a very reasonable cost in an effort to grow the workforce in the Pee Dee Region; and the college’s enrollment continues to see a steady increase through all of these efforts.

FDTC SELECTS DEAN OF NURSING & ALLIED HEALTHCARE



Asha Anumolu

Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) announces the appointment of Asha Anumolu as the college’s new dean of Nursing and Allied Healthcare.

“I am very honored and humbled to have this opportunity to serve Florence-Darlington Technical College and the community as dean of Nursing and Allied Healthcare,” Anumolu said. “I’m so excited to join the team and to contribute to its mission and vision.”

Anumolu, a Patricia Robert Harris Fellow, brings with her an impressive background in both the Technical College System and the University System of Georgia. With over thirty-five years of career history, her journey began with ten years of clinical practice before moving on to collegiate-level teaching and, ultimately, leadership and program management within nursing education.

“We are excited to have Dean Anumolu join the FDTC team,” FDTC President Dr. Jermaine Ford said. “Florence-Darlington Technical College is committed to closing the talent gap shortage in our region via healthcare positions. We must pipeline more qualified healthcare graduates into the workforce for our regional healthcare partners while also increasing an ASN transfer pathway to our 4-year regional universities for BSN to MSN degrees. We are confident Dean Anumolu will help us accomplish that vision.”

Throughout her career, Anumolu has gained extensive experience as a nursing program coordinator, director and dean. Her responsibilities have included direct supervision of full-time faculty, adjuncts and staff recruitment and retention. She has also excelled in managing ADN, LPN, nurse aide and allied healthcare programs, overseeing budgeting, accreditation and certifications, class scheduling, policy creation, curriculum development and grant writing.

Anumolu officially began at Florence-Darlington Technical College in September.

“To have the opportunity to be on stage and see each of our graduates receive their degree has been the highlight of my time as chairperson,” Seward said. “I look forward to continuing my service on the board and certainly look forward to working with our incoming Chairperson, Dr Ershela Sims.”

Dr. Sims is the executive director of the Women in Engineering ProActive Network (WEPAN). Prior to joining WEPAN she was the interim president and senior vice president for Virtual and Outreach Programs at the SC Governor’s School for Science and Mathematics (GSSM). She was the first African American and first female to lead GSSM. She began her career at GSSM as vice president for the Accelerate Virtual Engineering Program in 2017. Prior to GSSM, Dr. Sims was the dean of Engineering and Technology at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics (NCSSM) which housed the 2 of 2 Engineering and Computer Science programs, as well as the Peter T. Haughton Fabrication and Innovation Lab. During her tenure at NCSSM, Sims developed and taught courses in Statics, Biomedical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Engineering Research and Biomedical Instrumentation.

In addition to her service on the FDTC board, Sims serves on the Clemson General Engineering Advisory Board and NSBE Healthcare Innovation Special Interest Group. She also is a member of several professional associations including the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) and Biomedical Engineering Society (BMES).

FDTC TO OFFER ELECTRICAL TRAINING IN LAKE CITY



Florence-Darlington Technical College’s (FDTC) Corporate and Workforce Development (CWD) division and the Continuum in Lake City are partnering to offer a National Center for Construction and Educational Research (NCCER) electrical training program to support the demand for

skilled workers throughout the Pee Dee region.

“FDTC’s Corporate and Workforce Development division is really excited about this new program.” FDTC Associate Vice President of CWD Dr. Lauren Holland said. “We know that there is a definite demand for skilled trades among area employers, and we also know that the skilled trades provide wonderful opportunities for secure employment and good wages.”

The course, which is scheduled to launch September 5, will teach attendees electrical safety, an introduction to electrical circuits, electrical theory, an introduction to the National Electric Code (NEC), device boxes, hand bending, wireways, raceways, fittings, conductors, cables, basic electrical construction documents, residential wiring and electrical test equipment.

Holland said the creation of this program, and plans for future skilled trades programs, are in response to employers’ workforce needs, and “we hope that by offering these programs, we will create opportunities for the lives of students, and their families, to benefit from good careers.”

NCCER’s standardized assessments and national credentialing provide employers with a valuable tool for measuring the knowledge and skills of future and current employees.

This program will be offered at the Continuum in Lake City, twice weekly, in the evenings from 6:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. This will make the course very convenient for individuals who are already working, but who are seeking a new opportunity in a field with promising job outlooks and a bright future to make good wages. This course will also be made available for high school students to take advantage of.

To register or obtain more information about the course contact FDTC’s CWD division at 843-413-2715 or by email at ceregistration@fdtc.edu. FDTC’s CWD division is also working to secure employers to hire electrical apprentices from this new program, which could potentially provide a paycheck and training at the same time to attendees.

To learn more about how to participate, as an employer, in the NCCER Electrical Level 1 program, contact Dr. Holland at 843.413.2739 or Lauren.Holland@fdtc.edu.



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THE FARM AT FLORENCE 1 SHOWCASES AGRICULTURE, STUDENT EXPLORATION

Submitted by Florence 1 Schools



Farm to School Coordinator Jeff Murrie uses a sunflower to explain pollination.



Murrie explains ways to use okra during a demonstration in the teaching kitchen.



Fourth-grade students find pollinators using magnifying glasses



First-grade students from Wallace-Gregg feed ducks.



Students from Julius Moore's Horticulture class at Advantage Academy install irrigation in raised bed garden boxes

With the start of a new school year, The Farm at Florence 1 has come alive. Dozens of students from across the district have already visited The Farm and many more classes have trips planned for the coming weeks and months.

Each visit is designed with the grade level of the visiting class in mind. Kindergarten students might take a hayride around The Farm and learn about the incubation period for chickens. Meanwhile, students from the district's three high schools and Advantage Academy can learn about turf management, greenhouses and irrigation systems; the first high school students to visit even worked together to install irrigation for The Farm's raised garden beds.

The possibilities are endless and as the seasons change, so will the opportunities for learning. This school year so far, students have been able to explore the pollinators that make flowers, fruits and vegetables grow

simply by stepping into the sunflower field. A neighboring farm, Stirrup Hope, has also allowed students to see ducks, horses and donkeys up close.

In The Farm's teaching kitchen, students have explored their taste buds with fruit and vegetable smoothies, baked okra and 'bugs' created from fresh fruits and pretzels for an afternoon snack.

Farm to School Coordinator Jeff Murrie said that students will be able to explore careers and learn new skills, all while having fun and being active on The Farm.

"The Farm at Florence 1 is going to have a profound impact on the health and well-being of our students and their families for generations," Murrie said. "It has been incredible to see how excited students are when they get to The Farm and have all of these new experiences, using all five of their senses. They are learning and they don't even realize it because they are having fun."



Students from Wallace-Gregg gave apples with honey two thumbs up.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE FARM AT FLORENCE 1 AT [HTTPS://FARM.F1S.ORG](https://farm.f1s.org).



CLAFLIN RANKED A U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT TOP 10 BEST HBCU

Submitted by J. Craig Cotton, director of public relations Office of Communications and Marketing

ORANGEBURG-Who says the number 13, is unlucky? Not Clafin University. For the 13th consecutive year, Clafin is ranked among the U.S. News & World Report's Top 10 Best HBCUs. In the 2024 poll, the university retained its number nine ranking from 2023. Founded in 1869, Clafin is South Carolina's oldest Historically Black College/University and the first to admit all students regardless of ethnic origin, gender, race or religion.

"To be a U.S. News & World Report's Top 10 HBCU for 13 consecutive years secures Clafin's place as a North Star in the constellation of the nation's leading HBCUs," said Clafin President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack. "Our rankings are a testament to the collective commitment of our world-class faculty, talented administrators and staff and leal and loyal alumni. These rankings also reaffirm that Clafin provides an exemplary academic experience that elevates and transforms our high-achieving scholars into globally engaged visionary leaders."

Clafin made a noticeable improvement in the Top Performers on Social Mobility category as it moved up to number nine after being ranked at No. 20 in 2023.

The Social Mobility category is a measurement for colleges and universities that enroll and graduate a significant number of students who receive Pell Grants.

At Clafin, these students earn degrees that prepare them for professional careers or to continue their education in graduate school.

Clafin was recently named 2023 Best College by Money.com. The rating offers a practical analysis of more than 700 four-year colleges using data in three main categories: quality, affordability and student outcomes. Clafin's annual alumni giving percentage of more than 40 percent is the highest for all HBCUs.

The University has a retention rate of 80 percent.

Clafin's other accomplishments during the past year include:

- Received a reaffirmation of accreditation from The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) following a rigorous evaluation of the University's on-campus and online academic programs. SACSCOC is the body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states.
- Ranked third on the U.S. News & World Report short list of Top 10 HBCUs with the highest four-year graduation rates among first-time, full-time students who started in fall 2014.
- Launched online Master of Science Degree in Biotechnology to Mitigate Climate Change.
- Launched online Master of Science in Nursing Program and celebrated the program's inaugural graduates.
- Invested \$670,000 to renovate and install more than 50 new ClearTouch Interactive Displays, and state-of-the-art cameras, microphones, and speakers to expand teaching and learning technology throughout the campus.
- Clafin received more than \$17.4 million to support the construction of a new Innovation Center for Biotechnology and Cybersecurity.
- The construction of the University's new ultra-modern Student Center is nearly completed, and the scheduled opening is later this fall. Features of the facility will include a movie theater, esports lounge, a food court, and other amenities.



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2023 Teacher OF THE YEAR



Marlene Mitchell-Golding

2ND GRADE TEACHER
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THE PURSUIT OF TEACHING: THE JOURNEY Submitted by Marlene Mitchell-Golding



Marlene Mitchell-Golding holds check from Lee County School District

BISHOPVILLE -My name is Marlene Mitchell-Golding, a dedicated teacher who has been impacting the lives of students for the past twenty-four years. I am honored as well as humbled to serve as Teacher of the Year for Lee County School District and also representing my school, West Lee Elementary. Teaching is an ingrained passion that I knew I had to pursue. Of course, there were motivating forces that

gave me the inspiration to walk in my calling that included several teacher-mentors as well as the innate passion for supporting the children of my community. My dream of becoming a teacher led me to the Bethlehem Teachers College in Jamaica where I earned a diploma in teaching in 1999. This would later propel me for the Bachelor of Education degree at Knox College, Jamaica in 2008. Having the zeal for life-long learning, I pursued a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction in 2019 through the American College of Education. Along the journey, I have also co-authored a language arts textbook series which serves children in grades one and two in Jamaica and the Caribbean.

The philosophy that drives my desire to teach is found in the principles of self-determination in Kujichagulia that teach four simple ideologies: 1) to define ourselves, (2) to name ourselves, (3) create for ourselves and (4) speak for ourselves. This is my thinking, that children can be motivated

to become who they want to be.

As an accomplished educator, I am currently pursuing the National Board Certification (NBCT) in order to effectively hone my craft. To add to my repertoire of competencies, I successfully completed the mentorship and evaluator training with the focus on SC Teaching Standards 4.0 Rubric in August 2023. My educational experience has been an exciting adventure that took me from my home country to teach in the United States in 2016. I have been employed in the Lee County School District for the past three years, teaching second grade at West Lee Elementary School. In this capacity, I create a classroom environment where my students are excited about learning as I use their interests and fascinations to create learning experiences for them. There is always an activity taking place in my classroom because I am a firm believer in the educational value of project-based learning where students are developing, constructing and connecting learning to real world experiences. At the end of the school year, my students became published authors, marked by a celebration of their effort with the school and their families.

Service above self is a distinguishing hallmark that has driven me to care for the poor and indigent in my home country through a program I initiated that is dubbed, "Touch of Love." Even though I have transitioned to a new land, my enthusiasm for service has been fueled even more through feeding the homeless and caring for the elderly in the community.

The French designer, Coco Chanel, who ruled over Parisian haute couture for several decades penned, "If you were born without wings, do nothing to prevent them from growing." This is my mantra as I continue to make my mark in a profession that has given me so much fulfillment. My teaching is constantly improving; the pedagogical skills I used in the past have been revamped, and every day brings a new opportunity for learning. I am thankful for the vast opportunities I have found in my school and district through the ongoing professional development sessions that show me constantly evolving as a teacher, and so, the journey continues.

FMU RECEIVES \$25,000 FROM HONDA TO FUND CYBERSECURITY INITIATIVES

Articles submitted by FMU

Francis Marion University (FMU) recently received \$25,000 in funding from Honda of South Carolina to support the expansion of cybersecurity initiatives at the university. The funding will allow the university to begin establishing additional curricula in cybersecurity that will benefit both students as well as community members.

Funding from this gift will be used to provide specialized equipment and software to train and certify students in cybersecurity. Faculty training will also be available through this generous support.

FMU's School of Business and Computer Science program will be

home to this new initiative. Job growth in the cybersecurity industry is expected to increase 35 percent in the next ten years. With Honda's generous support, FMU will have the opportunity to increase the number of qualified individuals in the Pee Dee region.

"Time and time again, Honda has stepped forward with generous support for our programs," said FMU President Fred Carter. "All they ask in return is the opportunity to interview and hire our graduates into fine careers. These types of corporate partnerships are an important part of the future of this university. They are also essential to the success of the entire region."

FMU RECOGNIZED AS A 2023 GREAT COLLEGES TO WORK FOR® ELEVEN YEARS IN A ROW



Francis Marion University has been named to the 2023 Great Colleges to Work For® list for the eleventh year in a row, with top marks in all ten categories measured. Universities are recognized based on results from surveys administered to employees.

Being a workplace that excels in all ten parameters of the assessment, FMU has earned the special designation of Honor Roll institution. This year marks FMU's tenth time receiving Honor Roll distinction. Out of the 194 universities that participated, 72 received recognition as a "Great College to Work For," and only 42 received Honor Roll status.

The ten categories measured in the surveys include: job satisfaction and support, compensation and benefits, professional development, mission and pride, supervisor/department chair effectiveness, confidence in senior leadership, faculty and staff wellbeing, shared governance, faculty experience and diversity, inclusion and belonging.

The survey results are based on a two-part assessment process: an institution questionnaire that captures 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 received recognition was the employee feedback.

"FMU is proud to be included on the Great Colleges to Work For® list for the eleventh year in a row. We are especially delighted to receive the highest ranking in every category," said FMU President Fred Carter. "This honor is a testament to the quality and collegiality of this fine faculty and staff. They make this university a great place to work and a great place to receive an education."

The Great Colleges to Work For® program is one of the largest and most respected workplace-recognition programs in the country. For more information and to view all current and previously recognized institutions, visit the Great Colleges program website at GreatCollegesProgram.com and GreatCollegesList.com. ModernThink, a strategic human capital consulting firm, administered the survey and analyzed the results.



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BELIEVE IN YOURSELF. YOU REALLY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Submitted by Ruiz Foods



Kimberli Carroll

When you first meet Kimberli Carroll, chief operating officer, Ruiz Foods, you are immediately greeted with a warm and welcoming smile that you quickly realize is both genuine and exudes confidence. “Kim joined the company in 2001,” shares Kim Ruiz Beck, chairman of Ruiz Foods, “and we are so pleased to be working alongside her and to have watched her learn and grow into this current leadership position. Kimberli has a vision for the company’s future that totally resonates with the Ruiz family, and she fully

embraces our values and our commitment to our team members, our customers, and our consumers.”

Prior to joining Ruiz Foods, Carroll worked for a small produce company in California’s Central San Joaquin Valley. She was given the opportunity to introduce and sell a product that had never been sold before. “I remember feeling,” recalls Carroll, “that I was given the opportunity to create something out of nothing but an idea. I quickly realized, I loved that feeling...that challenge...and then, the satisfaction and pride in the accomplishment. And that’s what working at Ruiz Foods has offered me time and time again over the years.”

“As a small company, growing into what is now the largest frozen Mexican food manufacturer in the United States,” adds Carroll, “we have investigated many opportunities over the years... many times starting from nothing more than a simple idea. What has been incredible, time and time again, and one of the things I admire so much about the team members at Ruiz Foods, is the working together, the sharing of ideas and the realization that each of us truly ‘makes a difference.’ For each of us at Ruiz Foods, ‘making a difference’ is not just a catch phrase or public relations mantra. It’s knowing and recognizing that we contribute and that our contributions are important.”

An example, shares Carroll, is the fact that until a few years ago the industry did not offer foodservice data analytics to product buyers of traditional food service and convenience stores. Knowing how valuable this information is to retail store buyers, one person at Ruiz Foods asked the question “why isn’t that information available for our food service customers?” One Ruiz Team Member, Darlene Takanishi, figured out how the company could go about making that happen. Building on what was just a general concept, Takanishi made it bigger and better than anyone would have imagined. Now, Ruiz

Foods has a team of people that run data analytics for the foodservice side of the business, providing valuable insights to customers that, just a few years ago, would not even have existed.

When asked what happens when the opportunity, and the Ruiz Team efforts don’t result in success, Carroll is quick to respond, and you notice that confidence in her smile, “First of all, I can proudly say we have more successes than not, and second, each opportunity

pursued simply adds another chapter to the playbook our co-founders, Fred and Louis Ruiz, began writing nearly 60 years ago. The playbook of the true entrepreneur who understands there is accomplishment and learning even when there is failure. And while some ideas are small...others can be transformational...but together the results have been excellent for the company’s growth and future.”

“I’d also like to add,” she says, “that the team explores each opportunity with eyes wide open, consciously tapping into the diverse knowledge and experience each team member brings to the table. We know we make a difference...each one of us...and we value and take pride in our diversity. I know we’ve shared our belief in the importance of diversity within our organization several times in past issues of Diversity Works, and that hasn’t changed. Whether the diversity is related to age, race, ethnicity, religion, experience, education, sexual orientation, gender identification, or physical appearance/ability or a combination of one or more, each person brings tremendous value to the conversation.”

She goes on to explain that Ruiz Foods doesn’t have a ‘script’ for who they should hire. “You know, it’s interesting but I honestly believe we have a very diverse workforce because what we do is focus on bringing the best talent with the right skills and mindset to the business. We’re all part of this Ruiz Family because what we really care about is each other. We recognize we’re working together as a team to deliver something to the marketplace and be proud of what we do. We genuinely enjoy working for Ruiz Foods because we each like to ask questions, take nothing for granted, strive to always do the right thing, believe in treating each other with dignity and respect and we are encouraged to follow our conscience. And it comes from the top-down beginning with Fred and Louis. Today, the Management Team and the Leadership Team, work hard to embed into the organization what we want the culture to be by how we treat people and how we to talk to people and by the decisions we make.”

“Throughout her 22-year career with Ruiz Foods, Kimberli has continuously taken on more and more responsibilities,” adds Ruiz Beck. “She joined Ruiz Foods as the director of Marketing/Foodservice Business Unit in 2001, and was promoted to Sr. VP, Foodservice Business Unit in 2012. During that time, she demonstrated a knack for identifying what we needed as we continued to grow our company. She not only identified the opportunities as they presented themselves, but she understood the importance of identifying those issues that were worth solving...worth spending time on. She readily accepted extra work in addition to what she was already responsible for and proactively expressed her desire to grow personally and within the company. Subsequently, she was promoted to senior vice president and general manager, Foodservice Business Unit, executive vice president and general manager Foodservice Business Unit and executive vice president and chief commercial officer in 2012, 2021 and 2023 respectively.”

“I hope that my story, when read by people just beginning their careers,” concludes Carroll, “will cause them to pause and think... even if it’s just for a minute. Once you find the company that shares your values, become as good as possible in what you want to do. Always be hungry to learn as much as you can about how to get better and learn from others to be able to expand your base of knowledge. Understand what the business means in terms of financials. In other words, what is the revenue potential and what are the costs associated with generating that revenue. And, finally, always treat everyone you meet, everyone you work with, with dignity and respect. Remember, you really CAN make a difference.”



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SHEENA GENERETTE THEN AND NOW By Cynthia Ford



Sheena Generette

Generette found out in September but did not receive care until November. When she found out, it was like a seed in her breast. By November it had tripled in size.

As an advocate and survivor, Generette continues to support initiatives of breast cancer awareness. She initially follows up every six months. She now follows up once per year. Generette stated, "After treatment, I prayed Lord if you heal me, I don't want just to have life. I want to live." Ever since then, Generette has enjoyed life to the fullest, traveling to various states and out of the country. "I don't want cancer to be the one thing that defined my life," stated Generette. Generette still thinks about it every single day and it's difficult for her to watch shows where people are going through. She expressed that she had to realize that their situation was not my situation. Generette recalls that her nurses would say that she was the happiest cancer patient they'd ever seen. Generette wanted to see herself on the other side of it and began imagining herself on the other side. She believes it's important to ask yourself if you want to have life or just live.

During treatment in 2015, Generette had a great support system. Her husband never missed a doctor's appointment or treatment. Because the family had gone through it before, they were phenomenal and offered consistent support. Her sons were in third and fourth grade at the time. They would come home from school and would help her out the bed and make the bed. Her younger son would say, "I prayed for you at school today." Generette felt that she had to push for her family, didn't want to put them through what they had already been through. "If your mind says a thing your body will follow," stated Generette. After her oldest sister passed, she adopted her six months old twins. She had responsibility on top of her children and wanted to live for them. Generette notes that she didn't want them to see her down and out but happy and enjoying life. "Life is short, and I want them to have great memories. You never know what can happen anytime and any moment. My motivation was God and my children," stated Generette.

Generette recalls not wanting to eat after treatment because you can't taste anything. During the difficult experience, her husband cooked many meals to get her to eat. Generette believes people give up in their minds and say they can't. "I can't stress enough, if your mindset isn't there, your body will not follow," stated Generette. She believes it's important to try to get some type of nutrient. That was the hardest thing for Generette to fight through. Generette acknowledged that patients will get tired and weak. She recalls feeling selfish but thought of not wanting to put her family through an experience of loss again. She encourages others to try eating again if the food doesn't stay down. Generette recalls getting lemon drops even though she

couldn't taste them but it the hint of lemon and would make her feel better. Generette believes that cancer patients need a strong support system. She knew that her family was worried not knowing what was going to happen to her. She spent her time trying to console them while praying to get through it. She believes in pushing forward. As Generette meets other survivors, she connects with them as a surviving sister or brother and develops a kinship with them. "We been through something everyone can't talk about," stated Generette.

Generette has noticed some of the challenges since that time. One of the concerns is to heal from the scars. The scarred tissues and thickening in breast can be a lasting and frightening effect. Generette experienced having three lumps because of the thick tissues. However, they were not life threatening. One of the challenges some survivors face is, "chemo brain" where you forget things. Generette's hair grew back but it came back totally gray. Some have asked her about dying her hair, but she refers to the transition as her Moses experience. "I came out on the other side," stated Generette.

Generette encourages patients to keep appointments. She also believes if people notice anything different or out of the norm, they should write things down so they can report it to their doctor. Generette kept notes in a journal. Generette is big on faith and recalls praying for her doctor and nurses to make sure they were doing what they need to do for her healing. Generette wants people to know there is more and to not accept what's been said to you. She believes many people accept it and give up. "It's not the end," stated Generette. "I'm saying it because I went through it with my sister, but with my fight, I knew what to do and what not to do." Generette wants people to learn from her fight and encourages people to see themselves healed and on the other side.



Mr. and Mrs. Generette

Generette is more cautious with things she consumes. She eats a lot more fruit and vegetables and does not consume many processed foods. Her husband cooks every day and makes sure they eat healthily. She tries to eat a lot of leafy things. Generette encourages people to take advantage of healthy food initiatives happening in the Pee Dee area. She believes people can live a wholesome healthy life and have fun while doing it.

Since completing treatment for breast cancer in 2015, she has visited several countries. She and her family have also visited most of the states and they cruise often. Generette values the American Cancer Society quote that was noted in her 2015 article (Creating a world with more birthdays). She believes that she has learned to enjoy life more. Generette feels that she not only has happiness but more joy than anything else. "I'm filled with so much joy now because I know what it's like to be knocking at death's door," said Generette. She believes it's important to celebrate life and not to just have life but experience it. Generette just celebrated her birthday with family. She noticed that her children are still protective of her and ask a lot of questions to ensure she is doing well. She notes that everyone has been phenomenal. "They are my help, and they don't let me forget how to love," said Generette.

Generette began exploring other gifts she has and often decorates at her church, for parties, and even weddings. Her

SHEENA GENERETTE CONT'D



Mrs. Generette surrounded by family.

church helps with awareness of breast cancer by having, “Pink Sunday.” Throughout the year she gives out information about awareness. Generette advocates by telling people to get checked regardless of age. She also mails information to her sister to pass out in New Jersey. As recalled in 2015, Generette learned in home economics class how to detect breast cancer. Years later, that skill turned out to be beneficial.

Unfortunately, it is not taught in the schools today.

Generette wears something pink every day of the month. Generette believes that self-care and self-detection should be talked about in other months throughout the year instead of just in October. “There are some people who do not recognize breast cancer awareness until October, stated Generette. “It’s not just October but every day of the year.

Generette plans to explore additional ways in which she can broaden her gift as an advocate, decorator and would even consider speaking opportunities. She was often told that she has the voice of a speaker. She hopes that her story will be an inspiration and bring strength to those who have received a diagnosis of breast cancer. To those going through, she encourages you to hold on, keep pushing and keep fighting for your life.

Generette’s story is one that many can learn from. Life is made for living, so live life to the fullest while you can. If your physical body is attacked with sickness, fight with all your might and learn to see yourself on the other side. Encourage yourself and keep your mind strengthened for the journey ahead. Generette states, “If the mindset is not there, the body will not follow.”

SURVIVOR JAMIE P. HANNA: THEN AND NOW *By Dawn “D.A.” Goodwin*



Jamie Poulas Hanna putting her son James Wesley on a plane to attend law school.

In the October 2015 edition of Diversity Works Magazine©, we met several of our area’s brave breast cancer survivors, including Jamie Poulas Hanna, who was surprised that year to find herself going from being the host of a cancer survivor luncheon to being its honoree. In catching up with her story of then and now, we find that her life has changed in so many ways since her diagnosis and mastectomy in 2014, and after her last feature. “Today, almost nine years later,” she said, “I am a widow (of five years), and I

am a mom to a now first-year law student.”

“On November 20, 2014, I was diagnosed with breast cancer,” said Hanna. “I was a wife and a stay-at-home mom to an eighth grader.”

When we met Hanna, she spoke very highly of her supportive friends and family during that time, all of whom were by her side through her diagnosis and her healing journey.

Today, health wise, Hanna is doing quite well. In fact, in 2017, after a 26-year absence she returned to the classroom—just three years after her diagnosis. She teaches twelfth grade Economics and Government at West Florence High School. In addition, Hanna’s son, James, graduated high school in 2019, and then from Francis Marion University this year. He is now attending Rutgers University School of Law in New Jersey and is engaged to a sweet, beautiful young lady named Briana, who is a Level IV NICU nurse in North Carolina.

Unfortunately, another major update we now learn from Hanna includes the passing of her loving, accepting husband, who passed away in 2018, after a very short battle with lung cancer, which causes the most cancer deaths in America. According to the American Cancer Society, while the number of new cases has been decreasing over the years, an estimated 117,550 U.S. men will be diagnosed with lung cancer this year.

In the United States, breast cancer is more common in women. However, research has found that with early diagnosis, you can survive either diagnosis, just like Hanna.

Hanna’s faith in God and encouragement of others are yet other elements in her life that have remained unchanged. As she said, “I encourage everyone—men and women—to be proactive in their lives. Get regular health screenings! Above all, have faith in our Lord and Savior because He is the true healer of all things!”

Hanna and her son James have traveled to Europe twice since she was diagnosed with breast cancer—once in 2015 and 2019. Although she teaches at West Florence, she has recently moved to the beach with her rescue kitty, Mr. Mo.

PREVENTION, SUPPORT

AWARENESS MONTH

**BREAST
CANCER**

AWARENESS, SOLIDARITY

A woman wearing a pink headscarf and a white top is being kissed on the cheek by a young girl with long brown hair. They are outdoors, with a blue ocean and a sky with soft clouds in the background. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is tender and hopeful.

HERE FOR LIFE

When facing a cancer diagnosis, it is important to put yourself in the right medical hands. Home to the region's only nationally accredited comprehensive cancer program, our top cancer specialists, cutting edge and targeted treatment options, and compassionate support services provide everything you need to fight cancer while remaining close to home. **McLeod Health is Here for Life.**

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GET THE FACTS ON BREAST CANCER.

Breast Cancer is diagnosed every

14 seconds

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

2 minutes. 

About **297,790 women** and about
2,800 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

99% 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 2.5%)**



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THEN AND NOW FOR NOVELLA DAVIS *By Cynthia Ford*



Novella Davis

Receiving a diagnosis of cancer can be a frightening experience. From that moment there are so many questions, some answered and some not. Following the diagnosis is the demanding treatment process. The annual campaign is a present reminder of self-care, knowing your body, and to refrain from procrastinating when a medical need arises. Our bodies are mysteriously complex, yet there remain resources of hope and healing to help push us through trying times. Cancer has affected many families and remains a

priority and concern.

The memories of the journey remain in the far corners of the mind of survivors as they strive to move forward with their lives. In 2014, Novella Davis shared her journey as a breast cancer survivor with Diversity Works Magazine. Years later she continues to survive while maintaining an active and wholesome life, Davis had great support while completing chemotherapy. She would even drive herself to treatment on occasions and would treat herself afterwards. Even with the support of friends and family, she still maintained a level of self-motivation as she progressed through treatment for breast cancer.

“My motivation was giving it all to Jesus and believing in his healing,” stated Davis.

Davis received her diagnosis in 2009 after a routine mammogram checkup. Davis did not have symptoms during that time but does recall unexplained weight loss during that time. Her biggest worry at the time was leaving her daughter. After completing treatment, she had a desire to continue to help others.

Davis understood the challenges and support needed for others battling cancer and co-founded the cancer support group M.A.G.N.I.F.Y (Mothers Attesting Glorify through an Intricate Fight Year-Round). MAGNIFY not only provided support for those battling cancer, but the group also provided educational resources and facilitated community events to heighten the awareness of cancer. Davis understood that early detection has proven to be beneficial for many and sought to educate others about the process.

So many connections were made through MAGNIFY and many members benefited from the assembly and support. Davis recalls having a Passionately Pink Day of Pampering for Breast Cancer Survivors with the help of Mary K consults. Another memorable event was the New Beginning Walk at the Benjamin Mack Memorial VFW Post 10319 in Marion, SC. The group facilitated Walk/Ride community awareness and orchestrated a group trip.

M.A.G.N.I.F.Y has moved on to be a part of Susan G. Kamen Low Country and became Ambassadors of a program called R.O.A.R (Reaching Out to African Americans and Rural Communities). Davis became a part of the Witness Project. She remained open to supporting others in their journey. She understood that group settings may not be the appropriate setting for everyone. Battling cancer is a major adjustment and she wanted to be available for others in a space of comfort. M.A.G.N.I.F.Y is now more of a one-on-one type of meeting. The participants that Davis has worked with prefer to do it that way to have a more personalized experience.

Following her treatment Davis followed up with the oncologist once a year. This year Davis was told that she didn't have to report any more unless she experienced problems. Davis still chooses to do her annual mammogram. As with most survivors, Davis did experience life

changes since the completion of treatment. She changed her eating habits and tries to eat ore green vegetables and fruit. Davis believes she is stronger emotionally and mentally, but Chemo has taken a toll on parts of her body physically. This has caused her to not do a lot of activities she used to do.

“It is still all good,” stated Davis. “God has never failed me, and I have accepted the changes I have gone through because of the cancer.”

Davis was determined to continue living life. She continues to work for the Marion County Housing Authority. She is also a lifetime member of both veterans' organizations, Benjamin Mack Memorial VFW Post 10319 and Lt. James B. Miller Dav Chapter 21. Davis continues to enjoy precious moments in life and enjoys traveling.

Davis wants others to know that she is a caring and giving person that will do anything to help you if she can also. She also celebrates being a Breast Cancer Survivor with a strong testimony. As a survivor, Davis expressed that she owes it all to God. She has done a lot in her community for breast cancer survivors and continues to do all that she can. She does a lot behind the scenes that no one ever knows about.

Since the 2014 article, Davis has become a grandmother. “Being a grandmother is another blessing from God and by the Grace of God I am still here and living life to the fullest! If I had to give advice to someone battling cancer, I would tell them to pray, give it all to God and stay around positive people. Never give up and continue living life.” Davis says.

From then to now, Davis not only survived the breast cancer battle, but created an opportunity for others to thrive, while being a resource of hope. As we acknowledge National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, it is important to note that screenings should not be delayed until October. If you notice something out of the ordinary, seek medical attention right away. As the National Breast Cancer Awareness Foundation states, “Early Detection Saves Lives.”



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BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH



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HAL ROWAN: A SURVIVOR THEN AND NOW By Dawn "D.A." Goodwin



GEORGETOWN-This year for Men's Breast Cancer Awareness Week in October, the goal is to encourage the community to seek early cancer screening. Since we met Hal Rowan a few years ago, he says he has been blessed. He first received a breast cancer diagnosis in April of 2008 and soon after had a mastectomy. The great news is that he has been going strong ever since.

Healthwise, Rowan says he has not had any additional issues related to cancer. "While I have had rotator cuff surgery and also back surgery for a herniated disc, as far as I know my health is reasonably good for a person born a long time ago. Originally, I was seeing my oncologist and my surgeon twice a year. I was on Tamoxifen for ten years. I now see the surgeon and the oncologist once a year. Also, I have a yearly mammogram. One good thing about being a male breast cancer survivor is they get you in early and out quickly on mammogram day," he said.

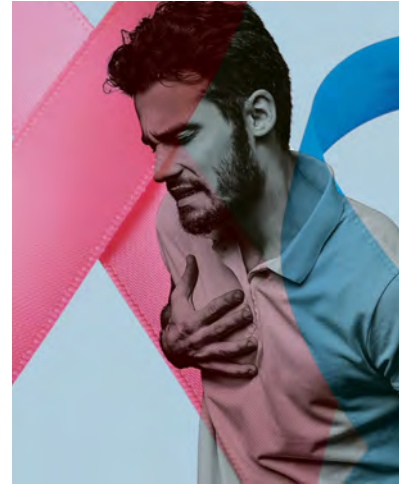
"I am a survivor." These are the words of Rowan, a man who says he is living proof that males can get breast cancer. At the same time, Rowan is living proof that someone, whether male or female, with a breast cancer diagnosis can survive.

Having a mammogram for early detection is a measure that can

save your life. "Don't assume anything" is a tip Rowan offers. "Don't assume it will go away. Seek medical attention as soon as possible for your concerns. Early detection equates to better outcomes. May God Bless anyone that has had or will ever have cancer. I lost my sister to breast cancer, and it was very hard watching her with the disease."

Words of encouragement Rowan has for others with a similar diagnosis include, for them to keep the faith, just as the Bible states in 2 Timothy 4:7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." He reminds us, "Have faith in God, faith in your family and faith in your medical caregivers. Each day that passes things are learned on how to treat cancer so you can have a positive outcome."

Hal Rowan grew up in Georgetown, SC. After graduation, he attended the University of South Carolina and graduated in 1969. He then moved to Florence in October 1969 where his job with the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control assigned him. In all, Rowan worked full time and part time for 49 years with the Immunization Division and retired on December 31, 2018. Rowan and his wife watched their daughter get married, and now she is the mother of a daughter who will be two years old on December 7.



Because
MEN
get it too



Christopher Moore

“Men don't cry; suck it up; why are you being such a girl; toughen up!” These are a few statements many men have heard over the course of their lives.

Often men are taught to be tough or macho no matter the circumstances and have been led to believe that showing emotions or expressing innermost thoughts and feelings is the wrong thing to do. We have been told that keeping our issues buried makes us strong, but in reality, it does the opposite.

This October, as we observe Mental Illness Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day, let's take time to focus on men's mental and physical health.

According to Mental Health America, five major mental health problems affecting men are depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, psychosis and schizophrenia and eating disorders. Studies show that men of all ages and ethnicities are less likely than women to seek help for these problems and more - including substance abuse and stressful life events - even though they encounter these problems at the same or greater rates as women.

It is estimated that six million men struggle with depression, yet men are less likely to seek treatment due to reasons including reluctance to talk, fear of stigmatization and judgment and the inability to accept symptoms or verbalize the extent of their feelings.

A significant factor that prevents men from seeking help for mental health issues is what is commonly referred to as 'masculine norms,' especially in American society. Masculine norms are the social rules and expected behavior culturally

associated with men and manhood. Within these norms, a man is supposed to be strong and stoic, not weak or vulnerable which is a concept that prevents men from expressing their true feelings. The adherence to these norms results in toxic masculinity - men lack the ability to express themselves and as a result, their emotions have more of a chance of being suppressed or expressed through aggression or violence. Adherence to masculine norms can result in the following:

- worsening of depression and anxiety
- abuse of substances
- greater health risk (e.g., cardiovascular and metabolic disease)
- issues with dating and interpersonal intimacy
- issues with interpersonal violence
- increase in overall psychological distress.
- discouragement in seeking help.
- homophobia

Suicide rates continue to grow each year and have been referred to as a 'silent epidemic,' due to the alarming rate of suicides committed on a daily basis. According to a 2021 statistic, males make up 50 percent of the population but nearly 80 percent of suicides. This amounts to roughly 105 men dying by suicide daily.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death among all Americans.
- Men account for 79 percent of all suicides.
- Suicide is four times more prevalent for males than females.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death of men between the ages of 10-39.

Mental Health America lists some of the factors that lead to suicide in males as social isolation, substance abuse, unemployment, military-related trauma, genetic predisposition and other mood disorders.

Gay and bisexual men are more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual men before age 25, likely attributed to social stigma and nonacceptance. Additionally, young Black men commit suicide at more than three times the rate of Black women, with suicide rates in Black men 10 to 19 years old increasing by 60 percent since 2017.

As men, it is important we continue to show our strength by being vocal about what impacts us on a daily basis. It is also imperative that we express feelings in a healthy way, to avoid the pitfalls of burying or ignoring emotional difficulties. According to the American Journal of Psychiatry, in the year before they committed suicide, only 35 percent of men in America on average sought care from a mental health practitioner. It is critical to speak up and seek help, before your emotional turmoil turns into bigger problems and manifests in negative, dangerous or even life-ending behaviors.

We should take care of our emotional responsibilities with the same care and dedication we give to family, work and financial obligations. It is not easy to share yourself with others, but we have to begin somewhere to lessen the stigma attached to men and their mental health.

Take the time today to check on the men in your lives and let them know it is okay to talk. Support them with encouraging empathetic, honest communication, signaling to them that you are a safe space for them to be vulnerable and open for the betterment of their mental health.

Christopher Moore is a behavioral health consultant in the HopeHealth Medical Plaza in Florence. He is a licensed professional counselor in North and South Carolina and has worked in counseling and mental health since 2002.





Erica Buffkin

Most people would be alarmed to discover that the third leading cause of death for young people ages 15-24 is suicide according to the Center for Disease Control's data. Pam Williams, treatment director for Circle Park Behavioral Health services shared that, "Young people and teens are among our most vulnerable community members. We must do all we can to offer support and address any mental health issues they may develop to ensure they have the best chance to weather the onslaught of stressors they encounter daily." Although all youth can be susceptible, mental health

organizations note that certain populations are particularly vulnerable including LGBTQ+ (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered/Questioning) youth who are four times more likely to seriously consider suicide than their peers. Native American youth and military service members also present with higher incidents of suicidal behavior. Suicide is a mental health and public health issue which can be improved with more access to information and treatment.

Risk factors for suicidal thoughts and behavior may include mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression. These mental health problems affect one in five teens in this country. Alcohol and substance use; impulsive behaviors; history of trauma or abuse; family history of suicide and previous suicide attempt(s) are also risk factors. Many survivors of suicidal behavior state that it is a way of feeling control in situations which are uncontrollable, such as mental health problems. These issues are compounded due to the terror of suicidal people that they will be stigmatized for being, "crazy," if they ask for help.

There are incidents of suicidal behavior which show no signs, in many

cases these are some notable warning signs:

- Physical changes in appearance or hygiene
- Increase in alcohol or drug use.
- Sudden drop in grades
- Social withdrawal
- Talking about suicide or preoccupation with death
- Risky or reckless behaviors (such as reckless driving or unsafe sex)
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having nothing to live for
- Researching suicide methods and/or acquiring weapons

Studies have shown that 81 percent of people who attempt suicide tell someone what they're planning to do. Therefore, these conversations should be taken seriously.

When parents, teachers, peers and others note these warning signs in a teen they can begin to help by expressing concern; active listening; maintaining connections; displaying compassion and prioritizing safety. Proactively seeking treatment for teens who exhibit these warning signs is a critical first step to helping a young person in crisis. Organizations such as Circle Park Behavioral Care have counselors specializing in adolescent mental health and treatment of substance use disorder.

All Parents are encouraged to keep an open line of communication with their children and stay educated about the current pressures and challenges young people are experiencing. Family and friends can help teens with suicide prevention through utilizing some of the national and local resources available for teen suicide prevention such as these:

Circle Park Behavioral Health Service: www.circlepark.com

843-665-9349

National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: <https://afsp.org/>

Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide: <https://sptsusa.org/>

At Circle Park Behavioral Health Services, we work to ensure wellness in Florence County by providing as much information for suicide prevention and mental health treatment as possible.



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A SAFE SPACE FREE FROM VIOLENCE

Submitted by Shonette Dargan-Richardson, M.A., Shelter program director Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic And Sexual Assault



Shonette Dargan-Richardson, M.A.,

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM). Each year Pee Dee Coalition (PDC) honors this month as by educating our community and sharing information about domestic violence. This year we are celebrating our 12th Annual Breaking Free Virtual Walk and Run. All proceeds from the event will support our Emergency Safe Shelter (ESS).

Our ESS has been serving clients since 1989, more than 2000 clients have sought refuge within our

Emergency Safe Shelter. Our location is confidential. We provide accommodations for 18-20 women and children. Within the last year we have extended our stay to six months dependent on the client's needs while in our safe home. Our beautiful historical home provides five bathrooms and six bedrooms, one of which is a handicapped accessible room for clients with disabilities. We have an indoor and outdoor play area for the children, laundry room amenities, and a storage room with items needed for our clients as they come in. Everything a client needs when entering our shelter, we can provide because of the generous support from our community. During the pandemic clients were still in need of a safe place free from violence. While many shelters closed or transferred clients into hotels, we continued to accommodate our clients with shelter. It was a challenge ensuring that our clients would get the assistance needed and remain safe from the virus that spread rapidly throughout the country.

Our primary goal was and still is to ensure the safety of the clients. We assist our clients in becoming empowered survivors.

Once a client enters our ESS program, via referral from law enforcement, another shelter, hospital, family member or self-referral, we are available seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day to assist. Since being in operation for almost 35 years, we have seen survivors thrive, we have seen some clients return, we have seen repeated clients, young, old, rich, poor, all races, and sexes. More recently we have served larger families, mothers with 8 children or less. Sometimes it is difficult to place the larger families in housing due to limited income, unemployment or due to parents not having childcare. Some other challenges are mental and physical issues the mother and children encountered due to the trauma they have experienced. With the support of our community resources, we make referrals to Mental Health, local clinics, hospitals, Circle Park, Employment Works, Vocational Rehab, Adult Education, schools, and colleges.

Pee Dee Coalition Emergency Safe shelter is one of the programs within Pee Dee Coalition. Shonette Dargan-Richardson, Shelter Director has been with PDC for 11 ½ years totaled. She started as an intern in April 2012 and was hired as Shelter Coordinator in January 2013. Then she was promoted to Shelter Director. She and her dedicated team of three full-time employees and six part-time employees have served and assisted countless women and children. "All superheroes don't wear capes; how do I know; I work with heroes every day. "Our shelter staff, colleagues, advocates, donors, volunteers, and interns are the heroes. They answer the crisis line, respond to hospital calls, attend court, provide a listening ear, advocate, or provide resources, these are the heroes that save lives. This is why acknowledging and bringing awareness to domestic violence is so important."

HELP US, HELP SOMEONE BREAK FREE! UN-SILENCE THE VIOLENCE.

REBUILDING LIVES WITH CONFIDENCE

Submitted by Nikeisha Martin, life skills coordinator/Advocate Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Assault New Beginnings Transitional Shelter



Nikeisha Martin

As someone who has survived domestic violence, I know firsthand the strength and resilience it takes. However, moving forward requires a different set of tools. As the life skills coordinator at the New Beginnings Transitional shelter, my goal is to empower women with practical skills that help them rebuild their lives with confidence.

One of the essential skills I teach is home maintenance. It's not just about keeping things clean, but creating a safe haven. For

survivors, having control over their personal space can be deeply healing. It strengthens the feeling of security and independence that may have been lost during difficult times.

Financial abuse is often linked to domestic violence. Many survivors often deal with limited access to their personal financial resources and limited financial means due to financial abuse. Survivors without budgeting skills might struggle to support their families, leading to feelings of being overwhelmed. I teach survivors how to Shop wisely so that they can provide for their families without feeling stressed. This helps enhance their financial knowledge and achieve self-sufficiency. This empowerment can help them move beyond mere survival and transition to thriving in their new life.



TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Submitted by Michelle M. Tate, MS, interim director of the Family Violence Program and Military Partnerships, Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault Durant Children's Center



Michelle M. Tate

October has arrived, bringing with it Domestic Violence Awareness Month—an opportunity for us to shed light on an issue that often lurks in the shadows. As we take a moment to recognize and reflect upon domestic violence, our attention naturally gravitates toward its victims. However, we must also acknowledge the pivotal role of working with offenders in our collective journey towards lasting change and safer communities. In this article, amidst the backdrop of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, let's

explore why involving offenders in family violence programs is crucial and how it paves the way for transformative change. In a study, conducted by The Battered Women's Justice Project, research shows that coordinated community responses that include victim advocacy and close monitoring by probation appear to enhance the impact of Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP). The same study stated that BIPs have marked reductions in other types of crime besides domestic violence and re-offending. This suggests the broader benefits of these programs.

Why Including Intervention Matters

Addressing domestic violence comprehensively means involving all parties, including those responsible for perpetrating it. Here's why integrating offenders into our family violence programs holds such paramount importance:

1. **Breaking the Cycle of Abuse:** It's not uncommon for offenders to have once been victims themselves, trapped in the vicious cycle of violence. By extending support, education, and rehabilitation to them, we can break this cycle and help them transition into responsible, non-violent partners and parents. This transformation not only benefits their lives but also prevents the transmission of abusive behaviors to the next generation.

2. **Accountability and Rehabilitation:** Engaging with offenders ensures they are held accountable for their actions—a vital step towards rehabilitation and the prevention of future violence. Participation in

counseling and intervention programs equips them with the tools to comprehend the profound impact of their actions on victims and society as a whole. These programs also teach healthier methods of handling anger and stress, fostering empathy toward their victims and the community, as a whole.

3. **Protecting Victims:** It's essential to clarify that working with offenders does not excuse their actions but rather addresses the root causes of violence to protect victims. When offenders receive the necessary support and guidance to change their behavior, the risk of re-offending significantly diminishes. This, in turn, creates safer environments for victims and their families, offering them respite from perpetual fear and uncertainty.

4. **Supporting Community Healing:** Domestic violence casts a long shadow over entire communities, affecting not only individuals but also the social fabric as a whole. By actively engaging with offenders, we contribute to the healing and restoration of communities scarred by domestic violence. By reducing the prevalence of abuse, we foster healthier family dynamics and, consequently, more resilient communities.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month: A Catalyst for Change

Domestic Violence Awareness Month serves as a poignant reminder of our collective responsibility to address this issue comprehensively. It provides a platform to underscore the critical role of working with offenders within family violence programs. During this month, organizations, communities, and individuals unite to raise awareness, offer support to victims, and advocate for comprehensive policies addressing domestic violence. Recognizing the importance of including offenders in these efforts is essential for making meaningful strides toward change.

Conclusion

As we observe Domestic Violence Awareness Month, it is imperative to acknowledge that addressing domestic violence demands a multifaceted approach. We can't address this complex issue when only working with one piece of the equation. It takes a holistic approach to see long-term change. While the victims undoubtedly remain our primary concern, recognizing the pivotal role of working with offenders is a vital step in breaking the cycle of abuse. By understanding the complexity of domestic violence, holding offenders accountable, and facilitating their rehabilitation, we can create safer, healthier families and communities for everyone. Together, we can pave the way toward a future free from the scourge of domestic violence, all in the spirit of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. For more information about our offender's program, Alternatives to Violence, please contact Allen McBride at 843-673-2008, and as always, our 24/7 crisis line is always available at 843-669-4600.

AWARENESS in ACTION
Prevention in Practice



OCTOBER IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION MONTH

SPARK THE CHANGE TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE By Les Echols



Sara Barber

COLUMBIA-Domestic Violence Awareness Month is recognized each October through educational events, community gatherings and support groups. South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA) is a powerful component in preventing domestic violence and sexual assaults.

According to SCCADVASA'S website, "at the very heart of the coalition's mission lies a commitment and a tireless

endeavor to prevent sexual and intimate partner violence from occurring in the first place. We envision a safer South Carolina where all people are free from violence in their homes and communities." Sara Barber is the executive director of SCCADVASA. Prior to joining SCCADVASA, she was the executive director of a batterer intervention program that offered services in seventeen South Carolina counties and has she thirteen years of experience in this field.

Barber was working as a children's book buyer for an independent bookstore when a friend's mother called and asked if she would be interested in interviewing for a program that worked with domestic violence offenders. Barber was reluctant at first, but after learning more about the agency and its mission, she accepted the position and stayed at the agency for 13 years. She left to join the SCCADVASA in 2014. Her background in offender services provided Barber with a more comprehensive view of working with systems and policy to effect changes that promote accountability and healing.

We asked Barber about the importance of Domestic Violence

Awareness Month. "Domestic Violence Awareness Month is an opportunity to raise awareness of how common domestic violence is and that it affects somebody you know whether it be a family member, friend, colleague or even you. In 2022, almost 39,000 people experiencing domestic violence, including children, called a crisis line, sought shelter or received support services in South Carolina. Around 42 percent of South Carolina women are estimated to have experienced at least one incident of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking during their lifetime," Barber continued. "Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive, controlling behavior that can include physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, financial and other abuse. Anyone, regardless of gender, race, sexual identity or orientation, or socio-economic status, can become a victim of domestic violence. Unhealthy and abusive behaviors often begin long before abuse becomes physical. Leaving is the most dangerous time for survivors. Abusers can make it difficult for victims to escape by threatening to hurt them or a family member if they leave. When an abuser has access to a gun, they are five times more likely to kill their female victims."

According to Barber, as citizens, we all can play a vital role in the prevention of domestic violence and sexual assault. "Each of us has a role in changing the narrative about what domestic violence is, to whom it happens and how we can support those who are experiencing it and prevent it entirely. During Domestic Violence Awareness Month, think about how you can spark the change needed to build a South Carolina free from domestic violence. Whether it is volunteering, donating, learning how to respond to a friend experiencing violence, becoming involved in policy advocacy with your elected officials or identifying available resources in your area, the end of domestic violence for someone you know can start with you," concluded Barber. To learn more about SCCADVASA, visit: www.sccadvasa.org/get-involved.



Domestic Violence: DIFFICULT TRUTHS

Around 20 women and men per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. That equals up to **10 MILLION** women and men.

Source: CDC

Nearly **2,000** women were murdered by men in 2018 — most commonly with a gun

92% of women killed by men were murdered by someone they knew.

Source: VPC

GRATEFUL TO BEGIN A NEW CHAPTER IN LIFE

Articles submitted by The Naomi Project



When I was 23 years old, I married a man that was 65. I thought I was making the right decision for myself and my two-month-old son. Little did I know that I was in for the hardest years of my life. What seemed like a fairy tale at first, turned out to be a nightmare. At first, he was loving and kind. He spoiled me and I truly felt he loved me. But as time went on, he became controlling. He made the

money. I didn't so he thought that gave him the right to tell me what and how I needed to do everything. When I disobeyed, he would get very angry, and I would be punished. To him my place was to obey and do what I was told. It didn't matter that I may have an opinion or a mind of my own. I lived through this for almost 12 years. Until one day, I actually spoke up and he decided to pack his things, empty all of my accounts and disappear. He left me and our son with nothing. That's when I learned my hardest lesson which was "He who feed you can also starve you." I was scared and so I ran and started making calls. Through my efforts I found the help I needed to start again for myself and my son. In this time, I have learned so much about myself and my own strength. I will never allow another man to think that he has that much power over me. Although my freedom is still scary to me, I am grateful for this new chapter.

To the Victim of Domestic Abuse,

Your life **matters!**
You can't change the way someone treats you, but you can **change** how you react to it. Dig deep inside for the **inner strength** to break free from this abuse. **You deserve better.**



STOP IT!

You don't always need a plan, but you do need **courage** and to **trust** in yourself.

You can do this!
Break the cycle.

Speak up and get help.



BECOME A SURVIVOR

inkhappi.com

SIGNS OF BOUNDARIES IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

We are treated in a way that hurts. We are controlled, criticized, undermined, ridiculed, demeaned, humiliated, verbally, physically, and sexually assaulted. These boundary violations hurt. We hurt. It's painful. We are silenced and blamed when we challenge how we are being treated. The abuser has created an environment where it is possible to feel safe. This could look like punishment, violence, name calling, stone walling, gas lighting, justification, excuses and turning responsibilities back on us. It can be dangerous to express our hurt, our anger, and how we are treated. So we say nothing to keep the peace. We lose touch with our boundaries and feelings and turn the anger on ourselves. We might become numb to the abuse believing that it doesn't matter or that we deserve it anyway. We might stop noticing it. Minimize the impact it has. Lastly, we will begin to hate ourselves. Healing is possible. The key to recovery is awareness.



Toxic/Abusive Relationships





Elaine Weston

Elaine Weston is a seasoned program manager with over 29 years of professional experience in the human services and disabilities field. Most of her professional experience evolves around case management services with local disability board providers in the Pee Dee Region, with her beginning her journey in disabilities working as a service coordinator for Florence County Disabilities and Special Needs Board (FCDSNB). Today, she serves as executive director of the Marion-Dillon County Board of Disabilities and Special Needs (MDCBDSN). All in all, her extensive work experiences have shaped her into the professional that she is today who believes in advancing equity and access to everyone.

Weston left the FCDSNB after four years, to work with SCDSS Region IV Adoptions as a recruitment coordinator. Her previous experience as a service coordinator allowed her to work effectively with children in foster care as well as prospective adoptive parents. "Some of the children in foster care had disabilities and special needs to varying degrees," she said. "I also worked as a counselor and director of admissions for Williamsburg Technical College (WTC). Within this role, I also encountered students with disabilities and worked with the dean of Student Services to create 504 Plans. After leaving WTC, I worked briefly as the executive director for the Williamsburg County Disabilities and Special Needs Board. I was offered an opportunity to work as director of Family Support Services with Marion-Dillon County Board of Disabilities and Special Needs in July of 2001. This position allowed me to be directly involved in an array of services to include case management, early intervention, and

individual rehabilitation support services. In July of 2020, I also started supervising Day Services and my position was reclassified to director of Supports and Day Services. In April of 2021, the board selected me to serve as interim executive director and I was later promoted to executive director December of 2021. I also want to mention that I worked as a customer service manager/cashier with Wal-Mart which taught me the importance of customer satisfaction and appreciation."

"I have been working in the capacity of interim/executive director for almost two and a half years. I also continue to serve as the director of Supports and Day Services for the agency. My primary role as executive director is to ensure that the agency is providing for the health, safety and supervision of all participants served. In essence, I work for the participants by ensuring that policies and procedures are in place to ensure that the participants are being served in a respectful and dignified manner. I also have to ensure that the agency is being a good steward of any and all funding received for and behalf of the participants."

To Weston, advancing access and equity is important because all individuals have something of value that they can share with others. "Having a disability is not a deterrent for an individual to pursue their dreams and goals," she said. "In my years of working in this field, I have learned a lot by working with diverse populations. There are so many things that we as a society take for granted. Yet, I have worked with people with disabilities who show up for work, and they perform their duties with the utmost respect and diligence."

"Individuals with disabilities are very valuable in the workplace and within our communities. I feel that they are appreciative of the opportunities given and they are extremely motivated to prove that they can work just as hard or even harder than their peers. Not only do they work hard but they also contribute to our communities by spending their earned income in the community. They also make their voices heard in the community by participating in various political and civic organizations," said Weston.

According to Weston, there are several practices that employers can employ to be more inclusive of individuals with disability. "Employers should simply have an open mind about hiring someone with a disability. They can and will enhance workplace diversity. Employers should also realize that most people with disabilities just want the opportunity to

prove themselves. They are not looking for a handout and instead they just want to have a seat at the table. Also, employers should know that accommodations are not always expensive. The employer can also receive some financial incentives for hiring individuals with disabilities. In addition, there are grants and programs to assist with implementing accessible technology."

"We at Marion-Dillon will continue to try to integrate our participants in the community. It is our belief that all individuals are capable of performing some type of meaningful work activity. It is our goal to continue to get the message out about the value of hiring people with disabilities."

Weston is a native of Olanta who grew up working on a farm and a proud 1987 graduate of Lake City High School. She said, "At the age of five years old, I was tasked with picking up tobacco leaves at the barn. I believe in hard work and perseverance. My daddy used to say, 'Honest and hard work never killed anyone.'" Weston worked hard in school as well. In fact, she furthered her education at Francis Marion University with a B.A. in Psychology and M.A. in Counseling from Webster University. She is also a graduate of the Francis Marion University Nonprofit Leadership Institute and the SC Human Services Providers Association Executive Leadership Academy. She currently resides in Johnsonville with her family and is also a proud Gamecock mom.



Disability Awareness

INDIVIDUALS WITH LONG-TERM DISABILITIES ARE HUMAN WITH A DESIRE TO SERVE

By Cynthia Ford



Ashley (AKA Nugget) is giving a hug to one of her home's support staff, Miss May, as they head to the movie.

The Florence County Disabilities Foundation is a valuable resource in Florence County for individuals with life-long disabilities. The Disabilities and Special Needs Foundation was established to help support the financial needs of the Florence County Disabilities and Special Needs Board. The board provides an array of services

throughout the community to include case management, residential services, day program and employment services. Employment Services is an on-the-job training service that links employment of people with disabilities to local businesses. The foundation's work coincides directly with the 2023 theme for National Disabilities and Awareness Month (Advancing Access and Equity).

Executive Director Anne Carpenter has served with the Florence County Disabilities Foundation for the past eight years. The previous executive director started the foundation and had been with the foundation since the 90s. Carpenter is the first replacement since that time, she previously was a manager and assistant buyer for a formal wear program in Atlanta and obtained her degree in Interior Design and Fashion Merchandise. Carpenter loves nonprofit work and retail. She used her years of previous work experience in Girl Scouts and her passion to tackle the learning curve and continue to push the foundation forward. Florence County Disabilities Foundation is a subsidiary of the Florence County Disabilities and Special Needs Board, and often people would confuse the two.

The Florence County Disabilities and Special Needs Board provides the services, and the foundation is the fundraising arm for the board. Funding is acquired through hosting events, annual giving, employee giving, board giving campaigns, friends, and family. They explore every advantage possible to ensure the program thrives. Funding is also acquired through their thrift shops. The foundation had five and leased three of the buildings. The stores were consolidated into two, making a more manageable process overall for the foundation. The consolidation was a huge success for the foundation, and the store sales soared. The foundation has two large thrift stores that provide work opportunities for consumers. Typically, five or six consumers are placed in each store with a supervisor. The job duties include assessing each product received. If the product is not in good condition, it is recycled. Once the products are screened and prepared for display,



Our Second Annual Movie Day. One of the few times the groups in Lake City get to meet up with the Florence crowd for a chance to see a movie, Disney's, "Haunted Mansion."

they are placed on the floor for purchase.

The foundation has donation bins throughout the county. Multiple drivers are assigned to gather the donations. Donations are also received directly on-site. Customers frequently shop at the thrift stores and always appear satisfied with the low cost of the valued items. Carpenter always encourages the public to visit the thrift shops as it provides work experience for consumers and staff and

inexpensive products for customers. She believes it's a win-win situation. One thrift store is at 219 N. Church Street, Lake City, and the other is at 1650 East Palmetto Street, near the Florence Regional Airport.

"After COVID-19, the donations were unbelievable," stated Carpenter. We have an increase in consumers, and we're grateful for the increase in donations."

Donors receive receipts for tax purposes if needed. The foundation also receives donated furniture. Due to the high-quality clothing the foundation receives, they have also opened a boutique section. Many of the items still have tags on them. The cost for the boutique items is between \$8-\$10 due to the higher quality.

The foundation provides a range of services for consumers, and the goal is to offer additional programs for consumers to participate in. The foundation currently has 24 residents who receive different levels of care. Many consumers can attend workshops designed to help provide additional personal and professional development. The foundation plans to expand the program's reach and offer more services in the arts and music.

An annual event is scheduled for consumers to allow time for consumers and residents to join outside of work. This year, the foundation chose to have a movie day. The foundation rented out the movie theatre, and each consumer enjoyed a snack. Many of the foundation's volunteers come out. This event was the first time all consumers were together in a long time. The foundation plans to get together again this year during the Christmas holiday.

Carpenter said, "The consumers love seeing and talking to each other."

One additional fun program that the foundation provides is, 'Let's Get Physical.' The program was designed with the assistance of some college interns. An obstacle course is set up during the event, and consumers also participate in games. Afterward, consumers receive awards for participating. The foundation believes in doing anything to improve the consumers' lives. The foundation strives to ensure that consumers have normal and inclusive lives through scheduled events and consumer opportunities.

It takes a collective effort to ensure consumers' needs are met. Some consumers live independently in an apartment complex. If a higher level of care is needed, the consumers reside in a home with four to eight other consumers which has 24/7 support and supervision. Consumers enjoy their own rooms and share a community room where everyone gathers. Placements are determined by a person's needs and abilities.

A collage of images showing people working and interacting, with text: THE RIGHT TALENT, RIGHT NOW. National Disability Employment Awareness Month. #NDEAM | dol.gov/odep. OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR.

INDIVIDUALS CONT'D



Foundation Director Anne Carpenter on the left, greets the group as they head to get their popcorn and drinks for the movie.

The Foundation has volunteers to assist with program activities, and there is a continual need for volunteers. The foundation is now short-staffed, and multiple positions are also open for potential employees. A large portion of the labor pool is coming from retirees.

The foundation presents an annual award for consumers who improved the most in the thrift shop. The caseworkers submit the nominations. The winner receives a check and a

plaque for Employee of the Year. This year, the award is open to everyone in the agency. The foundation plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This act made it illegal for those receiving federal funding to discriminate against those with disabilities. Carpenter believes that people with disabilities make valued contributions to the workplace. She notes that working with the disabilities and special needs population is very rewarding.

The Disabilities and Special Needs Board actively searches for employment opportunities for consumers. Carpenter expressed concern that some companies do not consider people with disabilities regarding employment opportunities. The board has people employed at the local school district, restaurants and even operates Palmetto Secure Document Destruction. People with disabilities are always eager, dependable workers, who do a fantastic job. All consumers have supervisors who make sure they get to their work site. Carpenter believes that the trained consumers are ideal candidates for employment.

Carpenter expressed, "Some people are afraid of individuals with life-long disabilities, especially if they can't speak." Carpenter described that she has seen many people who are afraid to talk to consumers.

"They are loving people," stated Carpenter. "They want to please and do a good job, and they're proud of themselves."

The Board's Self Advocacy Group, "Our Voices Count, Too," helps to empower people with disabilities to understand their rights and advocates across the southeast. Outside of the workforce, consumers have participated in the Special Olympics and have traveled as far as Austria. Florence County has had three medalists in the Special Olympics in Austria. The foundation focuses on consumers' total health, including eating a balanced meal. Consumers also participated in planting and harvesting a garden this year.

The staff often perform dual roles as they work hard to accommodate the needs of the consumers. The caseworkers meet with the families to update them on the consumer's progress.

As the foundation continues to address the needs of the consumers, one of the goals is for a nutritionist to come in and work with everyone. Due to the technological rise, the foundation has also shifted in some of its processes. The organization also plans to continue to offer additional programs to sharpen consumer's technology skills. The foundation desires to do even more within the organization but is often limited due to manpower.

The foundation sponsors two big fundraisers each year and will host its 30th Annual BBQ Benefit on March 12, 2024. The second fundraiser, "Dinner is Done," is hosted the Thursday before Thanksgiving. The culinary arts schools in Lake City and Florence learn to prepare food in large quantities. Recipes are selected, and students prepare casseroles to be frozen. Dinners usually include cornbread dressing, sweet potatoes, squash casserole and pecan pie. Local churches also help with this event. The opportunity for comradery makes the annual event a huge success. The foundation is actively working toward two additional fundraising opportunities for consumers and will share more once details are finalized.

As the celebration of National Disabilities Employment Awareness commences, it is essential to recognize that individuals with long-term disabilities are still human and often have a desire to serve. Limitations don't totally define who someone is. This year's goal is to bring hope and to ensure citizens with disabilities continue to have equal access and opportunities to thrive.

1-in-5
Americans have a disability

56.7 million Americans have a disability
8.1 million difficulty seeing,
7.6 million difficulty hearing

respect
ability

FIGHTING STIGMAS. ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES.

Source: U.S. Census (<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/miscellaneous/cb12-134.html>)

PROMOTING HEALTHY ATTITUDES AND CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE

Articles by Les Echols



Ruth Jackson Blocker

DARLINGTON-Ruth Jackson Blocker is the executive director of the Darlington County Disabilities and Special Needs Board, where she has served since August 2005. Prior to this position, she worked with Family Connection of South Carolina and Sonoco Products Company.

Blocker's passion showed as she spoke about the importance of the allies and organizations who partner with them consistently. "In honor of National Disability Employment Month, we would like to applaud our community partners and the countless advocates who paved

the way to advance meaningful employment opportunities for citizens with disabilities," said Blocker. "The Darlington County Disabilities and Special Needs Board is proud of the contributions our agency and community have made to advance equity in employment opportunities and pay for adults with what I like to call, special abilities. Our agency has partnered with local businesses and faith-based groups to employ adults who happen to have a disability but demonstrate their value in the workforce daily by overcoming their diagnosis or diagnoses. We consistently work with individuals to secure employment with equitable pay. Our agency plans to continue to assist those we serve to learn new skills to

help to address workforce shortages. The individuals our agency supports are reliable and have an enthusiastic work ethic that promotes healthy attitudes and culture in the workplace," Blocker continued.

Blocker stressed that advancing equity is not possible without genuine buy-in and commitment to employ those with and without disabilities with equal pay and work expectations. "Darlington County is fortunate that our elected and civic leaders champion efforts to level the employment playing field for individuals with disabilities. Recent legislation is phasing out subminimum wages as a start for many with disabilities to achieving equity in the workplace. Organizations can assist the individuals that we serve by sharing announcements of employment opportunities and or contacting our agency to discuss establishing customized employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and special needs," Blocker concluded.

Employers wanting to learn more about the benefits of employing individuals with disabilities or partnering with our agency to expand employment opportunities can contact our agency by dialing 843-332-7252 or email rblocker@dcdnsb.org or visit www.dcdnsb.org.

Originally from Tallahassee, Florida, Blocker has been a South Carolinian since the 80's. She is married with three adult children. She earned a Master of Arts Degree in Counseling from Webster University and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education from the University of South Carolina. She serves on the South Carolina Human Service Providers Association and is a member of the AAIDD (American Association for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities).

THE PATHWAY TO A MORE INCLUSIVE, DIVERSE AND THRIVING SOCIETY



Mamie Legette

DILLON-Mamie Legette is the workforce system coordinator for SC Works Pee Dee, leveraging her extensive expertise in the field of workforce development, which spans over 25 years. In this capacity, she assumes a multifaceted role that encompasses numerous responsibilities aimed at enhancing the workforce system in the Pee Dee region. Legette serves as the primary point of contact for all matters related to the workforce system, providing a centralized hub for information and data. Her role extends beyond data management, as she also

plays a pivotal role in charting the strategic direction for the one-stop delivery system, ensuring that it aligns with the evolving needs and demands of the local workforce.

One of this quarter's themes is "Advancing Access and Equity: Then, Now and Next," to celebrate the passage of the Rehabilitation Act fifty years ago. Legette spoke on the importance of promoting equity for people with disabilities. "Advancing equity for people with disabilities has a profound impact, not only during National Disability Employment Awareness Month, but year-round. It extends beyond the workplace and permeates various facets of society, promoting a more inclusive and just environment for all. Advancing equity ensures that individuals with disabilities have equal access to employment opportunities. This leads to a more diverse and inclusive workforce, allowing employers to harness a broader range of skills and talents. In turn, this can result in increased productivity and innovation within organizations," Legette commented.

Legette continued, stressing how efforts such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, plays a crucial role in preventing disability-based discrimination. "These measures establish a legal structure that nurtures an atmosphere of fairness and inclusivity, clearly conveying that discrimination is unacceptable. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, administered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), prohibits discrimination against individuals with

disabilities in federal programs and by federal contractors. It has been amended in 1993, 1998 and 2015, with the 1998 amendment requiring federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. When individuals with disabilities have equitable access to employment and fair treatment, they can achieve economic independence. This not only benefits them individually but also reduces the burden on social support systems, contributing to a more sustainable economy. Other aspects include access to technology and changing perceptions of people with disabilities, Legette continued."

"In conclusion, advancing equity for individuals with disabilities is not just a legal or moral obligation; it is a pathway to a more inclusive, diverse and thriving society. National Disability Employment Awareness Month serves as a reminder of the ongoing efforts to create a world where individuals with disabilities are valued, empowered and included in all aspects of life," Legette concluded.

Legette is a native of Dillon, South Carolina. She is a member of the Pee Dee area coordinating councils (Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marion and Marlboro) and serves as the vice-chair for Darlington County Coordinating Council. She is member of McLeod-Dillon Board of Directors and the Dillon County Rural Area Leadership Initiative (RALI-DC). RALI-Dillon County was established and is led by Francis Marion University, dedicated to creating and supporting opportunities that will provide and sustain an enhanced quality of life for all citizens of Dillon County. She serves as vice-chair for Connie's Workforce Connections, a faith-based non-profit organization that exists to eliminate barriers to employment that other agencies or organizations may not be able to fund. She is an inaugural member of iMPACT Marion County, a grass-roots organization designed to address the needs of the community and facilitate social and economic transformation. She has served on the Executive Board of Dillon County United Fund for the past 15 years. She has also been named Dillon County Chamber of Commerce volunteer of the year and Outstanding One Stop Employee of the Year for the State of South Carolina. She is a Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) and has participated in and successfully completed Palmetto Leadership Dillon County and Leadership South Carolina leadership programs sponsored by Clemson University Institute of Economic and Community Development.

BUILDING A BULLY-FREE ZONE BEGINS WITH BELONGING

Submitted by Barbara Chappell, vice president of Development and External Affairs, Butler Academy



Butler Academy, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, is a free K-12 public charter school in Hartsville, SC, with a mission to create an enthusiastic culture of learning in which every student is expected and positioned to succeed academically.

HARTSVILLE—We all want our educational institutions to be safe havens, nurturing the minds and hearts of our community’s children. But let’s face it—the too-common experience of bullying, casts a dark shadow on many students’ experiences in today’s K-12 reality.

According to the Cyberbullying Research Center’s most recent statistics, 72.7 percent of middle and high school

students in South Carolina have been bullied in their lives, and some 58.4 percent reported having been bullied in the previous 30 days. One out of ten middle and high school students in our state shared that they had bullied others in the last 30 days.

But why? What’s it about?

Looked at individually, each student’s experience with bullying is different and needs to be addressed as such. Even so, there are commonalities about bullying that should inform the approach that teachers and school leaders take in addressing the problem. For example, according to the National Bullying Prevention Center, students cite appearance as the top reason for bullying.

“It’s one of the reasons school uniforms are recognized by educational leaders nationwide as an important component of healthy school environments,” said Butler Academy President Dr. Jerome Reyes. “At Butler Academy, school uniforms tie directly to the school’s mission, values and academic model. At its most basic level, school uniforms help create a sense of belonging because they can limit distractions caused by superficial socioeconomic differences.”

Butler Academy’s mission is to create an enthusiastic learning culture in which every student is expected and positioned to succeed academically. The school realizes its mission by emphasizing the social and emotional well-being of our students, families and staff.

Digging a bit deeper, Butler’s “BRAVE” school values (Belonging, Respect, Accountability, Vision and Excellence) aim to establish a character-based foundation for an organizational culture that is bound tightly to the school’s curriculum, operational practices and academic model.

One example of how the school’s values impact each classroom can be seen in Butler’s Scholar of the Week celebration. On Fridays, each class honors a scholar whose selection is based not on academic achievements but on growth they demonstrate in using the BRAVE skills they are learning. And it starts with belonging.

Butler Academy is a compassionate school. This means helping teachers and staff understand fundamental brain development and function. In addition to learning pedagogy, they learn to recognize the importance of self-care, interpret behaviors correctly and manage negative behaviors, such as bullying, with compassion and through positive behavioral interventions and supports.

Butler’s faculty, staff and family volunteers are trained to recognize and respond to behaviors from a place of empathy, and to remember that “a child whose behavior is creating issues

is not trying to cause a problem. They’re trying to solve a problem” (American Journal of Pediatrics, 1956).

By training the school’s adults to be trauma-informed and funnel all situations through a social and emotional development lens, Butler is equipping staff and volunteers with a healthy perspective for interacting with scholars.

More specifically, Butler Academy’s approach to the problems of bullying and other misbehaviors centers on building a strong system of social and emotional learning supports that include the following key components:

Safety – Establishing physical and emotional safety is paramount. Small class sizes and appropriate staffing create a positive ratio of adults to children and greatly improve the school’s capacity to de-escalate minor conflicts quickly.

Relationships – Encouraging collaboration among teachers, administrators, scholars and families fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility. It allows for a comprehensive understanding of students’ needs and ensures a coordinated response to prevent and address bullying incidents.

Trust – Building trust is crucial to help scholars feel comfortable enough to be open with their teachers. Consistency, transparency and clear communication are essential in developing trusting relationships between scholars, teachers and families.

Empowerment – Empowering students, especially older students, to actively participate in decision-making processes can promote a sense of ownership and agency. Butler Academy scholars are encouraged to express their opinions, report incidents and contribute to the school’s BRAVE culture.

Strengths - Recognizing and building upon students’ individual strengths and resilience helps them develop a positive self-image and learn to cope with adversity effectively.

Logical Consequences – Using non-punitive responses to misbehavior helps teachers set clear limits and students develop skills to fix and learn from their mistakes while maintaining their dignity.

Restoration – When incidents do occur, the Butler Academy uses well-tested restorative practices that focus on repairing harm, fostering accountability and rebuilding relationships. Restorative practices typically involve bringing those involved in an incident together in a facilitated conversation to address the impact of the bullying and identify specific actions that can restore trust and prevent future harm.

From the first day a youngster officially becomes a student, walking into that big center hall and around the corner to experiences they’d never before imagined, until the final day when they walk across the graduation stage, belonging to a supportive community may well be what matters most. At Butler it’s called their Movement of Can.

“I Can. You Can. WE CAN.”

Indeed, the grace that comes from the shared efforts of well-trained educators, highly engaged families and communities that care, is what turns difficult childhood experiences into stepping stones of growth and resilience – an education that leads to satisfying lives and to making a difference for others.



Bullying Awareness

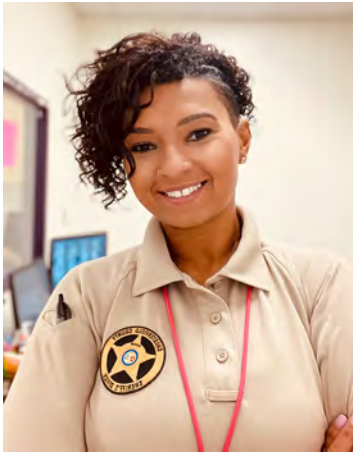
PHYSICAL BULLYING

VERBAL BULLYING

SOCIAL BULLYING

CYBER BULLYING

TACKLING BULLYING ONE STUDENT AT A TIME *By Cynthia Ford*



Deputy Brittany Robinson

Each year we consider what makes the bully decide to bully and what actions should be taken to eliminate or reduce the amount of bullying across the world. After PACER'S National Bullying prevention in 2006, many organizations picked up the torch and joined in on efforts to do the same. Even though bullying is not eliminated, there are still heroes such as Deputy Brittany Robinson, who actively provides solutions when the threat of bullying presents itself.

Strolling down the halls of Long Middle School is a hero in

human form who has a genuine desire to see students succeed. Robinson is an officer with the Chesterfield County Sheriff's Department and currently serves as the school resource officer (SRO) for Long Middle School. Robinson previously served in the medical field and decided to switch to law enforcement to have direct contact with cases instead of dealing with cases on the back end. She began her career in law enforcement in 2017. Robinson started in patrol, served a few years in investigation and eventually transitioned to SRO.

Robinson loves her role as an SRO, noting that every day is different. "You never know what to expect and the unknown makes it exciting," stated Robinson.

Robinson believes bullying can stem from children not getting the love and attention they need and exert that behavior on others. She believes incidents build up over time, however, it can spiral from zero to one hundred if not handled correctly. Robinson has observed that social media plays a big role in bullying incidents.

At long Middle School there are prevention strategies in place to prevent bullying. The guidance counselor plays a very active role in bullying prevention. Robinson is also very active in talking to students. Robinson believes it's important to be able to distinguish between what is true bullying and what is not. She notes that some believe bullying is saying one thing to a person, but it is a pattern. Robinson believes in conflict resolution strategies, encouraging children to talk about the conflict that arises to prevent escalation to levels of bullying.

Robinson created a program called Operation Busted. She began the program after her first year as an SRO at New Heights Middle School in Jefferson. The purpose was to close the gap between law enforcement officers and youth while also giving kudos to students who were caught doing good. Robinson believes students genuinely want to do good and be praised for their efforts. Robinson distributes busted tickets to teachers and when the teachers witness a student doing anything positive the student is given a BUSTED ticket. The student reports to Robinson and uses a spin wheel to select a prize. Tickets can be given out for improving grades, good behavior, uplifting others, good manners, giving positive vibes and reporting bullying. All the tickets have a place to put the student and teacher's name on them, those tickets are saved until the end of the year to be included in random drawings. During the drawings both the student and teacher that gave the ticket will win a bigger prize. Robinson believes it is important to show students how to give back and how to operate integrity. Robinson notes that students are surprised, and it brings her joy to see just how happy students become knowing their positive deeds were noticed when they thought no one was looking. Prizes can range from gift cards, Sheriff office merch, candy/snacks and fidget toys. Parents and businesses donate to the program and Robinson also purchases items to keep the program going. Updates, pictures, donor shout outs and videos are posted on the Operation Busted Facebook page.

Robinson is open to other schools and resource officers using Operation Busted as a resource for their school. Operation Busted has been adopted by one school in North Carolina and in the beginning stages at another school in Chesterfield County. Although she created this program, it is fully adoptable by any SRO who would like to incorporate it within their school. Officers would need to reach out to Robinson to begin the process.

The school district has initiatives in place to recognize National Bullying Prevention Month. Throughout the month individual classes discuss the impacts of bullying and students are encouraged to not partake in bullying behaviors. Chesterfield Ruby Middle has a bullying link on their school page for students to report any bullying incidents. Some of the schools in the district during the month of October set aside one day for bullying by wearing a certain color. Chesterfield County School District has bullying policing in place and violations of that are dealt with based on offenses.

Robinson expressed that she would love the opportunity to go around to different schools to have deeper conversation about bullying. She believes most students desire to do good. She believes it's important to break the ice with students and have a working rapport. "They'll tell you anything and will let you know who's involved in bullying," stated Robinson. She believes schools should keep the open communication and would benefit from comment boxes where students can report. The boxes can be titled, 'See something say something.'

Robinson believes the best way to handle a bullying situation is to talk to the students and to educate them on what's bullying and what's not. She believes it's important to talk to the bully to see what's wrong and if the problem is stemming from a home situation. Robinson has observed the impact of bullying, noting that, it can impact a student's self-esteem and cause the student to feel less than. Robinson recalls having lunch with a student who was sad due to not having friends. After having lunch with the student, other students began to come over, and the student established a connection with other peers.

In the new age of technology, cyberbullying has taken on another form adding to the difficulties of controlling bullying. Robinson has noticed, a higher rate of cyberbullying compared to traditional bullying. More youth have access to technology and electronic devices at an earlier age. It is important for parents to keep an eye on what their child is doing to prevent inappropriate usage.

Robinson believes teachers at her school do a great job in reducing bullying in school, and in the community. Teachers attempt to resolve conflicts by helping students figure out the true problem. Students are aware of the consequences. Before the issue arises to the level of criminal charges, there is an attempt to find alternative solutions. Students and parents have access to multiple resources to address bullying throughout the year. Students and parents should reach out to their principal, guidance counselor or SRO to properly address



Robinson coached the baseball team last school year at Long Middle School. It was her son's last season before going to high school. They ended the season with a 9-4 record.

TACKLING BULLYING CONT'D



Deputy Brittany Robinson

bullying concerns.

Parents should be aware of the signs that bullying is happening with their child. Robinson notes if an outgoing student is quiet and not involved in activities, which could be an indicator that something is going on. She also believes if parents notice their child is depressed, and showing signs of anxiety they should talk with their child to see what is going on. Robinson believes it is important to write those things down and take at least thirty minutes out of their day to have a

conversation with their children. “Even though it may be challenging with life’s schedules, it will make a difference,” stated Robinson.

Robinson believes bullying was seen as a way of making children tough, but the issue has caused many to lose their lives. She notes that the mindset of children is different, and the smallest thing can make it seem as if it’s the end of the world. Robinson has noticed that some students have been able to hide by masks and sometimes with hoodies, but it’s essential to be aware if there are other changes associated with these activities.

Robinson believes if a parent has a child who is a bully, they should talk to their child to find out why. Parents should consider the

options and see if their child was also bullied or if there are some concerns in the home that is triggering the behaviors. Parents can also reach out to outside sources such as counseling and mentoring programs as some students may open up more to others. Robinson believes parental involvement, along with love and attention, is key. “That would fix a lot of issues,” stated Robinson.

She often reminds students to say something if they see something. Because she has established a close rapport with students, they are not timid about talking to her. She maintains a professional relationship with students while participating with fun moments such as doing a small TikTok for the school page. She has caught their attention and gained their respect. Robinson believes it is important to have compassion as an SRO and to not sit in the office, but to be out amongst the students. Robinson’s interaction with students and parents has allowed her to make a lasting imprint.

Robinson promotes kindness, acceptance and inclusion at Long Middle School. Her consistent work helps to break the grip of bullying throughout her school. She is grateful that the school district has allowed her to implement Operation Busted as a resource for students. With the support of the district principal and other school staff, Operation Busted has flourished. When students focus on doing great things, the desire to hurt others is diminished. Everyone has a role to reduce and eliminate bullying. Often, hurt people hurt others. As Robinson suggests, it is important to get to the root of the issue. If the root of the issue is not addressed, the problem will continue to grow. With vigilance and consistent conversation with students, we will continue to tackle bullying, one student at a time.

4 Types of BULLYING



Hitting, kicking, slapping, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, blocking

Stealing or destroying someone’s possessions

Making mean or rude hand gestures

Touching in unwanted and inappropriate ways

Name calling

Insults

Teasing

Intimidation

Homophobic or racist remarks

Inappropriate sexual comments

Taunting

Threatening to cause harm

Lying and spreading rumors

Leaving someone out on purpose

Telling others not to be friends with someone

Embarrassing someone in public

Damaging someone’s social reputation or relationships

Posting/sending hurtful texts emails or posts, images or videos

Making online threats

Imitating others online or using their log-in

Deliberately excluding others online

Spreading nasty gossip or rumors online

CONFLICT THE BIGGEST CAUSE OF BULLYING *By Cynthia Ford*



Sharon Davis

MULLINS-Bullying has plagued our communities for many years. It has taken on several forms through the years and continues to leave long-term effects. Bullying behaviors are often observed in school settings. Teachers, administrators and counselors often serve as mediators diffusing conflict and bullying behaviors. Counselor Sharon Davis, at McCormick Elementary School in Mullins, SC, has observed a range of behaviors in students over the years.

Davis loves the ability to make a positive difference in the lives of children. She makes an intentional effort to work with students in their classroom. This level of rapport allows Davis to be aware of student names, their grades and how they are engaging in social and emotional settings. Davis expressed those bullying behaviors that happen in halls and classes, and believes it is important to hear the concerns of students. "The biggest cause of bullying is conflict," Davis said. Some students don't handle emotions well and the conflict is taken to another level. Often, friends get together against another student which leads to tension in class. Students are always told to report problems to staff as they arise. Principal Dr. Shawn Perry and Assistant Principal Shauna Stanton also have a very visible presence throughout the school day.

The tactic of bullying has shifted to a different level. Davis shared how television and digital videos broadened the world's horizons and there is less bullying about fashion. "Children have different perceptions because horizons are broadened but it doesn't mean there is no conflict," stated Davis.

McCormick Elementary serves students in third thru fifth grade and these delicate years are sensitive periods of transition. Types of bullying will vary depending on the level of the student. Elementary school is not too soon to address bullying. Many students have lost their lives because of being bullied. Cyberbullying can cause a great deal of concern as there is a capacity for an extended reach to audiences around the world. She is intentional in her efforts to tackle bullying. She offers classroom guidance in small groups as part of the curriculum for prevention. She is also mindful to implement social and emotional learning strategies as encouraged by the school district. For 10-20 minutes each day, students participate in some sort of social and emotional engagement.

The district offers several prevention strategies to prevent bullying. The district has a threat assessment manual in place that outlines the district's plan for addressing bullying. Parents, teachers and children can make a direct report of bullying on the school district's website. Each school has a selected team to include counselors, principals and teachers who review and determine the level of threat, and the administration becomes involved in determining the consequences. Parents of the involved students meet, and are notified of the team's decision.

Marion County School District is a No Tolerance Bullying district. The implantation of classroom guidance offers a huge foundation piece in support of the district's goal. The schools participate in Red Ribbon Week that includes drug awareness and bullying prevention. The school also facilitated bully free relays, poster contests, wore anti-bullying bracelets and students have participated in essay contests for bullying prevention. The student's work is highlighted and posted throughout the school during that week.

Students are more open to diversity today. Davis believes technology has helped to give understanding from a diverse point of view. McCormick will recognize National Bullying Prevention Month. There will be resources available, bullying awareness included in lesson plans and unity in wearing the same color. The school loves bringing in presenters and distributing relevant literature to children. They are open to new ideas each year to coincide with the need.

Davis believes the best way to handle bullying is through prevention. McCormick promotes the motto of treating everyone with respect. The school encourages a team concept for the students. Posters are used throughout the school to remind students that if they want to win, they must be a team. All preventive actions of the school coincide with the district's push for a bully free campus.

Research has proven, bullying can have a drastic effect on student's education. Students who are choosing to bully others could lose quality education time due to being distracted. The student loses focus due to targeting others to make them feel bad. Misbehavior also ultimately leads to bad grades. Victims of bullying can also suffer from poor grades and emotional challenges.

Parents are briefed on the topic of bullying each year. Bullying is addressed in the school handbook and resources are always available on the school website. The district provides brochures as another written reference for parents. The protocol teams also act as a preventive measure and offer a quick response.

Davis believes parents should remain vigilant and talk with their children about their day. Parents should assist youth in the appropriate way to address concerns. She notes it is very important to stay up-to-date with what is going on. She encourages parents to observe if their child has a change in eating habits, their demeanor, if they are withdrawn or less excited about attending school. Davis noticed that some students who are victims of bullying also complain of health problems such as headaches or stomach aches. The overall resistance to attending school should be a red flag to parents. "The best measure is talk with them and let them know you are concerned," stated Davis. Davis believes parents should maintain a rapport with teachers and be present as much as possible for parent conferences.

Davis believes if a parent has a child who bullies others, they should talk with the child right away. She notes that the parent should follow up with school contacts to make sure there's a resolution. Many of the schools have on-site mental health counselors in addition to other resources. Parents should utilize available resources to help their child.

Preventive measures such as the structured tactics at McCormick Elementary are great ways to tackle the fight against bullying. It is the small consistent actions that often make the biggest difference. With over thirty years of educational and personal experience, Davis is well equipped to address student concerns, and she remains open to being a lifelong learner. Davis is not only passionate about learning, she is more passionate about seeing others excel. Bullying cannot thrive where positivity thrives. McCormick Elementary takes consistent measures to create thriving atmospheres for their students.

Davis has served as a school counselor for over thirty years. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science and an Education Specialist degree in counseling which is a degree beyond a master's degree. Davis's entire educational tenure has been served with the Marion County School District. Davis has established a great rapport with the students. Students look forward to seeing her throughout the day and enjoy stopping by her office, even if it's just to say hello.



Pictured left to right: Shauna Stanton, assistant principal, Sharon Davis, school counselor and Dr. Shawn Perry, principal.

THE EFFECTS OF BULLYING IN 2023

Submitted by Rev. Sandra Carter



Rev. Sandra Carter

Bullying has become a major crisis within our society that does not discriminate along racial, economic, educational nor political party lines. Bullying affects all of us either directly or indirectly. It affects homes, schools and our communities. Bullying has become so pronounced that the month of October has been designated to bring national awareness to this growing issue. This is inclusive of the second Wednesday in October being observed as

National Stop Bullying Day. This is an opportunity for schools and parents to spend time learning about bullying and how they can become involved in prevention. During the month of October, students and communities all over the world wear BLUE in solidarity against bullying.

In an article written by Bector Loveless, he states that 90 percent of students in grades four - eight report having been harassed or bullied and 28 percent in grades six - 12. If we are to dismantle or decrease the production of bullies, it must be done at the elementary level. This is the age group that is exploring their options of behaviors and personalities.

Bullying is defined as, "seeking to harm, intimidate or coerce someone perceived as vulnerable. Bullies pick out those whom they consider smaller in stature or someone whom they perceive to be timid. That's why it is important that those targeted maintain and exhibit confidence. Bullies have been known to insult their victims about their weight, skin color, ethnicity, religion, speech (particularly if there is an impediment), family and sexual orientation. However, if the victim maintains their composure, this will at times, deflate the act of bullying. It is the fear of the victims that seemingly empowers the bully to continue their aggression.

No one is born a bully. It is a learned behavior that is formed by various circumstances such as: the bully being a victim of bullying; anger, frustration about themselves; their own low self-esteem; unstable homelife; lack of attention or jealousy of their victims, just to name a few.

When a child is being bullied within the home, he/she feels helpless, defenseless and worst of all embarrassed. Children are belittled by those who are supposed to love and care for them. They are afraid to stand up to adults or older siblings and too ashamed to tell anyone about the situation. In the home, they may experience physical abuse, be denied access to nourishment and become targets for name calling which chips away at their self-esteem.

When a child is being bullied at school, the parents/guardians must come to the child's aid and sometimes that is not easy. The



school's administrators must be clear as to what was said and what was done among the students in order to proclaim a clear and concise judgment. Also, to ensure that what was reported, actually occurred. There are times while going through the process of hearing school officials constantly pacify parents with, "we're handling it," or "we're looking into it," parents feel helpless as they deal with their child's daily fear of returning to school as well as watching their child become more withdrawn. It also becomes tedious for parents to be productive at work because they are worrying about their child's safety at school. Many have taken actions to remove the child from school and the bully, only to find that bullies can be found almost everywhere.

As a former school employee and a former member of FSD1, the effects of bullying within the school have become a significant issue. It is the desire of school staff that all students return home safely without incident. However, educators find themselves repeatedly having to reprimand the person accused of bullying. This takes away from the educational process and adds stress on the staff.

In the community, bullies have empowered themselves to formulate into gangs. They pride themselves as territorial and reject anyone who attempts to take over their perspective areas. It has caused gun wars within neighborhoods with innocent people being wounded or killed. Cyberbullying is the act of being intimidated or coerced via social media. With so many electronics in hand, it becomes less complicated for the bully to make his/her move. For example, victims fall prey to sending or posting explicit pictures of themselves, sexting, which allows the bully the opportunity to threaten and expose to the victim's family and their inner circle. This monstrous act can bring about great devastation. For some, the only means of refuge is death. In a report by the National Library of Medicine, a study of ninety-four suicidal youth reported bullying being a factor in six of the deaths.

The topic of bullying must remain a vital conversation within the home, school and community. Proactive solutions should be applied to help remedy these actions. We must no longer kid ourselves that bullying is just child's play and realize that bullying can result in life-long detrimental consequences.



— October is —
National Bullying Prevention Month

ADVOCATING FOR THOSE VICTIMIZED BY BULLYING By Jennifer Robinson



Isaac Wilson

involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.” What is often minimized is the aggression of the bully and the source of the aggression. The other overlooked consequence is the pain and embarrassment the bullied child may feel and how it will affect social development. There are different types of bullying: cyberbullying, social bullying, verbal bullying and physical bullying.

South Carolina schools reported 1,319 instances of intimidation, 1,375 instances of bullying and 228 instances of cyberbullying during the 2019-20 academic year, according to a report from the State Department of Education. The report, obtained by News13, through a Freedom of Information request, outlines the number of bullying instances in about 1,250 South Carolina schools. Of the schools listed, a little less than half reported no bullying incidents that year (wbw.com).

Isaac Wilson and his team of volunteers with the Isaac Wilson Project (IWP) ensures that the voices of children and parents victimized by bullying are heard. The Isaac Wilson Project provides no cost advocacy for students and their families who have been bullied throughout the Southeastern United States. In addition to advocacy, the organization provides education to schools, churches, businesses and organizations about bullying and signs to look for if a child is being bullied.

Wilson, a 2011 graduate of Morris College, says his passion for

educating people about bullying came from an acquaintance who shared about a child who was being bullied and no one followed up about the welfare of the victim. He said he wondered, “what can be done about this?” The organization has assisted parents and their children in North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida and Georgia.

Wilson says there is a process to receive services from the organization. When a student shares with their teachers they have been bullied, the hope is they will share with the parents. Parents must then return to the teacher to whom the bullying was first reported. If there is no resolution between parent and teacher, then the parent should report the incident to the principal. If the principal doesn’t respond or the parent does not receive an adequate solution, then the parent is encouraged to report the issue to the school board. Wilson said if the school board does not respond accordingly, then legal advice is sought. The hope is the family will not have to take legal action, but in some cases, it is necessary.

He also stated it is important to inform people about the underlying issues those who bully may have. Though the behavior should not be excused, it should be acknowledged and possibly problems should be identified. Bullies often have little to no social skills. Their home lives are sometimes filled with neglect or abuse and, he shared that there are also signs those who are being bullied show. Some scratch a lot because they are nervous and upset about being bullied. Others experience hunger because bullies either steal their lunch money or take their meals. Unfortunately, teachers are not often informed about bullying so some experience bullying for many years. The IWP partners with organizations such as Pee Dee Mental Health to ensure parents are informed about bullying and its effects on students. Wilson said he also partnered with Florence District 3.

Bullying is an issue that should be addressed more from the time a child enters school until they graduate, and sometime beyond. Parents should be made aware of even potential bullying toward their children because in recent years, many children have died by suicide because the pressures of bullying were overwhelming. The Isaac Wilson Project not only makes communities aware of the problem but provides solutions: education and advocacy.

TEACHING YOUR KIDS TO COPE Submitted by Toni-Marie Wilson, LISW-CP



Toni-Marie Wilson

The CDC reports that anxiety in children is on the rise. From 2016-2019, 9.4 percent of children aged three to 17 years received an anxiety diagnosis. This percentage shows an increase when compared to reports from previous years of 5.5 percent in 2007 and 6.4 percent in 2011–2012 for children aged six to 17 years.

The last several years have been tremendously stressful and traumatic for everyone, and this is especially true for families with school-aged

children. In addition to managing common stressors like balancing work with family and paying the bills, parents have faced the extraordinary challenge of navigating the COVID-19 global pandemic, virtual learning, increased economic stress, growing violence in schools and foreign conflict. On top of these stressors, children experience additional trauma from bullying - one out of every five students report being bullied.

Parents are overwhelmed, and it is no surprise that their fears and anxieties are felt by their children too. Routines have been disrupted, plans and celebrations were postponed, and uncertainty has become the norm for many. But by regularly practicing a few positive coping

strategies, parents can foster resilience and promote self-regulation to combat anxiety at home and in school. Additionally, in honor of National Bullying Month, these coping techniques can help with bullying prevention.

Set your children up for success by adopting these coping strategies for managing stress and reducing anxiety:

Talk to Your Kids - While this might seem like an obvious solution for staying involved with your children, some parents find it hard to maintain an open dialogue for a number of reasons. Whether your children become guarded about their troubles, such as struggles with academics or dealing with teasing or bullying, they feel uncomfortable talking about their feelings or they lack the language or insight into their emotions to talk openly, you can help by continuing to engage your children and reassure them that you are available to talk. Most importantly, use active listening skills by giving them all your attention, avoiding interruptions and repeating back what you understand to show that you are listening and care about what is being said. You can use this time to process with your children and problem solve together.

Making a habit of talking to your children and staying involved will build trust and encourage them to be open and honest with you when they are struggling with critical issues rather than keeping secrets or trying to cope on their own.

Provide Predictability with Structure - Uncertainty can be a significant source of stress for both adults and children. Children lack

TEACHING YOUR KIDS CONT'D

the control that adults have, so improving predictability can help reduce their stress. Create regular routines to help foster self-regulation and social development in your kids. Be consistent with rules, set and hold boundaries, and strive to keep unchanging bed schedules and mealtimes.

Modeling - Another way parents foster resilience and healthy coping is by modeling those behaviors for their children. It is not simply enough to talk the talk, you must show children through your own behaviors how to deal with disappointment, anxiety and fear. If you struggle to hold it together when things go wrong, you can't expect your children to stay calm and collected. By talking openly about your anxieties and other emotions, you normalize healthy discussion around feelings and show children that it is safe to open up. You can follow this up by sharing and showing how you manage stress by going for a walk (exercise), talking to a friend or your parents or taking a break and eating a healthy snack with your child.

Eliminating Unhealthy Stressors - Identify and limit unhealthy behaviors and habits that may contribute to increased anxiety and stress for your kids, such as consuming caffeine before bed, inactivity or spending too much time on their phone, especially on social media.

If your children complain about teasing or bullying at school, encourage them to resolve it themselves in a positive manner, but if it continues, don't be afraid to schedule a meeting to address it with the school.

By teaching these stress-management strategies, you can foster confidence and instill invaluable skills that can serve your children for life. For additional resources, check out therapistaid.com for more information, and if you find that your children continue to struggle with anxiety or other mental health challenges and need help, reach out to the behavioral health professionals at HopeHealth.

APPRECIATING DIVERSITY REDUCES BULLYING By Susan Carter



Kate Lawhon

Bullying Prevention Month takes place every October and aims to raise awareness and promote strategies for preventing bullying. This campaign supports efforts to create safe and inclusive environments for everyone, particularly in schools and online spaces.

Kate Lawhon is a school counselor and dean of culture at Virtus Academy, a free, K-12 Public Charter School serving Florence and Darlington counties. She describes the efforts her school is making to reduce bullying. "As part of a year-long campaign to educate students and prevent bullying, the school will be inviting stakeholders to be part of a committee to ensure Virtus Academy is a welcoming environment for all. Classroom lessons, 'read aloud,' and student and teacher check-ins are also used. Virtus Academy is a leader in 'Me school,' which also teaches the importance of diversity."

Lawhon believes that the most effective way to reduce bullying is by creating a culture that welcomes all and model's respect. "The expectation should always be for children to be supported and cared for. If children see that adults are caring and kind, they are more likely

to follow that modeled behavior. Also, children will feel more comfortable reporting bullying to the adults around them." Providing education and opportunities early in life is another way bullying can be prevented. "Children who have a healthy self-worth and feel supported are less likely to have negative interactions with peers."

Virtus Academy teaches behaviors to reduce bullying. Virtus Academy is a leader in, 'Me school.' This school-wide curriculum offers a wonderful, rich education for students and adults on how to be leaders within the classroom, school and community. Lawhon believes the seven habits taught in this curriculum directly correlate with reducing bullying behaviors. For example, Habit 1: Be proactive teaches children that they are in control of their actions. Habit 4: Think Win-Win teaches students that everyone can win and sometimes there needs to be a third alternative. Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood, teaches students that it's good to learn from others. Integrating all the habits at home will not only reinforce a

healthy, happy learning environment at school and home, but lay the foundation of building great leaders.

Parents and guardians can start bullying prevention at home. Lawhon emphasizes that, "teaching children the value and importance of diversity is a great place to start! Children should understand that everyone is different, and this is a wonderful thing!" She adds that, "teaching and modeling the golden rule is another great habit to instill in your child. While this is a simple concept, it's a very important one!" Teaching children how to include others is also an important part of prevention. "Talk to your children about keeping an eye out for students who may need someone to sit with them at lunch or play with them at recess." Inclusion goes a long way in building relationships as well as prevention. Including others can also look like not standing by while a peer is being bullied. Most important is for parents to have open conversations with their child about what is going on in their lives. Having this kind of relationship can be beneficial for both of you!



COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AGAINST CRIME By Jennifer Robinson



Lieutenant Luke Hall

unfortunate uptick in drug abuse and break ins and when neighborhood members are kept informed, they are aware of what to look for to report any suspicious activity. “Strong relationships of mutual trust between police agencies and the communities they serve are critical to maintaining public safety and effective policing. Police officials rely on the cooperation of community members to provide information about crime in their neighborhoods, and to work with the police to devise solutions to crime and disorder problems. Similarly, community members’ willingness to trust the police depends on whether they believe that police actions reflect community values and incorporate the principles of procedural justice and legitimacy,” (justice.gov). Hall said, “Also, it’s a good idea for people concerned about crime, to get involved in a local crime watch or start one. Juveniles should also look for opportunities to join civic or mentorship organizations.”

The mantra of the Sumter County Sheriff’s Office is, “Putting Citizens First,” and they work very closely with community members to ensure their safety. To increase crime prevention, Hall says, the Sheriff’s Office has outreach programs to stay connected with partners. The programs include workshops where

assessments and surveys are completed to measure activity in communities. The assessments show what specialized groups are needed in what areas. Task forces share the information with community members to increase participation efforts. Hall said, “Jurisdiction does not matter.” They want to be able to reach all people in all areas. “The Sumter County Sheriff’s Office Citizens Community Relations Advisory Board was established 2017 and held its first meeting in August of that year. The established board makes an ongoing effort to maintain a positive and interactive rapport with the citizens and to increase public confidence that all people in Sumter County have a voice regarding law enforcement and public safety matters in the community,” (sumtersheriff.org).

Hall shared some helpful tips to keep everyone safe.

- Try not to go out at night alone. If you must go out alone, please be aware of your surroundings.
- Please pay attention to who you are around. Criminals look for people who are not paying attention.
- Make eye contact with people you encounter. Criminals are less likely to strike when they know they are spotted.
- Parents should monitor all electronic activity with their children. Predators use the internet to engage children and lure them.
- Know who children are communicating with online. This reduces the chances of inappropriate behaviors.
- Family members should watch senior/elderly family members online activity. Predators contact them to steal financial information.
- AI (artificial intelligence) software in on the rise. Do not share personal or financial information online or over the phone.
- Cut down on screen time. Hackers are always online. Screen time cuts down on the risk of being hacked.

The partnerships between law enforcement and communities must remain strong to deter criminal activity and keep everyone safe.

DCSD’S KIM NELSON NAMED S.C. LAW ENFORCEMENT VICTIM ADVOCATE

Submitted Christopher McKagen, Communications Manager



Kim Nelson

DARLINGTON—Darlington County School District’s (DCSD) Kim Nelson, who serves as the district’s coordinator of Safety and Emergency Management, earned the prestigious honor of being named the 2023 South Carolina Law Enforcement Victim Advocate of the Year.

Nelson, who is also a captain with the Darlington Police Department (DPD), received the recognition and award Friday at a ceremony in Myrtle Beach, hosted by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Victim Advocate Association (SCLEVA).

“Capt. Nelson is the epitome of a servant leader,” said Dr. Tim Newman, DCSD superintendent. “She volunteers in many roles throughout the district and community. We are blessed to have her on our team and congratulate her on this prestigious award.”

“It was truly an honor to receive this award,” Nelson said. “I have the pleasure of working with so many dedicated and compassionate individuals from across the state who have pledged themselves to helping victims of crime. I agree with the quote from our vice president of the organization, Frank Fuller, when he stated that, ‘Victim Advocates are shining lights

in a dark and cruel world.’ I thank the committee and our president, Tressa Dixon, who models what it looks like to be professional and empathetic to all those who need light in their darkest hour.”

SCLEVA membership includes Law Enforcement Crime Victim Advocates, Law Enforcement Officers, Forensic Interviewers, Investigators and Chiefs from across the state. SCLEVA aims to empower its members to “protect the fundamental rights and dignity of crime victims,” according to the organization’s website, as well as to instill best practices and leadership in those efforts.

Law Enforcement Victim Advocates provide direct services to crime victims including but not limited to sexual assault, criminal domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, human trafficking and survivors of homicide, fraud and crimes of technology. These victim advocates work tirelessly to protect the wellbeing and legal interests of the victim.

With more than two decades of law enforcement experience, Nelson began working in DCSD in 2016. She returned a couple of years later to active service with the DPD. In 2019, she joined DCSD again in her current position while remaining an active law enforcement officer with DPD.



A LEGACY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT Articles by Jennifer Robinson



Kendrick Spears

Kendrick Spears reflected on the decorated career of the man who was his hero and began to think about how he would honor him. Spears' father, Corporal Thomas Spears, died in the line of duty as a Florence County deputy sheriff in 1992. Spears said he watched his father protect the community from crime and served the people by showing care and concern about families in the community. He elected to begin his law enforcement journey with the Florence Police Department in SC. The Florence

Police Department is a State Accredited Law Enforcement agency, with a focus on community-oriented policing. The department has implemented many effective programs in order to accommodate the continued expansion of the city limits. The police department operates under an agency-wide community policing concept, meeting regularly with the 40 neighborhood and business crime watch associations. The Police Department is comprised of four divisions: Administrative Services, Community Relations, Patrol Services and Support Services (cityofflorence.com).

Throughout Spears' career, he has served in various areas in the police department including working to prevent gang and gun violence, as supervisor of the Special Investigations Unit. Spears stated, "One of the main problems of law enforcement in the Pee Dee and throughout the county is controlling gun violence. A lot of the violence involves juveniles who are affiliated with gangs. In my opinion, they make bad decisions without thinking about what the consequences would be for their actions. I believe heavy drug use and sales are major factors in decision making." His work to take actions to keep the community safe from violence led Spears to the promotion as Lieutenant with the Florence Police Department in 2020. As head of the Special Investigations Unit, he is responsible for overseeing the Florence County Violent Crime Task

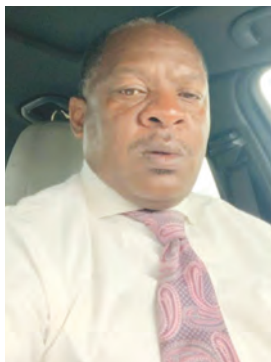
Force for the Police Department. Due to the increase of violent crimes in the City and County of Florence, Sheriff TJ Joye and Chief Allen Heidler established the Florence County Violent Crime Task Force. The task force consists of deputies from the Sheriff's Office and Officers from the Florence Police Department. Many guns, drugs and violent offenders have been removed from the streets by the task force which has lowered criminal activity. This Task Force normally conducts investigations and patrol the high crime areas within the City of Florence and Florence County.

Important ways the community can help combat crime and bridge the gap with law enforcement. Spears said, "We need eyes of the community to put us in the right direction at times to help us solve crimes. We have ways of protecting identities now which has led to more people coming forward to help solve cases." Recently there has been an increase in car break ins. Spears shared these tips.

1. Don't leave items of value in your vehicle in plain view. Please remove weapons from vehicles. Many vehicles are being broken into looking for weapons.
2. If you have weapons, please keep a record of serial numbers for your weapon in case they are stolen.
3. Never leave your vehicle running unattended for any reason.
4. Always check your surroundings wherever you may be, especially if you are alone.
5. Be aware of telephone scammers asking for money for different causes as well as asking you to load money on Green Dot cards and other gift cards for various reasons.
6. Be aware of social media hackers and never befriend people who you don't know or click on suspicious links from social media or other websites. This could lead to your personal information getting hacked.

These tips are just a small part of how Spears cares for Florence County. The family legacy of law enforcement taught him the importance of keeping communities together and informed.

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY



Captain Michael Hamlin

DARLINGTON- October is National Crime Prevention month—a time when the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) asks us to renew or join the commitment to help, "Take A Bite Out Of Crime®." In 1984, October was designated as Crime Prevention Month through a Presidential Proclamation and since then, NCPC has been working with local law enforcement, government agencies, civic groups, schools and 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 (nnw.org). When law enforcement contributes safety measures to their community, it creates an engaging environment where community members are active in assisting in crime prevention. Although Crime Prevention Month is recognized annually in October, law enforcement agencies across the country raise awareness about safety daily, to ensure community protection. Patrol Commander, Captain Michael Hamlin from the Darlington County Sheriff's Office knows the pulse of Darlington County and urges community relationships with law enforcement. The partnership is important to decreasing crime and keeping communities safe. The Sheriff's Department knows what areas in Darlington County are hot spots for crime. Those areas are where they communicate most with the residents to combat criminal activity. The misconception about law enforcement is they only care about crimes as they are committed or post crime activity. "The Darlington County

Sheriff's Office is not just about law enforcement. They are part of the community and are involved in various initiatives to make Darlington County a safer place for everyone. These initiatives include community outreach programs, crime prevention strategies and partnerships with local businesses and organizations" (darlingtoncountyjail.org). Partnerships are not just for specific areas, but all areas. Hamlin says that officers make themselves very visible. This is to deter potential crime and let community members know they are safe.

Crime watch is an effective program in Darlington County. The Sheriff's Office Community Liaison is Joyce Everette. Hamlin says she keeps the Sheriff's Office engaged with information about events in the areas. They have community activities, town hall meetings and open forums. Darlington County also has two task forces, homicide and U.S. Marshall whose main operative is to bring justice for the citizens of the county, said Hamlin. Crimes such as gang activity and drugs are identified through calls from residents because they know what to look for due to community engagement. Some neighborhoods have very active crime watch groups. They mobilize by patrolling, sharing information, and offer security recommendations for added home protection. The partnerships with neighborhoods, businesses, non-profits and other groups proves a united front against crime. Communities depend on law enforcement for protection, but members have the power to protect their own neighborhoods.

Hamlin recommends communities to always be watchful. Residents should know their neighborhoods, be aware of suspicious things or people. No one should be afraid to call law enforcement. If you see something, say something. Neighbors should communicate with each other and always share information with law enforcement. It takes a team effort. Law enforcement and Darlington County are perfect partners.

HONOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS IN NOVEMBER

Submitted by Corey Remle, community health worker, HopeHealth



Corey Remle

November is National Family Caregivers Month – a time to honor the nearly 38 million Americans who provide unpaid care to older adults or those with disabilities. Many family caregivers provide day-to-day care for a loved one who needs assistance with bathing, getting in and out of a chair or eating. Other regular caregiving tasks include cooking, providing transportation to medical

appointments, taking care of household finances and managing their loved one’s medications. A recent report by the AARP estimated the economic value of this unpaid caregiving in the US to be \$600 billion!

Caregiving is often an expression of love and respect for a loved one’s wishes to continue living in their home. Caregiving can be a rewarding experience; however, it also comes with multiple challenges. Over 60 percent of all family caregivers are employed in the workforce while caring for a loved one. As the care demands increase or change, some choose to stop school, reduce their work hours or even leave a job. Often, employed caregivers report higher levels of job-related stress and concerns about how bosses and co-workers evaluate their job performance. For many, caregiving can require as much time as an additional job. Employers can assist by creating paid time off policies for family caregivers and using flexible work arrangements when possible, helping employees who are trying to balance work and caregiving.

Caregiving responsibilities can also increase financial strain for family members. Reducing work hours or leaving a job means losing income and fewer career opportunities. Caregivers may have difficulty finding affordable paid help for their loved ones. In effect, caregivers become employers themselves - hiring, coordinating schedules, training and monitoring the quality of care provided by their new employees. Hiring can also lead to rehiring, as the direct care workforce has faced an especially high turnover rate since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the mentally and emotionally difficult responsibilities of caregiving can lead to health-related strains for caregivers themselves. Managing their loved one’s finances, coordinating their health appointments and medications and providing help with getting out of bed, eating, showering, and/or using the restroom can lead the caregiver to feel tired, stressed and overwhelmed. A caregiver may not eat or sleep well or take time to relax and spend time with friends. Caregivers should remember to get support; recognize they have limitations too

and watch for signs of caregiver burnout if the situation becomes stressful. If family members take on too much and burn out physically or emotionally, they will not be able to help their loved ones or themselves.

While all groups of people receive care, the diverse life experiences and health needs of certain underserved populations have an impact on the levels of family caregiving needed. African American and Latino families are more likely to have a loved one living in their home to receive care. Cultural and familial expectations may lead to sharing the home, especially if caregiving needs include assistance with activities of daily living. African American caregivers are more likely than other racial or ethnic family caregivers to provide care without help from others. Latino caregivers tend to be younger and may have a harder time receiving guidance on providing care as tasks become more difficult. Health care providers and experts should remember that family caregivers in minority communities may face complex challenges that are unique. For example, African American and Latino communities experience higher rates of heart disease, diabetes and dementia at younger ages than in other groups. These risks must be factored in by those giving care and those helping caregivers.

If you are a family caregiver, you don’t have to do it alone! There are many organizations that can connect caregivers with support groups and emotional or social resources. These groups help caregivers manage their own physical, mental and emotional health during the challenging times that can accompany family caregiving.

Remember, taking care of yourself will help you give your best and provide the care your loved one needs.

National and Regional Resources for Caregivers:

- The AARP website has a large section for caregivers: aarp.org/caregiving.
- The Alzheimer’s Association has a Helpline available 24 hours a day for caregivers of people with Alzheimer’s Disease or Related Dementias: 800-272-3900.
- Several online educational presentations about Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementia caregiving are available at alz.org/SC.
- The Family Caregiver Alliance provides a database of Best Practice Recommendations at bpc.caregiver.org.

Local Resources for Caregivers:

- Vantage Point, the Pee Dee Area Agency on Aging, provides meal delivery services, a Consumer Choice program for safety-related minor home repairs, insurance counseling and caregiver respite vouchers to eligible seniors: 843-383-8632.
- The Santee-Lynches Area Agency on Aging serves Sumter, Clarendon, Lee and Kershaw Counties with similar services: 803-774-1980.



SECURING THE COMMUNITY

By Jennifer Robinson



Erinn Rowe

It is important to distinguish between food insecurity and hunger to understand the disparities many people in our communities' face. With what our nation is facing now as the price of food increases, many families are facing the choice between paying necessary bills or purchasing food. Food insecurity is the condition of not having access to sufficient food, or food of an adequate quality. Having to make decisions between food and necessities has become

normal in some families. Some causes of food insecurity are unstable employment, unexpected expenses such as emergency room visits, or accidents. Hunger is a feeling of discomfort or weakness caused by lack of food and a strong desire to eat. Many children feel hunger because parents and caregivers are not able to provide necessary meals. One in ten of our neighbors, including over 100,000 children, face hunger on a daily basis (harvesthope.org). Because food may not be available, it can lead to health risks and developmental issues in children. Harvest Hope Food Bank is an organization who has taken the charge to address food disparities in SC.

Harvest Hope is a local food bank that has worked to provide food to SC since 1981. "We rescue nutritious food from stores throughout the state and distribute it to food pantries, shelters and soup kitchens. We operate programs that provide food for our most vulnerable citizens – children, seniors and rural residents who don't have access to grocery stores."

Erinn Rowe, CEO of Harvest Hope said, "We must work together if ending hunger is the end goal. There are root cause issues that increase barriers to access." Rowe also said they build relationships with over 400 partner agencies across SC and provide them with food to distribute in rural areas.

Bread.org reports in South Carolina, between 2019-2021:

- Food insecurity in South Carolina averaged 12.60 percent.
- That makes South Carolina the eighth hungriest state with a food insecurity rate 18 percent higher than the national average of 10.4 percent.
- The official poverty rate (which does not account for income from safety-net and tax-support programs such as SNAP, EITC, and others) in the state averaged 14.1 percent.
- But using the Supplemental Poverty Measure (which does include safety-net and tax-support income), the poverty rate falls to 10.0 percent. In other words, these programs reduced the poverty rate in South Carolina by 29 percent and the number of people living in poverty by 208,000.
- SNAP, alone, lifted 142,000 people above the poverty line in South Carolina, including 72,000 children, per year between 2013 and 2017, on average.

Rowe said there are hundreds of volunteers who work with the organization. They bring food into the warehouses, help sort food and some help deliver. Volunteers are from all backgrounds but there are some requirements in place before anyone can volunteer. She said when people ask about volunteering, they drive people to their website to find opportunities. Volunteering is great for team building and many family groups come to volunteer. Children must be 11 years old to volunteer, be accompanied by an adult, and everyone must wear closed toe shoes.

Rowe shared that funding for the organization comes from grants, the farm communities, partnerships and financial donations from individuals. Unfortunately, resources have decreased due to the impact of inflation, but anyone can help by donating nonperishable food items. Visit harvesthope.org to show your support for their efforts to decrease hunger and food insecurity.

ONE TABLE FLORENCE THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION

Submitted by Bryan Ransom



In a world that sometimes feels increasingly disconnected, where the pace of life often leaves us rushing past the needs of those around us, One Table Florence is a shining example of community, compassion and commitment.

One Table Florence is an outgrowth of the original One Table event in Aiken, South Carolina, where over 3,000 people come together to share a Thanksgiving meal. Even more amazing is that One Table Aiken has been a mainstay of the Aiken community for more than 20 years. Florence newcomer Jody Ransom assisted the Aiken event for several years with the express desire to bring this unique event to another community.

One Table Florence is not just another event: it's a celebration of unity, compassion and the power of community. Ransom is thrilled to announce that this year, One Table Florence will find its home at the beautiful Timrod Park. This iconic event, which is centered around a community Thanksgiving dinner, holds the promise of bringing all facets of our diverse community together at one table, for one remarkable holiday meal.

The core values that underpin One Table Florence are simple yet profound: combating loneliness, forging community connections and fostering a culture of volunteerism. These principles align perfectly with our city's spirit of neighborly love and shared responsibility.

Imagine a scene where people from all walks of life, regardless of age, race, religion or background, come together under the open sky at Timrod Park. Families, friends, neighbors and strangers alike, gathering around one table to share a meal, share stories and share in the joy of the season. It's a scene of inclusivity, where no one feels alone, and everyone knows they belong.

Loneliness can be a heavy burden, and it's a feeling that many in our community may experience, especially during the holiday season. One Table Florence is a beacon of hope, offering an opportunity for those who may feel isolated to connect with others, find support and feel a sense of belonging. It's a powerful antidote to loneliness that can truly transform lives.

One Table Florence is entirely free to attend. This means that no one is excluded from the celebration due to financial constraints. It's an event where everyone can enjoy a hearty Thanksgiving meal without any barriers.

Ransom states, "One Table Florence is NOT a soup kitchen." It is more than just a meal to fill the stomach. By inviting everyone, regardless of their situation, to partake in this Thanksgiving celebration, One Table Florence hopes to provide a sense of dignity and belonging to those experiencing homelessness, hunger, loneliness and beyond. One Table Florence aims to bridge the gap and create an environment of compassion where everyone can share our abundance and offer solace to those in need.

In the spirit of inclusivity local nonprofit organizations, like the House of Hope, June Bugs Care and Whosoever Church are partnering together to make One Table Florence a central pillar of support in Florence this Thanksgiving. Together, we aim to make a difference in the lives of those who need it most.

One Table Florence is an event bearing the true essence of the holiday season – gratitude, togetherness and the joy of giving. One Table Florence invites everyone in the community to come together on this memorable occasion. Whether as a volunteer, a guest or simply as a supporter of this wonderful initiative. Your presence and participation will make a significant difference.

One Table Florence - Event to take place on November 23rd 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. in Timrod Park. Further information and details can be found at www.onetableflorence.com or email diversity@onetableflorence.com.

HOUSE OF HOPE OF THE PEE DEE RESPONDS TO THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY

By Susan Carter



Vice President of Client Services, Wanda Vereen, House of Hope of the Pee Dee

National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week is celebrated each year, one week before Thanksgiving, to raise awareness about this significant problem faced by many, even in the United States. Organized by the National Coalition for the Homeless, it takes place from November 13 to 21 this year. Many homeless people are wrongfully thought of as criminals or miscreants, along with being discriminated against and treated unfairly and unkindly. Homelessness occurs due to a wide range of

unfortunate situations that can happen to anyone, including loss of employment, poor health, limited healthcare and lack of affordable housing. Other common causes of homelessness are untreated mental health and substance abuse problems, family conflict and lack of support and systemic inequality and discrimination.

The struggle to fulfill basic needs can be difficult for many Americans who live paycheck-to-paycheck. An illness, injury or job loss can easily lead to poverty, hunger and homelessness. Data shows that about 43 million Americans live below the poverty level and one in five children is afflicted by poverty. Approximately half a million Americans are without a home.

Our region is fortunate to have the House of Hope of the Pee Dee to address some of our community's needs. According to Wanda Vereen, vice president of Client Services, the House of Hope of the Pee Dee's mission is to provide hope by serving the needs of men, women and children facing homelessness. According to their website, "The need for emergency shelter in the Pee Dee was answered in October of 2016, with the opening of the Courtney McGinnis Graham Community Shelter. Each year we see 1100 unique individuals at this location. Individuals can stay up to 30 days." Another resource is Hope Village which has long-term transitional housing for homeless women and children. Families can spend up to two years in one of the 24 homes available. House of Hope for Men is a long-term 24 bed transitional facility where men stay for up to a year getting their lives back on track. During their stay they will be encouraged to make positive life changes through structured programs which focus on spiritual growth, education, employment, life management and recovery from substance abuse. Vereen responded that the community can help House of Hope by donating "all the same things you need to run your house. Because that's basically what this is, two big busy homes, and a lot of tiny homes." Other ways to contribute include visiting their website at www.hofh.org to become a volunteer and joining them as a prayer partner. You can offer hope by giving donation, you will be supporting a non-profit that uses the largest percentage of gifts to serve others. You can donate via text by texting, "Homeless," to 73256.

CMD PANTRY: ANSWERING A COMMUNITY NEED By Susan Carter



Tracy Pressley (left) and her daughter Areanna Driffin

KINGSTREE-Tracy Pressley, director of CMD's Pantry, is passionate about helping her Williamsburg County community. The family created a non-profit in 2019, in memory of their late father and brother. Pressley stated that her father was, "always giving and loving," and tried to help others, even though he had a limited education. When her brother died suddenly, six years to the date after her father passed away, the family decided it was time to honor both men by starting an organization to help people in need and named in memory of them. Cellis Major Driffin was her father and Cedric Moses Driffin was her brother. Working in the community provided a healthy way for Pressley, her daughter, Areanna Driffin and her sister, Jeaneen Nelson, to work through their grief over the loss of these beloved and giving relatives. The women knew the community needed food assistance; prior to COVID, they all worked as contract case managers for Medicaid and made home visits. The limited food they observed in many homes led them to develop the pantry.

She described CMD's beginnings as several mobile units filled with rescued food contributed by local food and grocery vendors. The non-profit grew quickly by word of mouth, Facebook and staging popups around Kingstree. Pressley began looking for a permanent location to build a larger facility for CMD's Pantry when SC Food

Share, a Columbia-based organization, offered to help with funding. Pressley worked with Food Share for a year on special projects. The organization decided to invest in their non-profit after seeing their commitment and success in reaching community members. As a result, they were able to construct two buildings, a main site and a warehouse, at their 2229 Sumter Highway location in Kingstree. The main building is a 2,700 sq. ft. building with four commercial freezers and two commercial refrigerators. The warehouse contains shelves stocked with canned goods, beans and dry goods from Low Country Food Bank. Several hundred gallons of fresh milk are donated weekly through a milk grant from Low Country Food Bank. Shoppers can peruse the aisles and choose what they need free of charge. CMD's Pantry is very thankful for the generosity of The David and Nicole Tepper Foundation that has continued to help CMD's Pantry grow.

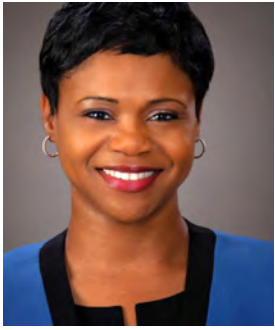
CMD's Pantry's mission is to provide healthy food to low-income families with minor children, seniors and disabled individuals located in Williamsburg and surrounding counties. The need is urgent as Williamsburg County has been declared, a "food desert," with limited access to healthy food. Pressley reports that 460 community members were served last week and 1500 receive help each month. In-pantry shopping and online ordering are offered. The CMD's website advertises a box of healthy fruits and vegetables each month for a low price (\$5 SNAP to order/\$20 cash). See cmdspantry.org for more information.

In addition to food, CMD's Pantry operates a no-cost store that offers a variety of items contributed by partners such as the Walmart Spark for Good program. Food Lion is another CMD's Pantry donor as well as the Low Country Food Bank of Charleston.

The hours of operation are Monday and Tuesday by appointment, and Wednesday and Thursday 9-12 noon. A good way to help CMD's mission in the communities is to donate to their upcoming food drive for their Thanksgiving distribution. Items being collected include but not limited to stuffing mix, corn, sweet peas, pecans, pie crust, sugar, flour, cooking oil and aluminum pans. Arrange a drop-off Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m., by calling Areanna Driffin at 843.382.4904.

FIRST CITIZENS BANK WELCOMES AND RECOGNIZES TEAM MEMBERS

Submitted by Twana McRae and Jodi Fravor



Twana McRae

First Citizens Bank is happy to welcome VP Twana McRae to the team. McRae started in June of this year and looks forward to assisting customers with their financial needs, in addition to bonding with her new team. For more than twenty years she has enjoyed providing excellent customer care through her banking experience, along with helping clients achieve their financial goals.

McRae prides herself in changing the banking narrative in a positive way. Because of her passion for youth, she will be promoting programs for financial literacy in schools, along with helping businesses and clients with financial planning.

When asked about her goals, she will tell you that she loves helping her clients thrive because “together we can accomplish the right plan for you.”



Jodi Fravor

McRae is a graduate of Limestone University with a degree in business management and a minor in marketing. Florence is home for her and her husband Dexter and fur baby Champion. Her three children all reside in North and South Carolina.

Jodi Fravor joined First Citizens

Bank in July of 2022, as a premier relationship banker bringing 18 years of experience in the financial services industry to the role. She brings knowledge, professionalism, and an understanding of the financial landscape to her Premier Relationship customers. Fravor is well known as a trusted, knowledgeable and innovative advisor, helping her clients do more with their assets and resources as they work to shape their future. She helps her clients by not only making banking easy and convenient, but, ultimately, by learning what is most important and helping to plan for today and the future. However, Fravor works with clients throughout the Pee Dee area and travels to other First Citizens Bank locations, as needed.

Fravor is a graduate of The University of South Carolina with a degree in finance. She resides in Marion with her husband, Todd. When not working, Fravor enjoys spending time with her sons, Geoff and Garrett, and is an avid college football fan.

McRae and Fravor welcome you to visit them at 2009 Hoffmeyer Rd. Florence, SC 29501, for any of your banking needs. They are both eager and willing to answer your banking questions.

About us

First Citizens Bank Florence branch is one of the 547 offices of the bank and has been serving the financial needs of their customers in Florence, Florence County, South Carolina since 1977.

The First Citizens Bank Florence branch operates as a full-service brick and mortar office. For lobby hours, drive-up hours and online banking services please visit the official website of the bank at www.firstcitizens.com. You can edit branch details by clicking here if you believe the information is incomplete, incorrect, out of date or misleading.



firstcitizens.com

Member FDIC

A community isn't just a place. It's the people who call it home and the things they do to make it a better home for all. At First Citizens, we're proud to support those who do so much to support the communities we serve. **First Citizens Bank. Forever First.**



THE FIRST BANK FOUNDATION AWARDS \$31,000 TO AREA NON-PROFITS Submitted by First Bank



First Bank Foundation pictured left to right Malorie Steadman, Paul Seward, Ashley Christenbury, John Long and Brooke Knotts.

First Bank Foundation donated a total of \$31,750 to Pee Dee communities in June. John Long, executive vice president of First Bank, said the bank is proud to give back to the Pee Dee.

“For over 20 years, the First Bank Foundation has given back to the communities we serve,” Long said. “The money we are able to donate to these charities to support their missions, is a direct reflection of the increased

value of our stock. Thank you to our loyal customers who have supported us over the years which has allowed us to give back and support these programs that make such a huge impact locally. It is truly an honor to be able to do so.”

First Bank is proud to be a local community bank that gives back to the communities they serve, he said.

The nonprofit groups that received donations include Mcarn Community Ministry, Cheraw Rescue Squad, Chesterfield Fire Department, Girl Scout Council of the Pee Dee Area, Northeastern Technical College, Pee Dee Area Against Domestic & Sexual Assault, St David’s Cemetery Association, Wallace Rescue Squad, Pathfinders United, Pee Dee Land Trust, United Way of Chesterfield County, Brocks Mill Fire Department, Patrick Fire Department, Cash Fire Department, Chesterfield Animal Shelter, Chesterfield Family YMCA, Florence County Disabilities Foundation, FDTC Foundation, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Greater Florence Habitat for Humanity, United Way of Florence County, House of Hope, Boys and Girls Club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, SNAC, Lighthouse Ministries, All 4 Autism, Help 4 Kids, Junior League of Florence, Care House of the Pee Dee, Miracle League and Florence Humane Society.

EMPOWERING FUTURE GENERATIONS WITH FINANCIAL LITERACY CRISIS

(BPT) - By Intuit Vice President of Education and Corporate Responsibility, Dave Zasada and Super Bowl Champion Ndamukong and wife, Katya Suh, Suh Family Foundation co-founders

The World Economic Forum has recognized financial literacy as a fundamental skill and essential form of literacy for all students. It holds significant influence over various aspects such as financial resilience, responsible retail investments and financial empowerment. However, shockingly, financial literacy remains scarce. A staggering two-thirds of Americans are unable to pass a basic financial literacy test. Additionally, three-quarters of teenagers lack confidence in their understanding of personal finance, with over six in 10 lacking confidences in applying the financial knowledge they possess. This disparity becomes even more concerning when considering underrepresented youth from historically disadvantaged communities. In fact, data from the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) Financial Literacy Results published by the National Center for Education Statistics reveals that White and Asian 15-year-olds exhibit significantly higher financial literacy rates compared to their Black and Latino counterparts of the same age.

The financial literacy gap threatens to put millions of young people on the road to high debt, low credit scores and the toxic stress that comes with money trouble. To navigate today’s world, young people need a fundamental understanding of budgeting, credit, taxes and investing. This knowledge and the skills to apply it will empower future adults to make productive decisions about money and protect themselves against financial predation and fraud. To help provide and encourage this knowledge, Intuit partnered with the Suh Family Foundation to empower youth and communities for long-term success.

Equal access to high school financial literacy to empower millions

Schools teach students many of the skills they need to build successful lives, yet only a quarter of high schoolers have access through their school to a financial literacy course. In fact, financial literacy education is only guaranteed to 5 percent of students in schools where more than 75 percent are either Black or Latino or eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. Just 22 states require financial literacy education in high school. We believe that equal access to these courses in all states would empower millions more students to succeed in life and overcome generational wealth gaps and racial and socioeconomic inequalities, especially in low-income and

disadvantaged communities with tighter resources. This lack of access perpetuates generational wealth gaps.

Engagement is essential

Research shows that financial literacy education works, but more critically, it needs hands-on instruction that engages students with real-life experiences.

For example, consider the national financial literacy education partnership our organizations have launched. Students learn to manage finances in custom scenarios using real-world tools, including TurboTax and QuickBooks - seeing firsthand how to finance a car, make a family budget, fill out tax forms, and navigate other essential aspects of adult finances. To maximize engagement, subjects are tailored to students’ needs and interests.

Partnerships like this can provide high school teachers with training and curriculum and bring engaging workshops, resources, and ongoing support to high schoolers. We are proud to have brought resources to some of the country’s biggest, most underserved school districts.

Scaling Impact

Intuit is dedicated to helping Generation Z and all the coming generations thrive. After a successful joint program in Portland, Oregon, we expanded to the Los Angeles Unified School District, Inglewood Unified School District and Compton Unified School District, East Side Union School District and Dallas Independent School District. To roll out and scale the programming, we work with nonprofit partners already active in local school districts. The big overarching goal is to prepare at least 5 million individuals for jobs and life after graduation by 2025.

We have the power to build a more prosperous future by providing high school financial literacy courses and ensuring that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to build successful, financially healthy lives.





FIRST BANK

The most important thing we do is good.

For nearly 100 years, we've been changing lives by giving communities access to the financial services they need. We know that when we empower people with the right financial tools, it benefits everyone.

Conventional Loans

Conventional loans either have fixed or adjustable rates.

Jumbo Loans

If you have a higher property value and can manage larger monthly mortgage payments, consider a jumbo or non-conforming loan. A jumbo loan provides financing for loan amounts higher than the maximum conforming limits set by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Government Loans

Get expanded qualifying criteria with our government loan programs for borrowers that meet eligibility requirements. Government loans include FHA, Rural Housing (USDA), and VA Loans.



MedPro Loans

Financing and mortgage loan options for practicing doctors, dentists and other medical professionals. Our MedPro Loan Program is a residential mortgage loan developed specifically for health professionals.

Construction Loans

Building a new home? With a First Bank One-Time Close Construction-to-Permanent Loan, your lot, cost of construction, and permanent mortgage financing can be covered in a single loan. For renovation projects, our One-Time Close Construction-to-Permanent Loan is also available for existing properties.

Contact me today!

Kellie Joyner
Mortgage Loan Originator
NMLS 537057

2170 W. Evans St
Florence, SC 29501
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Office: 843-669-4257

LONG-TERM CARE INSURANCE OFFERS MORE THAN JUST NURSING HOME COVERAGE



Julie A. Cord

The first image that often comes to mind when people think about long-term care is an elderly person sitting alone in a depressing nursing home. The misconceptions about what long-term care involves and peoples' images of the most common care settings are understandable since long-term care insurance originally started as nursing home insurance four decades ago. However, it has evolved into a much more flexible solution that allows you to receive care in a variety of settings. Most of us want the ability to age at home,

in a familiar setting surrounded by family and our favorite things. The fact is, 90 percent of adults who need long-term care services receive assistance at home or in another community setting.¹

If the level of care you need evolves over time, most long-term care insurance policies not only allow you to transition to a nursing home, but some may also provide you with support during the transition. Since you can't predict the care you might eventually need, it's important to have the flexibility to choose the setting that best fits your needs at any given time.

Many long-term care policies available today can provide you with a choice of where you want to receive care, including:

- At **home**, with the help of a home health aide or in some cases a family member or friend to assist with daily activities
- In a **community setting**, such as adult day care services
- At an **assisted living facility**, where you can receive help with transportation and meals
- In a **nursing home**, if you need around-the-clock care

Each of these options provides a different level of care depending on how much assistance you need. Receiving care at home is the most popular and preferred option, and some policies even provide benefits that allow you to make home modifications that can help you stay at home longer. Policies that provide home care allow you to receive care from a professional, or possibly a friend or family member if informal care is covered.

While most people hope they won't ever need to worry about long-term care, the reality is Americans have almost a 70 percent chance they will need some type of long-term care assistance after age 65.2 Women are even more at risk, primarily because they tend to live longer. The thought of not being able to care for yourself can be difficult and creating a strategy for care can be daunting. However, it's best to not let long-term care preparation get pushed aside, because your age and health both factor into whether you'll qualify for insurance and how much you'll pay for coverage.

By including long-term care in your retirement strategy, you'll have the peace of mind that you've taken the steps to help protect your family from the financial and emotional impact of a long-term care

event. Take the time to research available options, decide how much coverage you need based on estimated costs, and create a strategy that will give you the flexibility to choose where and how you receive care. If you need additional information, contact a New York Life agent to find out more about our solutions.

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1 Edem Hado and Harriet Komisar, "Long-Term Services and Supports Fact Sheet," AARP Public Policy Institute, August 2019.

2 "How much care will you need?" U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, February 2020



Long-Term Care
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What You Need to Know



PROTECTING YOUR BUSINESS AND EMPLOYEES

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

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

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

compensation arrangements allow you to provide retirement income to select employees. The way it works is that you and the selected employee enter a contract that specifies the compensation you will pay out to him or her in the future.

Since you may not set up a specific reserve fund in which a participant has a vested right, a life insurance policy is uniquely suited to informally finance a deferred compensation plan. The future of your business depends on attracting and retaining the right talent with the right tools.

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

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

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

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*Source: Credit Union National Association's (CUNA) membership benefits report

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ANDERSON BROTHERS BANK RECOGNIZES TEAM MEMBERS

Submitted by Samantha Strickland, marketing coordinator



Amber Herring

LATTA—Amber Herring promoted to customer service representative in the bank's Latta office at 101 East Main Street.

Herring joined Anderson Brothers Bank in September 2020, as a teller in the Marion Main Street office. As a Customer Service Representative, Herring will now serve her hometown by assisting customers with various products and services, including opening new accounts, Christmas Clubs, IRAs and CDs.

"The Latta staff and our customers are lucky to have Amber in her new role as customer service representative," said Glenn Greene, branch manager for Anderson Brothers Bank. "She is an asset to Anderson Brothers Bank and the Latta community. We are very excited that she is stepping into this role in the growth of her banking career."

MULLINS—Michaela Collins promoted to business services associate in the bank's Retail Sales and Services department.

Collins joined Anderson Brothers Bank in 2015, working in Deposit Operations; in 2016, she transferred to the bank's call center, serving as a representative. In her new role as business services associate, she will service customers with their cash management needs. Collins will assist with the merchant services program by conducting marketing, sales, support and



Michaela Collins

installation of remote deposit capture and cash management products.

"Michaela's passion for customer service paired with a strong background in banking adds tremendous value to Business Services," said Candace Britton, director of Business Services with Anderson Brothers Bank. "She is always looking for ways to go the extra mile for our business customers! We are thrilled to have her on our team, and I'm confident she will continue to excel in her career."



Shonna Wright

MURRELLS INLET - Shonna Wright was recently promoted as Consumer Compliance Risk assistant. As the Consumer Compliance Risk Assistant, Wright will review loan documentation and loan files from a compliance and credit quality lens. Wright will work closely with the Consumer Finance director, loan officers, and loan assistants to ensure all reports and documentation are accurate and compliant.

Joining Anderson Brothers Bank as a teller in August of 2020, Wright quickly showed her desire for learning and growth in the bank's Murrells Inlet office. She excelled and became a customer service representative. Continuing to expand her financial knowledge, Wright was promoted to mortgage assistant.

"Shonna is a fantastic talent. With her background and experience, she fits in so well," said Jeff Williamson, vice president – consumer finance director of Anderson Brothers Bank. "Shonna has already caught on quite well in less than two weeks. She has found ways to incorporate efficiency and best practices. Keep your eyes on Shonna and her career. She is a great talent, and the sky is the limit! We are better with Shonna on the team!"

ANDERSON BROTHERS BANK CONT'D



William Basler

SUMMERVILLE—Anderson Brothers Bank announces the addition of William “Bill” Basler as branch operation coordinator of the bank’s Summerville office located at 2139 North Main Street, Suite F.

As Branch Operations Coordinator, Basler will provide administrative and supervisory support within the branch, ensure the staff adheres to all banking policies, and exercise decision-making and approval authority necessary in daily operations.

Moving from Boston to Summerville

this year, Basler brings over twenty years of banking experience. When he is not working, he enjoys being involved with the community. Basler was a second VP Chamber of Commerce, a member of the school board and Mt. Hope Christian Church and was active with the “Back to Home Base Military Fundraiser,” while living in Boston. Since settling in Summerville, he wants to gain more local community involvement.

“Our Summerville team is beyond excited to have Bill join us, bringing decades of retail, lending, and management experience,” said Amy Bryant, Summerville Branch manager with Anderson Brothers Bank. “He is already making great connections and building relationships with our customers. He is a true asset to our team and will be a vital part of our growth to the next level here in the Lowcountry.”

NEED HELP TO EASE FINANCIAL STRESS

(BPT) - As inflation continues to rise, Americans are feeling the financial pressure and weighing their present needs against their future financial health. According to The National Association of Personal Financial Advisors (NAPFA) Consumer Survey, 87 percent of working Americans feel stressed about their finances, and nearly half are unsure of how much money they need to retire comfortably.

The survey also found that financial stress is spilling over into the workplace. About 63 percent of working Americans reported that financial stress makes them less productive at work, with a quarter saying they spend a half-hour or more thinking about their finances.

Whether you’re an employer looking to ease your employee’s financial stress and improve their performance or an individual seeking to plan and improve your financial outlook, an experienced financial advisor can make a world of difference.

“Everyone is feeling the impacts of inflation, from the price of groceries to the fluctuations in their retirement accounts, and it’s clear that more Americans are looking for the assistance and guidance that comes from financial planners.

Finding the right financial advisor that can educate and guide clients can be challenging. When searching for a financial advisor, look for the following four qualities.

1. Fee-Only compensation

How a financial advisor is compensated can affect the advice you receive. Financial advisors are compensated through three ways:

- * Commission-based model
- * Commission and fee model
- * Fee-Only model

Advisors that work in commissioned and commission and fee models are paid based on the specific financial products they sell to their clients. These models create an inherent conflict of interest. Advisors may struggle to put their client’s best interests above their own. They also may recommend riskier financial investments with lower returns because they’ll earn more money.

In contrast, clients pay Fee-Only advisors directly based on an hourly rate, a percentage of assets, a flat fee or a retainer for advice, plan execution and ongoing asset management. Because financial advisors don’t receive compensation from third parties, there’s no incentive to sell you expensive and risky financial products. This model allows them to concentrate on financial recommendations suitable to your situation.

“When choosing a financial advisor, always ask them how they are compensated for their services,” says Dattomo. “Asking this question will help you better understand the nature of the relationship and whether the advisor will be putting your best interests first. If they give you anything but a straight answer, continue your search.”

2. A fiduciary

A fiduciary is a professional that manages assets or wealth while putting the client’s best interest first. Fiduciaries are required to disclose any conflicts or potential conflicts to their clients before and during the

advisory engagement, adopt a code of ethics and explain their fee structure.

Not all financial professionals are fiduciaries. Non-fiduciary advisors can recommend products with higher fees that generate bonuses, commissions and prizes. That’s why it’s of the utmost importance to ensure your financial advisor has signed a fiduciary oath.

“As consumers of financial services, we all owe it to ourselves to remain diligent - to understand our options and the standards our financial professionals are held to,” says Dattomo. “Selecting a financial planner who has taken a fiduciary oath means they will always put your best interests first.”

3. Experienced and proactive

Having an experienced and proactive advisor is key to securing your financial future. When searching for a financial advisor, check out their educational history, including credentials and designations such as a Certified Financial Planner® (CFP®) certification.

CFP® professionals meet rigorous education, training and ethical standards that allow them to work in the best interests of their clients today, tomorrow and beyond. You can also check if they’re members of a reputable financial association such as NAPFA.

“When you entrust your financial well-being with a financial advisor, you want to make sure that they are looking out for your overall financial well-being,” says Dattomo. “That is why NAPFA-Registered Financial Advisors must meet stiff credentialing and rigorous continuing education requirements along with their Fee-Only and fiduciary oath.”

4. A holistic approach

When working with an advisor, you’ll want to choose someone who takes a broad-based approach to managing and planning your finances. Some financial planners focus on only one or two elements of your finances, such as selling specific products and investments, and overlook other critical areas of your long-term financial outlook.

A holistic financial planner will consider all aspects of your finances to develop a tailor-made plan to help you reach your financial goals. They can help you review and manage your cash flow, investments, income taxes, retirement planning, risk management, education funds, estate planning and any other needs specific to your situation. For more information on selecting the right advisor for you, visit NAPFA.org/Find-An-Advisor.





HARTSVILLE-Sometimes, you must step out on faith by trusting God, and that's exactly what Wendell, Leonard, Yvonne and Albert did in their quest to open Davis Funeral Home. Many, many doors closed, but others always opened and each time, the brothers and their sister never wavered. Finally, it all came together, and Davis Funeral Home opened its doors in March 2023.

As the Covid pandemic caused major delays, the road was not easy, but Dedicated Community Bank was there for the Davis family every step of the way. The siblings stayed true to their vision and mission through the many ups and downs and faced adversity with persistence and faith. The encouragement from family, friends, and Dedicated Community Bank kept the family motivated and today, their dream is a reality.

Davis Funeral Home is truly a family dedicated to serving others during their greatest time of need with love, dignity, and professionalism – not only because it's who Wendell, Leonard, Yvonne and Albert truly are, but because it also honors their beloved late parents, Deacon Albert Davis, Jr., and Martha Coleman Davis. The Davis brothers, Wendell, Leonard and Albert have over seventy-five years of combined experience in the funeral business. The responsibility and consideration for guiding families through a difficult experience is a role they don't take lightly.

Wendell, president, a licensed embalmer, and funeral director, was named Professional of the Year for 2022 by the Congressional



District Six of the South Carolina Morticians Association Inc., where he is a dedicated member and participates in all educational and social events. Albert serves as vice president, and Leonard is the operations manager. Yvonne, administrative assistant, keeps the office running smooth along with

the toughest job of all – keeping her brothers straight. Each of the siblings are wholeheartedly dedicated to serving their community and families for many, many years. Davis Funeral Home, A Family Business that Cares. Dedicated Community Bank is exceptionally proud to be a part of making their dream come true.



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THE WOMAN BREAKING LOCAL RECORDS IN BANKING By Dawn "D.A." Goodwin



Vera Herbert

Senior Vice President of Carolina Bank, Vera Herbert, was honored to be named the first female president of the Independent Banks of South Carolina in 2020. However, most recently, she shattered another record when she became the first female to be named

2023 Banker of the Year. Today, she shares the principles she lives and works by that can help other leaders.

Herbert has been living and working by certain principles that stem back from her childhood. One is to, "always, always be respectful. To earn respect, you must give respect. If there was something that was not tolerated when I was growing up, it was disrespect. This does not only hold true in my own home, but at work. I can't expect someone to respect me if I don't show them the same respect. Building relationships is all about trust and you should always be held to the same standard that you expect from others," said Herbert.

Herbert is a very proud fourth-generation banker who continues the tradition of operating for the community. Her great grandfather, J. Wesley Beasley, started Carolina Bank in 1936, and she has had the privilege of working for her father, Rick Beasley, over the past 21 years. "I am not just a banker, but a community banker," she said. "There is a big difference! I love that I can be involved with our community every day. A popular slogan that never gets old is,

'community bankers understand the needs of the community because we live and work here too.' It's where we raise our families, support local schools and small businesses."

In being named 2023 Banker of the Year, Herbert was quite surprised. "To tell you the truth," she said, "it was a complete shock. Not that I don't work hard, but so does everyone around me. Carolina Bank deserves this award, not just Vera Herbert. I know this is an individual award, but I could not be where I am without our wonderful management team and employees. Our Carolina Bank family is something special and I am so happy to be a part of it. It was a tremendous honor being the first woman to ever receive this award and I am very grateful to my fellow community bankers for giving me this recognition."

The advice Herbert would give to other business leaders or professionals is to never stop wanting to learn. "I have been working 23 years and still feel like I have so much to learn. I am fortunate to have great leaders around me, not only at Carolina Bank, but my fellow peers in the community banking sector and local business leaders," she said.

Herbert graduated from West Florence High School in 1996, and from Clemson in 1999, with a B.S. in Financial Management. She began working at Bank of America in 2000 as an analyst in its fixed income division. She moved back to Florence in 2002 to work for Carolina Bank and is also a graduate of the South Carolina Bankers School at the University of South Carolina and the Graduate School of Banking at LSU.

Herbert says her family has always been so supportive throughout her career and that she would not be where she is without them. Today she lives in Florence and is married to Jamie Herbert. The couple has two children, Jacqueline 19 and James 16.



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CPMG WELCOMES DR. CASEY WADSWORTH, OBGYN

Submitted by *Hanna Caddell*, marketing and communications coordinator.



Dr. Casey Wadsworth is highly skilled in robotic-assisted surgery, using our new da Vinci surgical system.

HARTSVILLE - Thus far, Dr. Casey Wadsworth's medical journey hasn't strayed outside of the Palmetto State. And that's just how she wants it.

"Being from a smaller town, being in medicine, I know how underserved some of these areas are and I didn't want to go get a medical education and then not be able to give back to my community in the manner that my community afforded to me," she said. "In college, in medical school and in residency, I've had so much support from the people in my community and I wanted to give back."

In August, Wadsworth, an OBGYN, began practicing at Carolina Pines Medical Group Women's Care in Hartsville, just 38 miles down Highway 151 from where she grew up in Pageland.

Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center CEO Bill Little, noted the connection.

"We are thrilled to add Dr. Wadsworth to our team to strengthen an essential specialty program at Carolina Pines and help us better meet the local demand and need for women's health services," said Little. "She brings a track record of accomplishments, from her schooling through her residency at the Medical University of South Carolina and will complement our existing team and help us better serve our community."

"Dr. Wadsworth is originally from this area, growing up right down the road in Pageland. We're proud to play a role in bringing Casey back home, to serve the same region that helped mold her into the person she is today."

Since high school, Wadsworth knew she wanted to practice medicine. At Central High School in Pageland, she was introduced to the medical field through the health occupations track and stayed the course at the College of Charleston, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology with a minor in Public Health (graduating with cum laude honors).

While at the College of Charleston, she volunteered at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC), which further cemented her interest in medicine. She recently completed her residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) after earning her Doctor of Medicine degree from MUSC in 2019.

Her love of women's health came during medical school where she was exposed to the breadth of the specialty. She realized that not only could she assist with bringing life into the world, but also follow patients from their teenage to adult years as well as provide surgical



Dr. Wadsworth conversing with her patient in the office.

intervention for reproductive issues throughout their life.

"I tell all of my patients, healthy mom, healthy baby," she said. "So, if we are taking care of you and getting you what you need throughout your pregnancy, then that, in turn, is taking care of your baby."

"The most rewarding part of my job is being able to advocate for women," she added. "That makes my job impeccable, and I am so honored to be able to do that for women and be that person for women."

Wadsworth said she appreciates how beautiful and welcoming Hartsville is because connecting with the community

is important to her on and off the job. So far, she says the people she has met have been incredibly nice and approachable, traits that are important to a successful provider-patient relationship.

"My philosophy is, I want what is best for my patients," she said. "I want them to feel like they are heard, and I want them to know that we have a common goal at all times."

Patients interested in women's health services at Carolina Pines Medical Group should visit themedicalgroup.com/womens-care or call 843.383.2764.

Q&A with Dr. Wadsworth

(Q) Could you share your perspective on the importance of diversity among healthcare providers?

(A) Diversity in medicine is crucial for excellent patient care as well as patient outcomes. There are many peer-reviewed studies that show significantly better patient outcomes with diverse care providers, which is why there are many efforts currently to increase diversity and inclusion. Additionally, it's only logical that the care team reflect their patient population.

(Q) Why did you pursue a vocation in healthcare?

(A) I initially pursued a career in healthcare because I enjoyed science and loved the health occupations tract offered at my high school. I've since come to love educating my patients about their bodies and helping them understand diseases, especially in the day and age of social media where there is much misinformation.

(Q) What gives you the most joy in your job?

(A) Educating my patients absolutely gives me the most joy! Using pictures and models in the office to explain things to my patients and have them understand disease processes really makes my heart smile.

(Q) What do you like to do when you aren't working?

(A) I love working out! Residency took up a lot of my time and energy the past 4 years, so I'm really happy to have time to devote to the gym again. I also really love to travel, listen to true crime podcasts and spend time with family and friends.



Carolina Pines
REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

TALK TURKEY THIS THANKSGIVING ABOUT YOUR FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY

Submitted by Krissy Huntley, MSPAS, PA-C



Krissy Huntley

Gain insights into your family health history for the best medical care and outcomes.

Many of you already know that November 23 is Thanksgiving, and you are probably already planning the menu for your bountiful feast. The U.S. Surgeon General has chosen the day before Thanksgiving, November 22, to spotlight the importance of learning your family medical history with National Family Health History Day.

While you're passing the time (and the green bean casserole) with loved ones this holiday season, take the time to learn more about their health and habits through the years. It could be vital to understanding and maintaining your own health and well-being.

Family gatherings offer you an invaluable opportunity to discuss your family health history, which the CDC defines as, "a record of the diseases and health conditions in your family." These can include conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack or Alzheimer's disease. A thorough family health history can also include shared behaviors (exercise, tobacco use, diet) and living environments (residing in a large city or a rural community).

Giving your provider the complete picture of your family health history offers them all the pieces to the puzzle when it comes to the best treatment, including screening for potentially significant illnesses that you may be at a greater risk of developing due to your genes.

While there are plenty of illnesses and diseases not influenced by your genetics, many serious and debilitating chronic conditions have genetic links. For instance, if grandparents, parents, and siblings are diagnosed with conditions like heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers, you are more likely to develop these illnesses yourself.

If your grandmother, your mother and your brother were all diagnosed and treated for colon cancer during their lifetime, this alerts your primary



Shyam Tantry, MD

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care provider (PCP) to aggressively screen for signs of colon cancer, helping to ensure early detection and treatment. Without a complete family history, healthcare professionals recommend screening schedules based on best practices for the general population, which can delay detection and treatment for patients with genetic predispositions to certain diseases like cancer.

Mental health often features a genetic component, so it is important to discuss your family mental health history as well. Illnesses such as depression, ADHD, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder have been genetically linked, and are just as important to share with your provider as your family history of stroke.

The more you know about your family health history, the more you can share with your PCP, and the more comprehensive and personalized your care can be.

For assistance with building your family health history, try using online resources such as the Surgeon General's "My Family Health Portrait" for documentation and record-keeping.

Talk with your family this Thanksgiving and schedule an appointment with your PCP to discuss what you learn. If you don't have a provider and are ready to play a more active role in your health, reach out to HopeHealth to become a patient by calling (843) 667-9414 or visiting hope-health.org.

HopeHealth also offers extended hours through Access Hope for when you can't visit the office during normal office hours. Access Hope health care providers are available, Monday-Saturday, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Have a safe and wonderful Thanksgiving, and don't forget to save room for dessert.

HOPEHEALTH'S "HOPEFRESH" Submitted by HopeHealth



Nikita Alford, community health worker, serving a healthy dish at the January 19, Hope-Fresh launch.

On January 19, HopeHealth launched the pilot program for HopeFresh, an initiative offered in partnership with Blue Cross Blue Shield and the Clemson Extension encouraging healthy eating and diabetes management. The inaugural HopeFresh group, containing eight HopeHealth patients who are diabetic or prediabetic, has hit its halfway mark with improved participant health outcomes.

The pilot HopeFresh program involved an initial 12-week education program from Clemson Extension, the Health Extension for Diabetes, where participants learned about the benefits of fresh produce for overall health, weight management, and A1C level reduction.

Participants were given a weekly \$20 voucher to purchase produce from the Florence Save-A-Lot, including fresh and frozen produce as well as some canned items. Additionally, participants received HopeFresh recipe books with ideas for how to prepare their chosen produce and other useful tips.

Following the completion of the 12-week program, HopeFresh participants continue to receive vouchers during monthly meetings with Nikita Alford, community health worker at HopeHealth. Alford checks in with participants to ensure they are on track with their goals and connects them with any additional resources needed to resolve barriers to care. Additionally, booster sessions are provided every three months, where participants learn new information, review previous lessons and sample healthy, flavorful recipes.

Currently, six out of the eight HopeFresh participants have experienced weight loss, with an average amount of 20 pounds! Additionally, five out of eight have lowered their A1C levels, with some experiencing a decrease of up to four points.

On the importance of the program and its measurable health outcomes, Alford shared, "The program has helped our participants tremendously! They can connect with peers and professionals to help with their success in managing their diabetes. I feel honored to be along for the ride in their journey."

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Bennettsville, SC 29512
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Chesterfield Center
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Pharmacy Locations:

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BISHOPVILLE 545 Sumter Hwy 803.588.7960
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FULL-SERVICE CSC COMMUNITY PHARMACY OPENS IN DILLON Submitted by CareSouth Carolina

DILLON- CareSouth Carolina officially opened a full-service CSC Community Pharmacy in the Dillon medical office, 1016 Old Latta Highway, Dillon, SC 29536.

The addition of an onsite pharmacy means that patients will no longer have to wait for next-day delivery and can conveniently walk straight to the pharmacy for their medication needs. This development has been hailed as a significant step forward in providing enhanced care and improved patient experiences.

“Being able to actually open up a pharmacy in Dillon for CareSouth Carolina will be huge for the patients that utilize our medical facility,” CareSouth Carolina Chief of Pharmacy Ashley Singleton said. “Now, they’ll be able to have a pharmacist to speak to, put a face with a name, develop relationships and have all the benefits that come with continuity of care. Hopefully, that will make the process much smoother for the medical team, pharmacy team and most importantly, the patient, as we are all working under one roof.”

The pharmacy accepts all major insurances and is open to all, even those who are not patients of CareSouth Carolina, and aims to be a full-service pharmacy that offers excellent care through consultation and affordable prices on prescriptions. The pharmacy is equipped to handle various services, including the 340-B retail program and has a full-service drive-thru. The CSC Community Pharmacy will be open from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, providing ample opportunities for patients to access their prescriptions. For more convenience, patients can also download the mobile app, Mobile Rx, which allows them to manage and fill their prescriptions online.

Lucile Owens, a Dillon native, will serve as the pharmacist in charge at the new pharmacy.

“I am thrilled to be returning back to my hometown to open the newest CSC Community Pharmacy location in Dillon,” Owens said. “CareSouth Carolina is an exceptional organization that provides our patients much-needed

cost-saving opportunities for their medications that cannot be found elsewhere in our community. Patients should not have to choose between their life-saving medications or their other essential needs and CareSouth, through our 340-B program, in all of our pharmacies, allows for ALL of our patients the ability to afford both. My pharmacy team and I are looking forward to opening our newest location and serving the patients of the Dillon community.”

CareSouth Carolina has been a prominent healthcare provider in the area and is committed to delivering comprehensive services to meet the diverse healthcare needs of the community. In addition to the new pharmacy in Dillon, CareSouth Carolina has pharmacy locations in Hartsville, Bennettsville, Bishopville, Latta, McColl, Society Hill and Cheraw.

CareSouth Carolina and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) opened the new 18,640-square-foot Dillon facility last year as part of a partnership. The facility allows CareSouth Carolina to continue to provide preventive health services in Dillon, including family planning, Sexually Transmitted Diseases/Infections, HIV, immunizations, family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics, women’s services, substance abuse prevention program, dental, pharmacy, geriatrics, social services, behavioral health counseling, laboratory, ultrasound, x-ray, migrant services and veteran’s choice provider.

CareSouth Carolina is a private, non-profit community health center delivering patient-centered health and life services in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. CareSouth Carolina operates centers in Bennettsville, Bishopville, Cheraw, Chesterfield, Dillon, Hartsville, Lake View, Latta, McColl and Society Hill.

Services provided by CareSouth Carolina include family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, women’s services, OB/GYN, HIV/AIDS primary care, infectious disease primary care, IV therapy, substance abuse prevention, dental, chiropractic services, pharmacy, senior support services, family support services, clinical counseling, laboratory, ultrasound, X-Ray, agricultural worker health services and veteran’s choice provider.

CARESOUTH CAROLINA HONORS WILLIAM FEAGIN OF SCPHCA Submitted by CareSouth Carolina



William Feagin and CareSouth Carolina CEO Ann Lewis

HARTSVILLE- CareSouth Carolina proudly presented William Feagin, director of Revenue Maximization at the South Carolina Primary Healthcare Association (SCPHCA), with the Community Partnership Award.

The accolade recognizes outstanding local organizations and leaders who have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to partnering with CareSouth Carolina to enhance community well-being.

The Community Partnership Award was bestowed upon William Feagin in recognition

of his dedication to strengthening CareSouth Carolina's collaborative efforts and his instrumental role in promoting the organization's mission to provide exceptional patient-centered health and life services. With over 11 years of experience at the SCPHCA, Feagin has successfully provided vital training and technical assistance to finance departments, specifically focusing on billing and coding strategies.

Feagin's extensive expertise also encompasses conducting comprehensive revenue cycle assessments, a vital process that he was invited to undertake at CareSouth Carolina. Through this collaborative initiative, Feagin and his team look for opportunities and challenges, devising innovative strategies to streamline processes and make things more efficient.

"It was a complete and total shock," Feagin expressed upon receiving

the award. "I was thankful for the opportunity to be able to help. I grew up in Boy Scouts—I am an Eagle Scout—within the organization, there's a group called the Order of the Arrow. For that, one of the oaths that we take is to preserve a cheerful spirit even in the midst of irksome tasks and weighty responsibilities and will endeavor, so far as in my power lies, to be unselfish in service and devotion to the welfare of others. I take that to heart. For me, personally, being recognized for what I've done and worked hard to follow my entire life is a great honor."

CareSouth Carolina's executive leadership commended Feagin for his exemplary contributions and shared enthusiasm for service.

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EXCITING NEWS!



Dr. Jennifer Evans Scott is proud to announce that she has been **VOTED** Best Chiropractic Practice/Best Chiropractor and Best Acupuncturist in the Pee Dee Region for 2023!!! It's a honor & privileged to be recognized for the 6th year consecutively by my clients and community.

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- Annual Preventive Care Visits
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HOPEHEALTH WELCOMES NEW PROVIDERS

Submitted by Sheridan K. Murray, BS, BA publications coordinator, HopeHealth



Melissa Gonzalez Lara, MD

Dr. Melissa Gonzalez Lara is an endocrinologist at HopeHealth Medical Plaza and HopeHealth in Manning.

She graduated medical school magna cum laude from Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic. Her residency was completed in Internal Medicine at Rutgers-Trinitas Regional Medical Center in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Lara speaks fluent English and Spanish. She is a member of the American College of Physicians, The Endocrine Society and the American Association of Clinical Endocrinology.



Mary Nutter, MD

Dr. Mary Nutter is a physician providing care at HopeHealth in Manning.

She earned a Bachelor of Science in psychology from the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina, an associate degree from the University of South Carolina in Sumter, South Carolina, and a Doctor of Medicine degree from the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, South Carolina. She served as a family medicine physician in the United States Air Force from 2011-2015.

Nutter is a member of the South Carolina Academy of Family Physicians, the American Board of Family Medicine, the American Academy of Family Physicians and the Psi Chi Psychology Honor Society. Her clinical interests include managing chronic conditions and preventive medicine through medication and lifestyle improvements.



S. M. Ravi Prakash, DMD, MDS, BDS

Dr. Sasankoti Mohan Ravi Prakash is a general dentist and independent researcher. Prakash earned his Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry from Southern Illinois University, School of Dental Medicine, magna cum laude in 2022. He received his Bachelor of Dental Surgery from the prestigious SDM College of Dental Sciences and Hospital, India in 1999 and his Master of Dental Surgery in the specialty of Oral Medicine and Radiology from KLE Dental College, India in 2002.

With over 18 years of clinical, academic and research experience, Prakash is committed to providing quality dental care to adults and children. Prakash has more than 100 scientific papers published in peer-reviewed indexed journals and is actively serving as an editorial board member for various journals. He is a member of the American Dental Association, and the Indian Academy of Oral Medicine and Radiology.



Tara Trammell, LPC

Tara Trammell is a licensed professional counselor providing behavioral health services to patients of HopeHealth in Manning. She received a Bachelor of Arts in sociology from Claflin University and a Master of Arts in rehabilitation counseling from South Carolina State University.

Trammell is the past president of the nonprofit organization Bel Canto of Columbia and has worked with the Shriners Hospital Spinal Cord Injury Project.

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.



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DAISY AWARD RECIPIENTS: MUSC FLORENCE AND MARION MEDICAL CENTERS

Submitted by John Russell, marketing manager



DAISY Award Recipient
Teresa Jenkins, RN - Florence

MUSC Health Florence and Marion Medical Centers announce the most recent DAISY honorees. The DAISY award is given to a nurse whose job performance exemplifies the mission, vision and values of MUSC Health. The recipient must also keep a consistent focus on meeting patient-family goals, collaborate with the healthcare team to meet patients' needs, use critical thinking to deliver extraordinary patient care and demonstrate a caring attitude, as well as professionalism in the workplace during all situations, according to the hospital announcement. MUSC Health Florence Medical Center recently named eighth floor MedSurg Registered Nurse, Teresa Jenkins, as the latest recipient of the DAISY Award for nursing. She has spent 37 years in nursing. "As a little girl I always had compassion for others and put their needs before my own," Jenkins said.

She was nominated by patient, Bart Meyers, and Linda Meyers, who described Jenkins as, "present every day with a smile on her face and a calm patient spirit. I watched her handle so many issues at one time, it was amazing. She never got frustrated or impatient. She is here early and stays late at the end of her shift to make sure her patients have what they need. She is thoughtful and thorough."

Jenkins' co-workers describe her as, "dedicated, kind, respectful to patients and staff alike, having a passion for nursing, compassionate, thorough and knowledgeable."

MUSC Health Marion Medical Center also recently named Licensed Practical Nurse Shenna Davis, as the latest recipient of the DAISY Award for nursing.



DAISY Award Recipient
Shenna Davis, LPN - Marion

She is an exemplary employee, and I am grateful that she's a part of our team."

The DAISY Foundation is a not-for-profit organization established in memory of J. Patrick Barnes by members of his family. The hospital announcement said, "Patrick died at the age of 33 in late 1999, from complications of Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura (ITP), a little known but not uncommon auto-immune disease. (DAISY is an acronym for Diseases Attacking the Immune System.) The care Patrick and his family received from nurses while he was ill inspired this unique means of thanking nurses for making a profound difference in the lives of their patients and patient families."

Nurses may be nominated by patients, families and colleagues. Recipients of the DAISY Award are chosen quarterly by the DAISY committees at MUSC Health Florence Medical Center and MUSC Health Marion Medical Center.

Patient comments –

"The first thing you notice about Shenna is her smile. She was so patient and kind to our entire family. She was compassionate and understanding. She never made us feel like we were bothering her and always took the time to answer our questions. We will always remember her smile and all of the kindness she showed when we needed her the most. Shenna was one-of-a-kind."

From Davis's Manager/Peers –

"Shenna is a team player. She does whatever she can to support the needs of the patients and the needs of the team."

MUSC HEALTH FLORENCE MEDICAL CENTER WELCOMES NEW PHYSICIANS

Submitted by John Russell, marketing manager

MUSC Health Florence Medical Center is pleased to announce the addition of General and Bariatric Surgeon Dr. Aftab Jafri, Cardiothoracic Surgeon Iva Smolens, Family Medicine physician Dr. Jacob Kozacki and Pulmonology/Critical Care physician Dr. Andres Escobar.



Dr. Aftab Jafri

Dr. Aftab Jafri, at MUSC Health – Floyd Medical Group, is a highly skilled surgeon, certified by the American Board of Surgery (ABS) and a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons (FACS). He is fellowship-trained in Minimally Invasive Advanced Gastrointestinal/Foregut and Bariatric surgery. Using cutting-edge technology and the robotic platform, Jafri is able to treat a variety of acute care and elective general surgical issues. To make an appointment, please call MUSC Health – Floyd Medical Group at (843) 669-1220.



Dr. Iva Smolens

Dr. Iva Smolens, at MUSC Health – Cardiovascular Surgery, is a board-certified thoracic surgeon for more than 20 years and specializes in adult cardiac and thoracic surgery. She provides Coronary Artery Bypass Graft surgery (CABG), aortic valve replacement surgery, mitral valve and tricuspid valve repair and replacement, Maze procedure for AFib, pericardial procedures, pacemaker lead removals and open and thoracoscopic pulmonary procedures. To make an appointment, please call MUSC Health – Cardiovascular Surgery at (843) 676-2760.



Dr. Jacob Kozacki

Dr. Jacob Kozacki is a board-certified family medicine physician at MUSC Health – Pee Dee Primary Care. He is a native of Florence, SC, and is honored to be able to practice medicine in his hometown. Kozacki's clinical interests include chronic disease management, acute care medicine and mental health among other areas. To make an appointment, please call MUSC Health – Pee Dee Primary Care at (843) 664-9696.



Dr. Andres Escobar

Dr. Andres Escobar at MUSC Health – Pulmonology is board-certified in internal medicine. He specializes in sleep medicine and sleep-related movement disorders, critical care and pulmonology. He specializes in sleep related breathing disorders, diagnosis and treatment of sleep apnea, COPD, asthma and bronchiectasis management, interstitial lung disease, pulmonary fibrosis, hypersomnia syndromes and treatment of circadian rhythm disorders. To make an appointment, please call MUSC Health – Pulmonology at (843) 673-7529.

For more information about any of these providers or services at MUSC Health Florence Medical Center, please go to MUSCHealth.org/Florence.



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SLEEP APNEA – KNOW THE SIGNS

Submitted by Andres Escobar C., M.D. MUSC Health - Pulmonology



Andres Escobar C., M.D. MUSC Health - Pulmonology

Sleep apnea is a condition caused when you repeatedly stop breathing for short episodes during sleep. According to a recent report by the American Medical Association, about 30 million people in the U.S. have sleep apnea, but only six million are diagnosed with the condition.

There are two main types of sleep apnea, central and obstructive. The most common type of sleep apnea in adults is Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA). It is caused by breathing that becomes abnormal due to the closing or narrowing of the throat.

The second main type is Central Sleep Apnea (CSA), which is caused by changes in breathing controlled by the brain. This means the correct signals are not being sent by the brain to make you breathe regularly while asleep. It's not uncommon for people with sleep apnea to be completely unaware of changes in their breathing. Some people may experience sudden startled awakenings or gasping for air.

Some of the most common symptoms of sleep apnea are:

- Loud snoring
- Daytime fatigue
- Sleepiness
- Trouble staying asleep.
- Morning headaches
- Dry mouth, or sore throat upon waking up.
- Restlessness
- Unrefreshing sleep

Tiredness and fatigue can easily be related to everyday stress. For this reason, it may take time for people to recognize that there is a problem. Often it is a bed partner or spouse who may suggest someone with sleep apnea seek a physician's opinion to be diagnosed.

OSA can happen at any age and can be potentially dangerous if left untreated. Studies have shown that people with sleep apnea are at a higher risk for high blood pressure, heart

disease, abnormal heart rhythm, stroke and mood disorders, amongst many other possible complications. Treatment can help decrease this risk.

One option to test for sleep apnea can be done by an overnight in-lab sleep study or Home Sleep Apnea Test (HSAT). Which type of testing is used depends on a patient's medical conditions (such as cardiac disease, history of stroke, etc.) and severity of symptoms. An in-lab sleep study, also called a polysomnogram, is performed at a sleep center overnight. During the study, various sensors will be placed on your body to monitor brain wave activity, breathing, movement, oxygen levels and heart rhythm. This type of study provides the most accurate and detailed information and is considered the "gold standard" for diagnosing sleep apnea.

Another alternative sleep study involves being done at home. It is performed at home by yourself with a small monitor that records the information. This test can be a valuable alternative used only for diagnosing OSA. Someone with other sleep problems or medical

conditions such as severe heart failure, stroke, Guillain-Barre syndrome, ALS, severe COPD or a need for oxygen may interfere with the interpretation of the study and is not recommended for a home sleep study. For this reason, they will require a more comprehensive evaluation.

A negative home sleep test does not rule out OSA. If there is a continued high suspicion of OSA, the general recommendation is to have a follow-up overnight in-lab sleep test. Consult with your primary care doctor or specialized sleep medicine doctor for more information if you or someone you know is struggling with symptoms of sleep apnea.

Escobar specializes in sleep-related breathing disorders, hypersomnia syndromes, sleep-related movement disorders and the treatment of circadian rhythm disorders. He is board-certified in internal medicine and is fellowship-trained in sleep, pulmonary and critical care medicine. For more information or to schedule an appointment with Escobar, call MUSC Health – Pulmonology at (843) 673-7529, or visit MUSCHealth.org.

SLEEP APNEA

SLEEP APNEA is a potentially serious sleep disorder in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts.

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- Diabetes
- Concentration and Memory Problems
- Depression
- Heart Failure

PEE DEE CHAMPIONS FOR YOUTH AWARD RECIPIENT Contributed article and photo Bob Sloan, Morning News



Carlos Washington

Carlos Washington as the 2023 Boys and Girls Club of the Pee Dee Champion for Youth, Fred Carter said he was most deserving of such an honor.

“Simply put, no one in this community is more deserving of our respect for nurturing our sons and daughters in athletic competition,” said Carter, president of Francis Marion University and the 2005 recipient of the Champions for Youth Award.

Washington, the founder and chief executive officer of the Florence International Basketball Association, received the honor during the 2023 Champions for Youth Tribute held in September at the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing Technology, on the campus of Florence Darlington Technical College. Hundreds turned out to support the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Pee Dee and to express their appreciation for someone who has spent decades serving the community and its youth.

“I appreciate this from the bottom of my heart,” said Washington. “I’m truly blessed, I’m truly thankful and I am humbled. I love each and every one of you, and I honestly believe that loves makes a difference. If we keep loving each other and if we keep loving our kids and working with them, this world will be a better place.”

Washington has dedicated decades to serving children and teens, most often through basketball, more specifically through his mentorship. His professional career spanned 32 years with the city of Florence Fire Department. While there, he began his career mentoring and coaching youth in the recreation leagues throughout Florence.

In 2003, at the request of the city of Florence, Washington volunteered to establish FIBA to allow youth from the Florence community to participate in the 2004 Children’s International Games in Cleveland, Ohio. Serving as the chief executive officer of FIBA since, he has continued to grow the organization, which is now one of the premier travel basketball programs in eastern South Carolina. His teams have traveled the Southeast (Orlando, Miami, Atlanta), the U.S. (Las Vegas, Washington, D.C., San Francisco) and the world (Thailand, Canada, Greece).

Every spring and summer, up to 80 boys and girls participate in FIBA and at last count, more than 90 of those youth have advanced to play college basketball. In 2012, he began “Function at the Junction,” which is the largest summer basketball tournament in northeast South Carolina with more than 80 teams traveling to Florence to participate.

Washington’s community activism goes far beyond basketball. His voice was one of the first to promote the establishment of Virtus Academy, a K-12 charter school in Florence. He continues his effort there as the remaining founding board member. He also serves on the boards of The School Foundation and the Salvation Army. His past



Carlos Washington accepts the 2023 Boys and Girls Club of the Pee Dee Area Champion of Youth Award from Francis Marion University President Fred Carter.

services include the S.C. Dept. of Juvenile Justice Advisory Board and the Florence Junior Football League.

“Everybody in this room knows he has made so many contributions across this community,” said Carter in his introductory remarks. “He has worked to sustain the people of this

community for decades.”

Carter specifically addressed the impact Washington has made through FIBA.

“This program, his program, has played an integral part in helping so many young people across this community,” said Carter. “It has allowed them do three things: first, showcase their talent in highly visible, competitive arenas; Second, enhance their maturity while learning the virtues of sportsmanship and teamwork; and third, and maybe most importantly, how to win and how to lose with honor and dignity. It has allowed so many of them to compete for collegiate scholarships, which allowed them to secure their own education and their own futures.”

Carter also cited Washington’s strong character and his sincere care for the young people he mentors.

“There are many things can do half-heartedly in life, but I’ve got to tell you, coaching young people isn’t one of them, especially the way that Carlos does it,” said Carter. “It takes patience and compassion, a determination to never give up on a kid no matter the circumstances or situation. Those are all traits possessed by tonight’s honoree, Carlos Washington.”

After welcoming him onto the stage, Carter presented Washington with a commemorative orange and white basketball imprinted with the words, “2023 Champion of Youth.”



Honoree Carlos Washington poses with his wife.

“It’s been a humbling experience,” said Washington. “What drives me to do this is that I see the difference I can make in young people’s lives. I see that it’s working. We’re giving them the opportunity. Basketball is just a tool. We teach them life lessons, boys and girls, and I have found that when you take them around the country or overseas, they see what is possible. They learn what it takes to be successful.”

“All they need is the chance, the opportunity,” concluded Washington. “For the five to 13-year-olds we are working with now, the future is bright. I’m looking forward to seeing what they are going to accomplish.”

Washington then invited his wife, Everlena, on stage and thanked her for her love and support, saying none of what he had been able to do would have been possible without her.

Charisse Reichenbach, a member of the Boys and Girls Club in the Pee Dee Area Board, served as mistress of ceremonies for the evening. Special presentations were made by Justin McNair, the Boys and Girls Club in the Pee Dee Area Youth of the Year and Nadia Orange, the Florence Boys and Girls Club Youth of the Year.

Near the conclusion of the program, Reichenbach announced that an anonymous person had committed to matching all donations from the event, up to \$10,000.

The Champions for Youth Tribute supports Boys & Girls Club programs that help thousands of children throughout the Pee Dee grow into productive adults.

The Boys and Girls Club of the Pee Dee Area serves over 3,500 children every year, with clubs in Florence, Hartsville, Hemingway, Lake City, Pamlico and Timmonsville. The club’s mission statement is to serve those who need it most.

Bob Sloan is a person who possesses many titles: veteran, community journalist, Presbyterian pastor, husband, father and grandfather. Please note the titles are not listed in order of importance. The priority of importance depends upon the day and the hour.

MEET ROBRICCO "ROB" PORTER

As the real estate market continues to evolve, fresh faces emerge, bringing innovative ideas and a passion for helping clients achieve their real estate dreams. Meet Robricco "Rob" Porter, an up-and-coming professional who is set to make a significant impact in the industry.

With a commitment to personalized service and a deep understanding of the local market, Porter is poised to assist anyone looking to buy or sell real estate. His dedication to his clients' needs and goals set him apart, making him an invaluable partner in any real estate transaction.

Porter ensures that his clients are well-informed and empowered throughout the process. Whether it's helping buyers find their dream home or assisting sellers in maximizing their property's value, his expertise and guidance prove invaluable.

One of Porter's greatest strengths lie in his ability to truly listen to his clients' needs. By taking the time to understand his clients' unique preferences, budget and long-term goals, he is able to tailor his services, accordingly, ensuring a seamless and stress-free experience for all parties involved.

What truly sets Porter apart is his genuine passion for helping others achieve their real estate dreams. His unwavering commitment to his clients' success, combined with his extensive knowledge and expertise, makes him a rising star in the industry.

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INGREDIENTS:

- 1 oz. Teremana Tequila
- 1 oz. Three by Wade Cabernet
- 2 oz. Sweet & Sour Mix
- 3/4 oz. Triple Sec
- 1/2 oz. Sweetened Lime Juice
- Salt &/or Lime for Garnish

Directions:

1. Fill your Rocks glass and Shaker with ice. (If desired, rim your glass with salt first.)
2. Add your tequila, wine, Sweet & Sour Mix, Triple Sec and Lime juice to your shaker.
3. Shake well and then strain in to your Rocks glass.
4. Lastly, float the wine over the cocktail by slowing pouring it over the back of a spoon into the cocktail.
5. Garnish with a lime (if desired).
Salud!



City of Marion

Annual Holiday Prelude & Community Tree Lighting Celebration

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Music Festival
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7pm-10pm

Saturday, November 25th
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Main Street Commons
10am-1pm

Sunday, December 3rd
Marion Christmas Parade
5:00pm

Annual City Tree Lighting Celebration
Marion County Courthouse
6pm

Fireworks at Withlacoochee Park
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YES! YOUR MIND IS PLAYING TRICKS ON YOU! Submitted by Coach Temple Robinson



Coach Temple Robinson

Today is the day! You have daydreamed long enough. Now is the time that you will accomplish a certain goal that is particularly important to you. Completing it reflects you living your purpose in life. Due to this truth, thinking about it causes your energy to expand. It feeds your inner spirit. You see yourself living your dream life.

However, when you finally decide that it is time to take the first step, it feels like a heavy load. Doubt has started to creep into your mind. Your brain is having a

robust conversation about the difficulties in accomplishing the goal. Now, you wonder if it is possible to make it a reality. Guess what? At this moment, your mind is officially playing tricks on you.

When you decide to accomplish a goal that is a new experience for you or one that you have achieved before, but this time, you have, "skin in the game," it is common to experience discomfort. It can include feelings of stress, unease, indecisiveness, incompetency and impossibility. What you are experiencing is an internal block or moment of mastery.

A moment of mastery is completely normal, even if it happens multiple times a day. Your brain is composed of conclusions that are from your living experiences. Many of these conclusions are hidden

and unconscious. Therefore, when you attempt to do something, you have never done before or produce a goal that is very important to you, your brain will find reasons to resist it. In reality, it is a sign that you are up to something good and doing exactly what you are supposed to do.

Please know that everyone's brain thinks this way. Hence, it is a natural experience. Despite what it may seem like, everyone goes through it. Given that this will occur for the rest of your human life, there is hope of minimizing the impact by working with a transformational coach.

Transformational coaching will support you by unveiling your brain's conclusion and supporting you in moving forward toward your goal with ease. You will learn how to identify when you are having a moment of mastery. In addition, you will learn how to apply coaching tools and viewpoints that will assist you in identifying who you are during these vulnerable moments, and practical steps on how to center yourself to clear your mind when amid confusion. Then, you learn how to bring forth your voice of wisdom to determine your next, authentic step, so you can move forward with more clarity, focus, ease and grace.

Through working with a transformational coach, over time, you can train your brain to react differently, so that moments of mastery are easier. Many successful people have gone through transformational coaching to become the ideal leader and person they aspire to be. If you are interested in experiencing transformational coaching, the time for you is now! For more information, you may visit templerobinson.com or contact me at coachtemple@templerobinson.com. Your ideal self and life await you!

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UNDERSTANDING SCAMMERS AND HOW TO SPOT A CON

Submitted by Mallory Wojciechowski, CEO/president, BBB serving Eastern Carolinas



Mallory Wojciechowski

MYRTLE BEACH - Better Business Bureau serving Eastern Carolinas serves over 5,200 accredited businesses, approximately 115,000 businesses and countless residents in our 48-county service area in both North and South Carolina. One of the ways we work to advance marketplace trust is by spreading awareness about scams and educating people and businesses about identity theft, and data privacy.

The first step in knowing how to spot a potential con is to understand that a scammer's goal is typically always to get you to pay, or to hand over your sensitive personal

information or both. BBB research has shown that knowing common tactics and red flags can help you keep your money and/or personal information safe if you're targeted.

Scammers have a toolkit of tactics they often use to prey on people.

One of the four most common red flags is when the person reaching out uses a sense of urgency in their messaging and pressures you to respond quickly. They hope you act without taking a second to think about consequences.

Another common warning sign is a request for up-front payments for things you shouldn't need to pay for, like a government grant.

Impersonation is another one of the most common tactics scammers use to perpetrate scams. Bad actors will pretend to be well-known authority figures or organizations (such as a representative from your bank or someone from your utility company) to get you to send a payment or reveal sensitive information.

Finally, remember that if an offer or deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Con artists know that advertisements for low-priced items are hard to turn down. BBB sees this happen in a variety of ways, including posts about a high-wage job that doesn't actually exist, other than as a way to collect personal information from someone looking for a job.

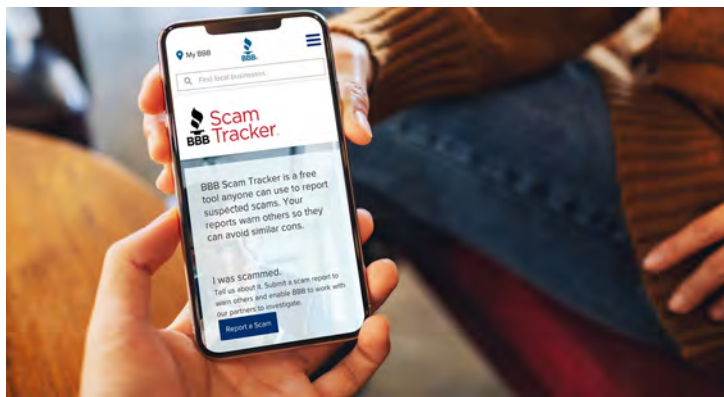
It's important that whenever something feels off, stop and do more research about the demand being made. In many cases, when you pay in a payment method other than credit card, it can be near impossible to get the money you sent to a scammer back.

For a small business owner, employees who can recognize fraudulent emails, identify fake websites, and maintain safe password practices are a key defense against scams.

According to the FBI, business email compromise (BEC) fraud has resulted in more losses than any other type of fraud in the U.S. BEC fraud is an email phishing scam that typically targets people who pay bills in businesses and nonprofit organizations. The scammer poses as a vendor or other trusted source who emails an accountant or chief financial officer. The email asks them to wire money, buy gift cards or send personal information, often for a plausible reason. If money is sent, it goes to the con artist.

Regular phishing emails can be just as damaging to a business. What appears to be a message from a legitimate source includes a link that forcefully downloads a virus that captures personal information or loads a form that asks for bank account or credit card details. Be leery of unsolicited messages, and don't click on links. Instead, hover over the link with your cursor to see the real address. Also, be sure your work computers have proper firewall and protection software.

Help your employees understand what falling for a scam could cost your business.



Always encourage your workforce to speak up if they see something suspicious. Scammers often target multiple employees at a company, so if one person sounds the alarm, it could prevent others from falling victim. Train staff to slow down, think twice, and use known contact information to verify changes, payments and other transactions.

Businesses and consumers alike can stay up to date on the latest scams through BBB.org's news page. If you encounter a scam that could affect your business, share it with your employees, friends and family. Anyone can use BBB.org/ScamTracker to report suspected scams to BBB and warn others so they can avoid similar cons.

About BBB serving Eastern Carolinas

Better Business Bureau serving Eastern Carolinas is a 501(c)(6) not-for-profit corporation serving 48 counties in North and South Carolina. The organization is funded primarily by BBB Accredited Business fees from over 5,200 local businesses and professional firms. BBB promotes integrity, consumer confidence and business ethics through business self-regulation in the local marketplace. Services provided by BBB include reports on companies and charitable organizations, general monitoring of advertising in the marketplace, consumer/business education programs and dispute resolution services. All services are provided at no cost to the public, with the occasional exception of mediation and arbitration. Visit BBB.org.

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FLORENCE FAMILY YMCA MARKS 100 YEARS Contributed by Matthew Robertson/Morning News



Florence Family YMCA CEO Brian New stands in the building's fitness center. The organization marked its 100th year of service in September with a ribbon cutting and other festivities.

The Florence Family YMCA did something many community organizations never get a chance to do — celebrate 100 years of service.

“We were chartered by the YMCA USA back on Sept. 8, 1923. So, we’ll have a big to-do Friday, Sept. 8,” said Brian New, the Y’s chief executive officer.

That big to-do included a Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting among other activities such as giveaways and tours.

The organization’s key to its longevity has been to

welcome change over the years.

From its pool to its gym and play fields, the Florence Family YMCA has grown and adjusted to community wants and needs over its 100 years of service.

“We had to reinvent ourselves during that. When we opened, we were a railroad YMCA, which meant we were down at the railroad tracks taking care of all the rail workers coming through — the doctors’ offices, dorm rooms, bowling alley, pool room, kitchen — so they would come through, stay at the Y and the community would come out and do things at the Y as well,” New said. Times change and, in 1971, the YMCA did as well — it moved away from the railroad.

“We took that opportunity to reinvent ourselves again and opened here in 1971, and we’ve been here ever since,” New said of their location at 1700 Rutherford Drive off Second Loop Road and South Irby Street in Florence. “We sit on about 10 acres now. We started out at four or five acres and have doubled our size. Our building has been added on two or three times. Our program offerings have changed and been added to.”

New said an aerial photograph of the YMCA at that time showed it all by itself without even a paved road around. Now it sits amid some of the larger subdivisions in Florence.

“Used to be we did a lot of classroom settings with education. Exercise was part of that in the gymnasium. Now a big part of it is the exercise part. We added on in 2001, adding on a wellness center,



YMCA Pool

aerobics room, spin room as well as expanding our childcare and youth sports and swimming,” New said.

As Florence has changed since 1971 so has the facility and its mission.

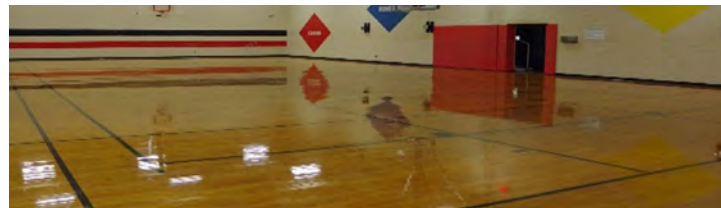
“We’ve always had a big presence with swimming, giving lessons and having lap swimming for our members and stuff like that. With the city not having any pools and fewer and less people doing lessons we’ve become a bigger player in that area. Our pool stays busy inside

and out,” New said.

Part of that change is an outreach to communities that traditionally haven’t learned to swim.

“In the last 10 years you have seen a shift in that role where the African American community and the urban community are coming to take more swim lessons. Not just the kids, the parents come and say they never learned to swim. We’ll teach you too,” New said.

“We do a program in the summertime which is called Safety Around Water which introduces people who have never had any formal



YMCA Gym

swim lessons to the water. We teach them how to carry themselves around water and give them the basic strokes they need to be safe around water.”

“With fewer and less pools around you’re looking at that stuff happening in lakes and rivers and not clear water, and you really have to know how to take care of yourself around that. Our program is underwritten so it is very very low cost,” he said.

Programs like that are part and parcel of the mission of the YMCA, he said.

“Our mission is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy mind, body and spirit for all and we like to take those last two words very seriously. It’s for everybody,” New said.



YMCA Play Field

“The YMCA — Young Men Christian Association — started out as a Bible study group back in 1844 in London, England. Since then, we’re not all young anymore, we’re not all men anymore and we’re not all Christians anymore, but we do apply Christian principles and we are still an association,” New said. “We invite everybody in here.”

In 2016, the YMCA grew again when it was given Friendship Park — which was adjacent to land upon which the facility sat.

“We have slowly added components to that park. We have a quarter mile walking track open to the community, we have six pieces of outdoor exercise equipment out there, a shelter, bathrooms, pretty much anything you would need except an umbrella if it’s raining,” New said. It also serves as home to some of the organization’s soccer fields.

Then there is the Y’s childcare program.

“Even before this building was built, we used the Pettigrew House as a facility for the Y and did a lot of childcares there. Once we opened this facility, we were able to expand it quite a bit,” New said. “We built our childcare center specifically for childcare back in the ‘80s.”

“We bring them in, give them a healthy snack. They have homework time, and they have activity time. Once a week they go swimming,” New said of the program’s current childcare operations.

INAUGURAL A.G.E. CON A SUCCESS IN LAKE CITY Submitted by Donna Tracy, public information officer



A.G.E. Con Free Play

LAKE CITY – For two days this summer gaming enthusiasts gathered in Lake City for the inaugural Anime Gaming and Entertainment Convention – better known as A.G.E. Con.

Although A.G.E. Con is new to Lake City, gaming is not. The convention

evolved from the city’s Smackdown tournaments held in August 2021 and 2022, which were specialty events focused on gaming tournaments and the competitors.

“We found that the players were excited and involved, but once their games were completed, they really didn’t have much to keep them entertained,” said Savon Whitehead, Esports and events coordinator for the city. “Additionally, the family members who came out to support the tournaments, had little to do when their loved ones were not playing.”

Whitehead attended the inaugural Lake City Smackdown in 2021 as a commentator. His energy and style caught the attention of City Administrator William A. Hall who eventually hired Whitehead to oversee the city’s growing Esports program.

“We held a community conversation in March 2022, and community leaders decided Esports should be one of the top three areas for the city to focus on,” said Hall.

Since then, the Esports program has expanded in Florence School

District 3 and the Smackdown Tournaments evolved into A.G.E. Con.

“We wanted A.G.E. Con to be an experience for gamers of all ages and levels. We wanted people to come, have a great time, and to stay and engage with each of our activities,” said Whitehead. “We wanted to provide a premium event that all people, from those new to the culture to competitive players, could find something they were interested in.”

A.G.E. Con included a variety of entertainment options, from free-play video games, virtual reality experiences, tournaments, voice actor panels, tabletop games and more.

“It was really exciting to see the community come out to explore our convention and learn about the industry,” said Whitehead. “Watching people experience the culture for the first time and interacting in such positive ways was inspiring, and I want to thank the entire community for making our first A.G.E. Con such a success.”



A.G.E. Con Vendors/Photos by Jonathan Laster

During the two-day event, city officials estimate more than 500 people came through the doors. “We had pre-sale tickets available online and you were also able to buy tickets at the door,” said Whitehead. “We not only met our expectations, but we exceeded them, and we are

excited for next year’s convention.”

A.G.E. Con 2024 is scheduled for Aug. 16-17 at The R.O.B.

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