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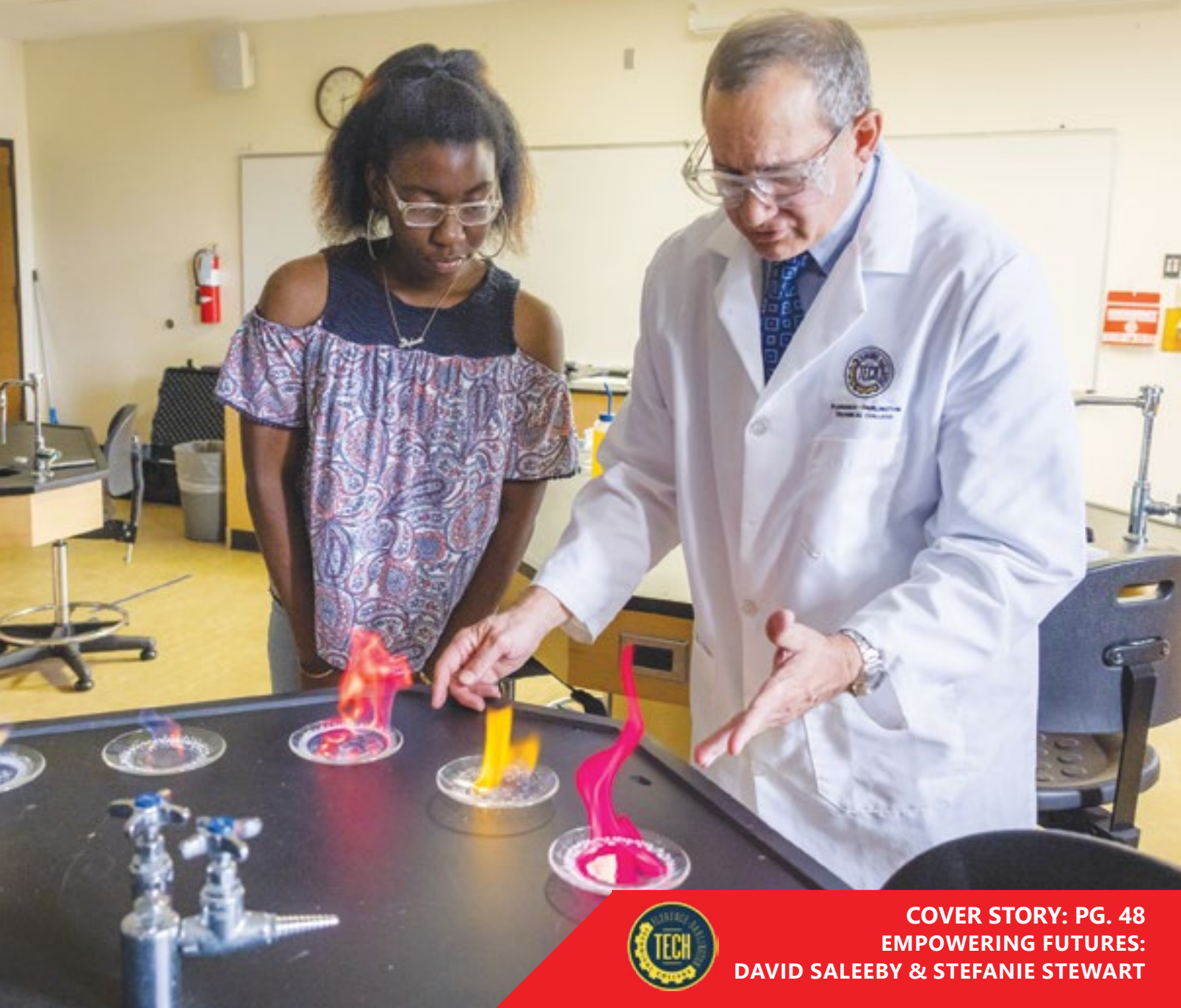
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DIVERSITYWORKS

JANUARY 2024 VOLUME 14 ISSUE 1

"For All of Us"



COVER STORY: PG. 48
EMPOWERING FUTURES:
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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



Glaceria Brown Mason
Editor

Greetings Diversity Works Readers!

With an equitable spirit and an inclusive disposition, the staff at Diversity Works Magazine wishes you a Happy New Year! May your year be joy-filled, informed and enlightened about what's happening over the next twelve months in and around the Pee Dee.

To the community of business owners, professional staff, facilitators and presenters who joined the Fifth Biennial Diversity Focus Training, thank you! Your presence and participation added to the successful outcome of the training. We hope that the take-away in knowledge sharing, engagement and

networking was beneficial. Plans are underway for 2025. We invite you to continue discovering new DEI content in present and past issues of Diversity Works Magazine at diversityworksssc.com.

Diversity Works also thanks our local business sponsors, new and recurring supporting partners for your ongoing commitment to DEI in the Pee Dee. Through your support, we are able to raise awareness about diversity, equity and inclusion and its importance to business and employee success. We look forward to sharing more of your stories as we continue to elevate the conversation on DEI within our service areas of Chesterfield, Clarendon, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, Sumter and Williamsburg Counties. In the plethora of business articles included, find a look back, year in review as the Florence Downtown Development Office reminds us of Florence's success on being named, 'A Great American Main Street,' winner. A wonderful designation as one of only two, shared with Greenville, SC to boast this distinction! This is a welcomed progression for our city. Congratulations to the City of Florence and its residents! Continue to boost our local economy by supporting the businesses advertised herein as well as enjoy dining and shopping in Downtown Florence. Continuing in a celebratory mode, read how Florence residents were entertained in 2023 as the Florence Little Theater celebrated their 100th Anniversary, the Florence Symphony, its 75th Anniversary and the 10th Anniversary of the Hotel Florence.

There's lots to look forward to in 2024! Get ready for the first Downtown Florence event, the Downtown Chocolate Crawl. Delicious!

New business enriches our local economy. In this section, find a welcoming article introducing a new business franchise, the Peach Cobbler Factory. The Peach Cobbler Factory is located in the Freedom Square Shopping Center, owned by Carolina Enterprises, Inc. Keep reading and learn how they're making progress by, "investing where they live." If you haven't already, visit their new location and, 'Stay Peachy!'

Did you know that MPD and Marlboro Electric have merged? Turn the page and learn how they're, "Better Together." Don't miss the new features residents now have access to. You'll enjoy staying up to date on the great progress the City of Lake City is experiencing as they are on track to open a new state-of-the-art community center at Cole Road in Spring 2024. In your reading, be sure to pay close attention to Florence's improvements in water service, the new Penny Sales Tax residents voted for, new service lines and water meters. Get informed about the six-week CityU program starting January 2024. Read with anticipation the progress on the new Florence Sports Complex as well as the recent groundbreaking of the new EV Battery plant through a partnership with AESC and BMW.

As always, our businesses section contains news to keep you informed on comings, goings, retirements, economic boosts for our city and acts of kindness via philanthropy, displayed toward one another and more. Florence businesses don't disappoint in their community support. You'll find an enjoyable article on how Honda executives and employees supported the community last year at the Honda Turkey Run. You'll also learn how the City of Lake City appreciated staff at their Milestones Appreciation Luncheon. Keep reading for much more news

content and be sure to read the great collaborative efforts of PDRTA and Trinity Behavioral Care, as they partner to provide transportation to the rural areas of Marion, Dillon and Marlboro Counties.

In our education section, we hope you read and spread the word about FMU now offering eight courses for its eleven-week spring evening college program. Check out the Darlington County School District's article on their career preparedness initiative. Golf enthusiasts will enjoy the HGTC article as they congratulate Associate Professor Jim Huntoon, a distinguished faculty member in the Golf & Sports Turf Management program for his years of service. In addition, find more interesting and congratulatory articles like the announcement of Tracee Auman as the new President-elect of the SC Dance Association, and more.

While you're enjoying great content, be sure not to miss informative articles in our financial section and start your year off on a good financial footing.

Our health section offers information on ways to keep you healthy, centered and informed. Find articles from MUSC, Care South Carolina and HopeHealth, as they welcome new providers which gives you our readers, options in health care. If you're a parent or guardian, be informed as Kira O'Neal, LPC, NCC shares tips for teen dating. Read Nicholas Licari's article and learn about statin drugs, one of the most prescribed drugs in the U.S. As you continue, read further and learn important information about your thyroid, as Dr. Francisco Barrera shares important information for Thyroid Awareness Month. These and many other articles included will keep you abreast of health news and information.

In this first quarter issue, our special section includes great content in observance of the King holiday, Black History and Women's History Month. Among them, read with interest, the article on renowned Concept Artist and Sculptor, Henry Willis Thomas, creator of, "The Embrace." Learn about his local tie to the Florence community. The twofold article shares a little-known, history changing fact of Florence. Our hope is that you'll be inspired by those in our community who continue to, live the dream. As you read, dive in and get a glimpse of stories about Dr. Marcus McGirt, Bryanta Booker-Maxwell, Miko Pickett, Senator Mia McLeod and more.

Diversity Works is happy to share art and culture with our readers as we observe Black History Month, focusing on the theme, 'African Americans and the Arts.' In this section, read interesting content from an interview granted to Diversity Works by world renowned artist, Leroy Campbell. If you like it, keep reading to experience more great content. Who doesn't get something from a love art and culture, right?! Art excites me and I hope it does you, too! We hope you'll enjoy consuming stories like, 'The Love of Art and Its Impact on Communities,' or about the work of Dr. Leo Twigg. These stories and more just lay the foundation for the upcoming ArtFields showcase coming in spring, see their ad and mark your calendar!

Women's History Month celebrates the achievements of women. The 2024 national theme is women who advocate for DEI. Diversity Works shares stories of five amazing women who advocate for DEI in the workplace and beyond. We hope the stories found, inspire and motivate you, wherever you are in your journey, to keep going. Read about women like, Retired Chief Master Sergeant Dr. Karen Wright Chisolm, who over her extensive career has witnessed DEI inadequacies within the military or Civilian Flight Chief of the USAF, Dr. Sarah Sloan and what she encourages employers to do. Familiar to our readers, see what Nika White Consulting shares with us on, "Moving Forward with DEI Goals," and what the League of Women Voters DEI Director shares on women and equity.

You will find these stories and so many more throughout our sections. Stay informed, peruse for enjoyment and knowledge about perhaps something you didn't know before. Whether you're a resolution maker and/or keeper, we wish you an informed year by reading online or in hand, Diversity Works Magazine for news and information about your local area. In this New Year, we hope all your interactions are carried out with the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion in mind.

Happy Reading!
Glaceria Brown Mason, Editor

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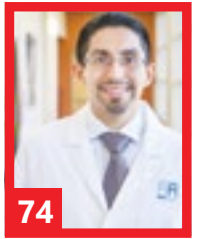
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WHEN DIVERSITY IS THE FOCUS, WE ALL WIN!!

Submitted by Reginal G. Lyerly, V.P.- Information Technology and Sales (DEI) - DNA Diversity Executive Search



Reginal G. Lyerly

The 2023 Diversity Focus Training held at the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology was a truly wonderful experience. Experiencing all of the different businesses and industries coming together to be become better knowledgeable about diversity means our workplaces are headed in the right direction for the overall economy.

We are in a day and age where diversity is needed more now than ever. It has been proven that

diversity workforces are more productive and build stronger teams. Companies are working harder to close the knowledge gap about diversity, equity and inclusion. There were so many positive moments from this event. It is important to home in on the training topics and their relevance to the overall DEI message.

Strategic Workforce Planning for DEI: This was led by Dr. Willette S. Burnham-Williams, chief equity officer/assistant professor - Medical University of South Carolina. Her training was excellent in explaining the awareness of unconscious bias, communicating the importance of managing bias, developing a quality strategic training program, acknowledging the holidays of all cultures and much more to create a better workforce.

Allyship Support for all defined: This was led by Ronald L. Harvey, MBA, certified leadership coach, president and chief operating officer of Global Core Strategies. His training was excellent in reminding every business leader that we go much further together. Creating the environment and workplace culture where all people can be seen, heard and valued makes a huge difference. Allyship is so important because it directly refers to the actions, practices and behaviors leaders take to advocate, support and lift others.

Unconscious Bias=Unintended Bias: This was led by Kennon Feaster-Eytchison, Employee Resource Group program manager-Micron Technology. His training was excellent in explaining the presence of unconscious and unintended bias. Unconscious bias in the workplace is the tendency to form an opinion about others in the workplace without having the information. Unintended bias in the workplace is the tendency to interpret and recall information that confirms preexisting beliefs or values. Both biases cause communication barriers in a workplace. Greater awareness is so vital for a more united and diverse workforce.

Diversity & Inclusion Next Frontier-Equity for BIPOC and

Mental Health: This was led by Gianella Quinones, BIPOC & Latinx outreach program director-Spartanburg Area Mental Health Center. Her training was excellent in explaining the mental health barriers for Black, Indigenous People of Color. The disparities of cultural barriers, stigma and less access to care are reasons BIPOC are less likely to get treatment for mental health resources.

When diversity is the focus, we all win. We win when companies are better equipped to embrace and form diverse teams. We win when employees can work, grow and advance in an environment that allows all people equal chance to be in a positive environment. We all win when everyone has equal access to resources. We all win, when we can be seen, heard and valued in our work environments. We win when all people are given the benefit of treated on the strength of their work and merits. When diversity stays the focus, companies, employees, communities and economies win.

Reginal G. Lyerly is the vice president of Information Technology and Sales (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) for the international recruiting firm- DNA Diversity Executive Search headquartered in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. He serves as the senior DEI executive responsible for the areas of Cybersecurity, Veterans, People with Disabilities and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous People of Color). He works and lives in the Raleigh-Durham area (The Triangle Region) of North Carolina.

He proudly supports Diversity, Equity and Inclusion through monthly article contributions through DNA Diversity Executive Search's partnership with Sanford Rose Associates. He is also responsible for the selection and recruitment of cybersecurity training candidates through DNA Diversity Executive Search's training partner with Rochester Cybersecurity. Rochester is the world best known cybersecurity training school, and their credentials are recognized globally.

Lyerly served 23 years in the United States Army and is a combat Veteran. He is a national mortgage loan officer with Capital Federal Credit Union. He can assist families in every U.S. State in the area of mortgage lending. He is also works in the insurance industry and the legal services industry.

He is the only two-time awardee one of the Brightside Promotions' highest honors, the Business Trailblazer Award. He recently served as the chairperson for the 2023 Brightside Marketing Challenge. This platform was responsible for teaching over 19 business owners about the way to better leverage marketing to improve their businesses. Lyerly has been designed as the vice president of Marketing for Brightside Promotions and will start in this capacity in January 2024. He will be responsible for all of the marketing operations for Brightside's B2B and B2C virtual and in-person networking platforms.

2023 DIVERSITY FOCUS TRAINING AND LUNCHEON OVERVIEW

By Diana Murphy-Eaddy, director of Diversity Works Initiatives



Diana Murphy-Eaddy and husband Gregory

At the 2023 Diversity Focus Training and Luncheon, "our hope was to inspire CHANGE, COMMITMENT and ACCOUNTABILITY by 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 was to make DEI goals work actionable, measurable and evidence based. In the end, having more harmonious relationships, centered around varied thought amongst individuals, increases productivity as well as profitability" said Diana M. Murphy-Eaddy director of the non-profit Diversity Works Initiatives.

On Thursday November 9, at the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology on the campus of Florence-Darlington Technical College, Murphy-Eaddy, conference founder, hosted its fifth Biennial Diversity Focus Training and Luncheon, which began at 7 a.m. – 4 p.m. Murphy-Eaddy believes, "this DEI training can help to 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 DEI training will work in helping employees

2023 DFT AND LUNCHEON OVERVIEW CONTINUES WITH PHOTOS



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.

The fifth biennial Diversity Focus Training facilitated by Fortune 500 Company D&I leaders who specialize in their organization's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion component, was sponsored by local companies such as Ruiz Foods, HopeHealth, Spherion Staffing and Recruiting, Food Lion, Thermo Fisher Scientific, MUSC Health, Synergi Partners/ERS, Diversity Works Magazine© and others. During the workshops, we linked the decision makers as well as the "worker bees" to collaborate on how to gain a sense of the attitudes, skills and best practices that culturally competent organizations and individuals demonstrate while offering them the opportunity to discuss challenges, areas of conflict, failures, solutions, strategies and next steps.

In hearing from our Keynote Speaker Greg Jenkins, he had this to say: Venue: beautiful place! My only recommendation would be locating larger breakout spaces as each of the individual classrooms were filled. This is a good problem to have, but if your conference continues to grow, which I believe it will, you'll quickly outgrow the current venue for breakouts.

Food service: without a doubt the lunch served was the best conference food I've ever experienced; excellent!

Breakouts: I was only able to participate in two sessions, but both were well delivered and received; good choice of expert facilitators. Event staff: you have a great team! Everyone I interacted with was professional, helpful and hard working. It was easy to tell that you

and your team believe in this effort; it shows in the execution of the conference.

Community involvement: again, excellent showing here. To have the mayor, and so many other community leaders, along with many sponsors is evidence to the community of the value of your conference; well done!

Take-away: The Diversity Works Magazine conference excels at community engagement and delivery of relevant and insight DEI resources, facilitation and professional networking. This was one of the best DEI conferences I've ever attended.

Workshop Facilitator Kennon Feaster-Eytchison, "I had the pleasure to be a guest speaker at the 2023 Diversity Focus Training. It was exciting to see so many professionals and corporations taking part to help bring the importance of diversity to the forefront! Those attending seemed passionate and committed to diversity efforts! One thing I took away from the event was how much of a need there still is around diversity regarding all underrepresented or marginalized groups especially around the LGBTQ+ community." Ronald Harvey, another facilitator said, "It was an honor to serve and support you and your team. I look forward to collaborating again."

Please be on the lookout for information concerning the next Diversity Focus Training and Luncheon with expectation of being Bigger and Better to be held in November 2025. One of the best training and network opportunities to learn more about fostering diversity, equity and inclusion in our communities, schools and workplaces in order to increase productivity and profitability.



2023—WHAT A YEAR FOR DOWNTOWN FLORENCE! Submitted by the Florence Downtown Development Office Staff



Barringer General Store opened in October 2023

As we ring in the New Year, it's important to take time to reflect upon and celebrate the accomplishments of the past year—and boy did Downtown Florence have a year to celebrate and be grateful for. Here are some of our favorite highlights from 2023 and a look forward to what's coming next in 2024.

First up, we reflect on March 2023, when Downtown

Florence was named a Great American Main Street (GAMSA) Winner by Main Street America and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This incredible honor is bestowed upon just three communities across the nation annually, and Downtown Florence is only the second community in South Carolina to achieve this designation. The first was Greenville, SC in 2003. This designation is a benchmark accomplishment that celebrates the first 20 years of renewed vibrancy in our community as well as promise to continue and expand upon that work.

We also celebrated four incredible milestones in Downtown Florence—the 100th season of the Florence Little Theatre, 75th season of the Florence Symphony Orchestra, and 10th Anniversaries of both Hotel Florence and the Downtown Florence Public Art Program. These milestones represent the steadfast commitment to the arts and revitalization of our downtown core.

Along the same artistic vein, Downtown Florence gained a brand-new mural in the 200 block of N. Dargan Street in 2023 painted by nearly 500 local community members and a professional artist team led by Herman Keith of the South Carolina Rural Arts Project. This vibrant

mural marks the gateway into the Historic African American Business District portion of Downtown Florence and celebrates the contributions of the Thompson family to barbershop culture in the region as well as the symbolism of renowned artist and Florence native, William H. Johnson.

Downtown Florence saw a few businesses close in 2023 for the retirement of their owners, but just as many new businesses opened including Barringer General Store at 138 W. Evans Street, TK's Clothing at 190 N. Dargan Street, the reopening of the Thompson Barber College in the 200 block of N. Dargan Street, and 135 Seafood Bar and Grill at 135 N. Dargan Street. The downtown skyline has also changed with the ongoing construction of the Urban Square parking garage to support the new apartments coming in 2024 in the 300 block of W. Evans Street and some new infill developments beginning in the 100 block of N. Dargan Street that will include commercial and residential uses.

Lastly in 2023, the new Downtown Florence Master Plan was adopted that will guide the work of our Main Street Program and expand the boundaries of redevelopment taking place downtown over the next decade.

As we look ahead to 2024, the future is so bright! The Downtown Florence event season kicks off in late February with the annual Downtown Chocolate Crawl on Friday, February 23. A full event calendar can be found on the downtown website, www.florencedowntown.com. We also look ahead to continued redevelopment of critical historic structures and the opening of several new and diverse businesses currently under construction as this article is written. We also look forward to continued placemaking efforts to make downtown even more inclusive, accessible, and a great place to walk, bike, and enjoy.

For more information on the Downtown Florence Main Street Program and Florence Downtown Development Corp., visit www.florencedowntown.com.



Chris Goss
Head of Pharmaceutical
Development Services,
Florence, SC

SOLVED WITH SOLIDARITY & SCALE

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.

Learn why new and emerging companies put their trust in Thermo Fisher Scientific at thermofisher.com/patheon



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- LOGISTICS SERVICES
- COMMERCIAL MANUFACTURING

TIPS FOR GROWING YOUR BUSINESS IN 2024 AND HOW BBB CAN HELP

Submitted by Mallory Wojciechowski, CEO/president, BBB serving Eastern Carolinas



Mallory Wojciechowski

MYRTLE BEACH - In 2023, Better Business Bureau (BBB) serving Eastern Carolinas had the pleasure of meeting with business owners in our newly expanded service area. As a result of our merger, BBB is a resource for more businesses in our 48-county service area.

Here are some tips for growing your business in 2024 and ways BBB can help you achieve them:

1. Continue building a strong digital footprint. Aside from having a website, ensure you build a solid content marketing

strategy that will help you create valuable content pieces that will drive engagement and sales. That includes a BBB Business Profile, a Google Business profile, and relevant social media platforms.

Video advertising is a vital need for any company looking to strengthen their brand. BBB serving Eastern Carolinas can produce, film and edit video ads for Accredited Businesses anywhere in our 48-county service area at an affordable rate. For more information contact BBB videographer Nick Hill at nhill@bbbec.org.

2. Promote your business consistently. Rather than waiting for the holidays to push larger promotions, find ways that you can creatively promote your business throughout the year. This ensures that you stay top of mind for your target customers. Sixty-two percent of consumers share online deals with friends, exposing your brand to a broader audience.

BBB serving Eastern Carolinas has a podcast called, "The Good Guide to Business." On it, we have conversations with local businesses, organizations and leaders spearheading social and environmental change across our service area. If this fits your business, reach out so we can feature you. If not, search for local podcasts or media that can put you as an expert in your field providing information to the public. For more information about, "The Good Guide to Business" podcast, contact Meredith Radford at mradford@bbbec.org.

3. Personalize the entire buyer journey. The days of communicating "at" your target audience, hoping they will buy from you, are now a thing of the past. Know that 71 percent of consumers feel frustrated when a shopping experience is impersonal. Therefore, personalize the buyer journey by offering products/services based on your customers' purchase behavior and complementary items they can also consider.

BBB offers a lead-generation program which allows consumers to request quotes directly from an accredited businesses' online profile on [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org). This tool can help connect businesses to consumers who are ready to buy!

4. Push customer reviews. Reputation can mean everything, especially for a small business owner trying to attract and retain customers. Approximately 81 percent of consumers say they must trust a brand before buying a product or service. You want to tell customers that your business is trustworthy, ethical and transparent – and what better way to illustrate that story than through online customer reviews?

Every customer review of a business that's submitted through [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org) is fully vetted by BBB staff to ensure its legitimacy, and that an

actual interaction took place between the business and the consumer. Before reviews are posted on business profiles, business owners have the opportunity to respond. It's good practice to respond to both positive and negative reviews. Reviews that are critical of your business are a chance to publicly right a customer service wrong.

5. Build trust. Establishing trust and transparency is crucial to running a successful business. In a market saturated with companies competing for customers, BBB accreditation gives consumers confidence that they are dealing with an ethical and vetted business. The BBB standards for trust remain at the core of BBB and its partners, and today presents an even greater opportunity for online retailers to elevate their brand, build trust and commit to excellence.

Consider adding the BBB Seal next to your company's good name and joining a community of 5,200 trustworthy Accredited Businesses in BBB serving Eastern Carolinas' service area. For more information, visit [bbb.org/get-accredited](https://www.bbb.org/get-accredited).

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](https://www.bbb.org).



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- ✓ My BBB Accreditation is a great value for the investment

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Visit [BBB.org/get-accredited](https://www.bbb.org/get-accredited)

Source: IABBB Research, 2022

PATHWAY TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING COMMUNITY

Submitted by Gladys Thomas



Jazzmyne J. Pipkins

American Sign Language Studio, Business Owner Jazzmyne J. Pipkins' business is the first of its kind in downtown. Pipkins joined the Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce in December 2022. Pipkins' business, American Sign Language Studio was born from her struggle. She grew up hard of hearing and had to learn how to navigate the world with her disability. She grew up as a fighter and learned early how to persevere with difficulties while performing at the same level and

oftentimes at higher levels than her peers.

Pipkins' dream has always been to be a business owner. She was going to let nothing stop her from reaching her dream. She gives thanks to God for favor and foundation from whom all blessings are from and her family who has been nothing but an indestructible support system through all of her trials and victories." Today Pipkins stands as a proud and strong Black businesswoman through all of her trials. She has persevered and attained her goal.

She has had a cochlear implant in the last nine years old and a hearing aid. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting from Gardner-Webb University, a Master of Business Administration from North Greenville University and tax and QuickBooks certification from Francis Marion University and an American Sign Language (ASL) certificate. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. Pipkins said, "After college, returning home with all the experience and degrees, no one would give me a chance. That's really when God spoke

to me to open American Sign Language Studio." Her mother, Gladys Thomas always told her, the sky is the limit and to not let anyone or anything hold you back. For a long time, people didn't acknowledge those who were hard of hearing or deaf.

Pipkins was raised to know that she can do anything that she wants to do, stay the course, stay focused and don't let anyone break you down and you will make it. This is a great place for people to learn American Sign Language to be able to communicate with family and friends, patients and clients. She is located at 174 W. Evans St Florence, SC 29506. It is in downtown Florence. Her email is aslstudio174@gmail.com and her studio phone number is 843-616-0540.



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A large advertisement for American Sign Language Studio. It features a photograph of Jazzmyne Pipkins, the owner, sitting on a stone wall outdoors. To her left is a sign with contact information: "CONTACT: Jazzmyne Pipkins Studio: 843.669.5471 Mobile: 843.616.0540 aslstudio174@gmail.com". To her right is a sign that says "AMERICAN Sign Language STUDIO" with a phone number "843-616-0540". Below the photo, there are several text boxes: "SIGN CLASS PRICING: Adults: \$35/hr Children: \$25/hr", "NEED A BOOKKEEPER? QUICKBOOK services Also Available", "CLASSES WE OFFER: Private and Group In person or virtual Beginner Intermediate Advanced", "By Appointment ONLY", "SIGN UP TO SIGN" with a hand icon, and "Ask about our interpreter services". At the bottom right, it says "Located DOWNTOWN FLORENCE 174 West Evans".



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FLORENCE'S FREEDOM SQUARE WELCOMES THE PEACH COBBLER FACTORY

By Glaciera Brown Mason



As the City of Florence continues to grow, so too does the economic development in the area. The backbone of economic growth remains infrastructure, and local veteran-owned small business, Carolina Enterprises Inc., is investing where they live!

Business Entrepreneur and President of Carolina Enterprises Inc., William Schofield has invested in the long-term growth of Florence County, by erecting a 93,000 sq ft, multi-use facility in the Freedom Square Shopping Center on South Irby Street. Almost 80 years ago when Baron Harold Samuel, founder of one of the UK's largest property companies, coined the phrase, "location, location, location," this is what he meant! Freedom Square Shopping Center is situated on a frequently traveled major commercial street and, in a prime location in Florence, SC. According to [Loopnet.com](https://www.loopnet.com), the Freedom Square Shopping Center is, "One of Florence's most established and well-kept shopping centers." Carolina Enterprises Inc. has seized the opportunity with the vision and follow-up to invest in and redevelop this local property to help grow our city's economy with jobs and opportunity. About the acquisition, and how it helps the city, Schofield, a former city council member and current county council member says, "The south side of Florence is PRIMED for development and has been underserved for too long. The intersection of Second Loop Road and Irby Street is the busiest in the City of Florence. Carolina Enterprises Inc.'s goal is to fully develop its existing 13+ acres into a 170,000 sq ft. Multi-Use Property containing a diverse variety of businesses and entertainment. Our focus is on growth and creating a family friendly environment for all to enjoy." Schofield says his current focus is on enticing and bringing the City of Florence a brand-new grocery store.

With Freedom Square's 93,000 sq ft at 100 percent lease capacity, it welcomes one of its newest small business franchises, The Peach Cobbler Factory, who just recently held its Grand Opening. The Peach Cobbler Factory is owned and operated by Williamsburg County, sibling duo, Jeremy and Naomi Plowden. The Plowdens are natives of Lane, SC. Jeremy Plowden is a retired military veteran, and Diversity Works thanks him for his service. Sister Naomi is co-owner and lives up to the characteristics of her biblical name, of being caring and gracious on a daily basis, as a physician's assistant with the Columbia Veterans Administration Health Care System, in Columbia, SC. Jeremy's free time is spent on hobbies which include fishing, hunting and reading. He is married to Wilson High School Counselor, Marcia Plowden and they share one daughter, Janiya Plowden, who is the couple's pride and joy. Co-owner Naomi Plowden has one son, Nate Harley who is affectionately referred to as a mighty man of valor.

The Peach Cobbler Factory held its grand opening November 18, 2023, with an amazing turnout, where eager customers extended the line around the building! The Plowdens own and operate the 60th franchise location in the world and the fifth in the state of South Carolina, with other locations in Cheraw, Indian Land, Myrtle Beach

and Spartanburg, SC.

The Plowdens were introduced to the concept of purchasing a franchise by a family member who operates three locations in the state of Florida. Chief Executive Officer of The Peach Cobbler Factory, Greg George, while thanking everyone for their support said, "The Plowden family have worked overtime to bring everything to fruition." Subsequently, after much prayer, deliberation and visiting several locations in other states, they felt, "the city of Florence deserved to have a place like this in the community," says Jeremy.

The Peach Cobbler Factory has been creating delightful desserts to satisfy any sweet tooth since 2013 and is committed to providing outstanding customer service. The company's motto is, 'It's a Southern Thing,' however, with southern owners, Jeremy and Naomi shared, "We are here to do more than just offer desserts. We are driven daily,

by the belief that, we have an opportunity to add value to the lives of the community as well as our workforce team."

As a co-business owner, Jeremy expressed his experience working with a diverse workforce, stating, "Being a business owner is a very challenging way of life and you have to make decisions that impact families outside of your own. Working with a diverse workforce has shown me that we all have something to offer for the success of any organization." He says, the most challenging aspect of owning and operating a franchise has been, "building the right team that properly represents the heart of who you



Jeremy Plowden

are." Jeremy shared that after having received hundreds of applications, they just couldn't employ everyone they felt deserved a chance. On the other side, however, he says, the best part of his day-to-day responsibilities as an owner is, "talking with the young people that are a part of the team, hearing about their day and seeing them grow as individuals." Plowden attributes bringing something fun, safe and enjoyable to our city as the inspiration that keeps him going.

To future business entrepreneurs who may be considering a venture into franchise ownership, Plowden says, "find something that you are willing to work harder at than anyone else; stay longer than anyone else and give more than anyone else. Then find a way it can help others."

The Plowdens want the public to know, The Peach Cobbler Factory offers an array of delicious, sweet treats from multiple varieties of cobbler to cookies, cinnamon rolls to milkshakes and much more to satisfy every craving. They invite you to dine in, take out or place a catering or delivery order. They are open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., daily

with delivery until 11 p.m. The Peach Cobbler Factory is located in the Freedom Square Shopping Center, located at 1605 S Irby Street, Suite A, Florence, SC. For more information and a complete menu of tasty treats served, visit peachcobblerfactory.com.



LAKE CITY SC

YOUR CITY MATTERS



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YOUR CITY MATTERS: LAKE CITY PROJECTS IN REVIEW

Submitted by Donna Tracy, public information officer/Photos by City of Lake City



Wastewater treatment plant and lab - Upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant include the finished construction of two new aeration basins (left) and a new water testing lab that is nearing completion.

Mayor Yamekia Robinson. “That goal is to make sure we keep Lake City moving in the right direction for growth, and that entails developing our housing, infrastructure, economic opportunities, youth engagement and all future endeavors.”

To accomplish that goal, the City of Lake City administration has been working all year establishing new relationships/partnerships as well as strengthening existing bonds to help support Lake City’s growth and development.

“The staff is preparing City of Lake City for the future and leaving the past behind, as we focus on several key highlights of our ongoing efforts,” said William A. Hall, city administrator. “We have many projects in progress and are working on additional efforts that will enhance our community, pave the way for growth and help us continue providing quality services to the City of Lake City.”

LAKE CITY—Reducing flooding, improving wastewater infrastructure and revitalizing our community are top priorities for the City of Lake City. With several projects coming close to completion, and more in planning, the city is making progress and, on the path, to make Lake City the place to live, work, play and visit.

“We have a simple goal, and it is one that we all share,” said Lake City

NEARING COMPLETION Wastewater Treatment Upgrades

The completion of a \$15 million upgrade to our wastewater treatment plant is a significant milestone for the city. The construction of two new aeration basins and the replacement of aging equipment at the facility improves treatment of discharged wastewater and ensures the efficient and sustainable management of our city’s wastewater infrastructure. The project broke ground in October 2021, promotes environmental responsibility, and helps safeguard the well-being of our community for years to come.

The upcoming completion of an additional \$1.25 million investment in the plant’s lab also enhances the capabilities and functionality of our wastewater treatment processes. This upgrade represents a significant step towards ensuring the highest quality standards in wastewater management.



New home construction—Construction crews work on the framing of new three-bedroom, two-bath homes in Lake City. Built on city-owned residential lots, three homes are nearing completion and construction on another two (pictured below) is making progress.

“We are also investing in our people to ensure that the future operations of these new facilities will benefit the community for years to come,” said Hall. “By providing access to professional development and in-depth on-the-job training for our staff, we safeguard the city staffs’ collective knowledge and ensure smooth operations continue into our future.”

Beautification and Housing

In an ongoing commitment to community revitalization, the

YOUR CITY MATTERS CONT'D

city wrapped up demolition of more than a dozen blighted properties recently. The structures, safety hazards and community eyesores, were removed through collaboration with property owners and funding from a Community Block Development Grant.

"Clearing the properties offers the owners a clean slate," said Hall. "Whether they choose to keep their lots clear or to invest by building a new home, the removal of the dangerous structures provides the neighborhood with a renewed opportunity for community growth." Plans to apply for a second block grant to address blight in other areas of the city are in motion.

Additionally, the city is working with Florence County and community partners to remove the dilapidated motel on Hwy 52 that has been an eyesore in the city for many years. The physical processes for clearing the property are already moving forward and should be completed by the spring.

While the clearing of the privately owned lots provides opportunities for the owners, new single-family homes are being built on residential lots owned by the city. The first of these homes are in final phases of construction and in early 2024, are expected to welcome their new homeowners.

Cole Road- Hall describes the ongoing renovations of the future Cole Road Community Center to Mike Tongour, a federal government specialist, during a tour of the construction which is scheduled for completion by March 2024. City leaders recently travelled to Washington, D.C., to ask for support for an expansion of the project that will add a multipurpose facility in the future.

Providing Community

Our commitment to community engagement and enrichment is exemplified by the upcoming \$3.7 million reconstruction of the Cole Road Community Center. This project is on track for completion in March, providing a state-of-the-art facility for various community events and activities.

"We are also working diligently to secure a \$5 million federal earmark application for a Cole Road Multipurpose Facility that will expand the community center," said Hall. "This funding will be used to create a hub for recreational activities, events and community gatherings."

PLANNED PROJECTS

While the above projects are nearing completion, conversations have already been in the works for additional projects to come. Dedicated efforts to applying for additional grants and building support for Lake City's needs have been at the top of the city administration's agenda. Among those grants are

EDA Grant Application for Stormwater Improvements

The city has submitted a \$14.8 million grant application to the Economic Development Administration for vital stormwater improvements on Acline Street. This grant focuses on addressing flooding issues from Hwy 52 to Thomas Street. The application is currently under review, and Hall said he is encouraged by the overwhelming support from various stakeholders the city has received.

Hwy 52 Corridor Stormwater Project Expansion

"We are also actively working to extend the Hwy 52 corridor stormwater project to encompass the areas behind the CVS pharmacy," said Hall. "This expansion will significantly mitigate flooding concerns in the region, providing a safer and more resilient environment for our residents and businesses."

Blanding Street Park Improvements

While the city is already relocating the Graham Road sewer pump to address environmental concerns, alleviate the use of septic tanks, enhance facilities at Blanding Street Park and improve the overall well-being of the community, additional projects are in the works.

"We are in the process of preparing an application for grant funds to construct a bathroom facility and concession stand on the backside of Blanding Street Park," said Hall. "This will complement the new multipurpose fields being prepared and offer enhanced recreational amenities for our community."

South Carolina Infrastructure Investment Program Grants

Infrastructure is the foundation of a city and Lake City's administration is actively pursuing a grant to support various projects, including:

- Water line extension on Hwy 52 to attract more development opportunities.
- Construction of an industrial sewer pump station on Cole Road for the City Community Center/Multi-Purpose Center, fostering future growth in this area.
- Acquisition of headworks equipment for wastewater treatment to ensure efficient and environmentally responsible operations.
- Martha Law sewer line replacement and upgrade.

"These projects not only demonstrate our dedication to improving the quality of life for our residents but also exemplify the responsible stewardship of resources for the betterment of our city. As we continue to forge ahead with developing Lake City as a place to live, work and visit, we invite our residents, local businesses and partners to join us in shaping a brighter future," said Hall.

"Lake City is growing. We are a city that has many different needs and our citizens' concerns are our concerns daily," said Robinson. "We look forward to working with everyone to make sure that the needs of the city are met to the best of our ability by coming together in unity. Unity is our strength and direct path to success."

For updates on city projects, visit our website at [LakeCitySC.gov](https://www.lakecitysc.gov) or follow us on our Facebook page at City of Lake City Inc.

LAKE CITY STAFF RECOGNIZED FOR SERVICE MILESTONES

LAKE CITY—Some say that your place of work is a home away from home, and for many coworkers, coworkers become a second family. On December 8, the City of Lake City family gathered at the Bean Market for an afternoon of employee appreciation and to recognize those members reaching service milestones in our community. Celebrating milestones are:



More than two dozen Lake City employees were recognized for their years of service, Dec. 8, during the annual employee appreciation luncheon. Photos credits to City of Lake City Joey McDonald and Jonathan Lester

25+ Years

Malachia Singletary
Ricky Sims
Cynthia Mallette
Calvin Smith
Tyrone Eaddy
Jackie McFadden
LaPortia Brown

20+ Years

Thomas Black
Lemuel Capers
Randy Driggers

15+ Years

Eugene Wallace
William A. Hall
Gerrett Brown
Delvin Sutton
Patrick Miles
Vicky McGill

10+ Years

Tony Singletary Jr.
Steven Franklin
Sterlin Mallette
Gloria Washington

Rhonda Housand

5+ Years

Michael B. Johnson
Tommy Spates
Phillip Thames
Jordan Burgess
Maxie Cooper
Christopher Horton
NeKeycha Izzard
Drew Godwin
Josey Gamble

TRINITY BEHAVIORAL CARE AND THE PDRTA CELEBRATE LOCAL PARTNERSHIP



Photo of Trinity & PDRTA at Trinity's Dillon facility

DILLON – With a newly wrapped bus the Pee Dee Rural Transportation Authority (PDRTA) and Trinity Behavioral Care mark their half-decade partnership providing public transportation in rural Marion, Dillon and Marlboro Counties and celebrate Trinity's fifty years of service to those communities.

Trinity, and the statewide system of county substance use disorder prevention and treatment providers, was formed in 1973. "Each of our counties created their Commissions on Alcohol and Drug Abuse via ordinance in October of that year," Donny Brock, Trinity's executive director explained. "In what is now seen as very progressive, the three commissions merged over time into one modern efficient organization adopting its current name in 2007." For fifty years Trinity has provided outpatient counseling out of its offices in Marion, Dillon and Bennettsville as well as community and school-based prevention services throughout the area. Trinity's response to our current opiate crisis has been recognized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the White House's Office of Drug Control Policy as a model for rural communities. "We are also very proud of our new Marion and Dillon facilities and the PDRTA's commitment to provide

our clients front door access to the care we provide." Trinity is also constructing a new facility in Bennettsville, expected to open late 2024.

The PDRTA's efforts to provide rural transportation in our outer most counties involve leveraging community partnerships. "Rural area transportation comes with a unique set of challenges. Valuable partnerships, like that with Trinity, allow our community-based organizations to reach shared goals. Local funding allows PDRTA to leverage federal dollars to maximize impact and facilitate essential community connections," said Don Strickland, PDRTA's Executive Director. "Together, Trinity and PDRTA are providing a path to recovery and treatment."

PDRTA provides public transportation in six counties: Florence, Chesterfield, Darlington, Marlboro, Marion and Dillon spanning over 3,500 square miles. By service area, the transportation authority covers the largest area in South Carolina and is the third largest in the nation. Founded in 1974, PDRTA was the first transportation authority formed in the state of South Carolina. Along with other plans for growth and route expansion, PDRTA's fifty years of service is on the horizon in 2024.

Ready for an experience you won't forget?

Your co-op has two amazing trips planned this summer. Juniors: Apply for the Washington Youth Tour. Sophomores: Apply for the Cooperative Youth Summit.

Juniors: Experience Washington, D.C., with hundreds of students from across South Carolina and the country, meeting lawmakers and touring all the sights. Your electric co-op will cover your round-trip plane ticket, tours and meals. In other words, it's all free!

Sophomores: Experience South Carolina's capital like never before. Tour the Statehouse, meet lawmakers and see how co-ops are preparing for our state's energy future. Plus, there's plenty of fun with visits to popular Columbia attractions like Riverbanks Zoo & Garden. Your electric co-op will cover all your expenses.

We've made it easy to apply for either FREE trip. Apply today!



Washington Youth Tour: June 15-20, 2024



Cooperative Youth Summit: July 15-18, 2024



Applications available: santee.org/washington-youth-tour
Application Deadline: February 23, 2024



ARE YOU MAKING EXECUTIVE DECISIONS WITH EASE? Submitted by Coach Temple Robinson



Coach Temple Robinson

Leadership coaching is the most effective professional development tool used to support executives. Its inception is rooted in human growth and development. When business executives need help identifying, focusing and gaining clarity for their mission, professional coaches can assist. As a result, leaders are equipped to better problem-solve, lead with compassion, and support their team.

A colleague was offered the opportunity to become a company vice president. With ten years longevity, this promotion was based on her years of education and experience. She was hesitant and seriously considered staying in her current role. She needed support in thinking through the situation. We've all experienced being at a professional crossroad and needed support.

The company had recently transitioned and was not local. Staff changes were occurring all around and respected coworkers she trusted and had relied on, were leaving. From her perspective, it was a recipe for disaster, stress and unsuccess.

This scenario is not uncommon for many executives. A challenge is good; however, most leaders want to see themselves as successful with a positive impact. Change can be uncomfortable and often makes challenging decisions more complex. As a leader, when tumultuous times and situations arise, a professional leadership coach can help gain clarity and focus to make significant and important decisions. Make decisions based on your guiding principles, those character traits that define who you are and allows you to make decisions in alignment with what is most important to you. They provide clarity, focus and



ease when experiencing confusion. For my colleague, her guiding principles included being truthful, loyal, transparent, practical and a visionary. Ultimately, she was able to determine what was important, as well as

creatively problem-solve to determine her next steps with ease to have the most impact for her career and her organization.

Leaders are unique people. Every leader has his or her own set of guiding principles. The benefit of professional coaching is to assist in gaining better clarity, focus and ease in determining your next best steps, professionally or personally. When executives experience clarity, it is much easier to accomplish organizational goals.

Temple Robinson is a native of Durham, NC and currently resides in Florence, SC. Her professional background includes leadership and organizational development, human resources, labor and education. Coach Temple earned her bachelor's degree in business education from North Carolina A&T State University and a master's degree in human resource development from Clemson University. She is also a professionally trained coach from one of the most rigorous training programs, the Academy for Coaching Excellence, which is an ICF accredited professional coaching training program.

For more insight on how coaching can benefit your organization; how to develop and fortify your leadership team's decision making with ease and confidence, contact Temple Robinson Coaching at coachtemple@templerobinson.com or visit templerobinson.com. Temple Robinson Coaching is available for individual or group consultations.

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WOMEN OF PFG - PERFORMANCE FOODSERVICE FLORENCE CHAPTER

Performance Foodservice (PFS) - Florence is committed to providing a great environment for our associates. PFS Florence understands the value of a diverse workforce and creating a culture of inclusion and belonging. The parent company, Performance Food Group, established Associate Resource Groups (ARG) for employees to find connection and support. The first ARG was the Women of PFG. The focus areas for the Women of PFG are career development and amplifying women's voices. Performance Foodservice - Florence launched the Women of PFG - Florence chapter, Associate Resource Group (ARG), led by women from every area of our Company - Alexis Barnes, district sales manager (Sales), Sheri Clark, contracts area (Sales), Elizabeth Rowley, warehouse coordinator (Operations) and Elizabeth Watford, human resources generalist (Administration).



Elizabeth Watford



Elizabeth Rowley

Watford is a human resources generalist at Performance Foodservice.

"I am proud to co-lead the Women of PFG-Florence Chapter. Diversity, inclusion, and belonging is important to an organization's success. Recruiting, hiring and retaining a diverse workforce leads to creative solutions, increased productivity and happiness and lower turnover rates. At Performance Florence, we have a One Team concept that celebrates our diversity as a group and the inclusion and belonging of all. We all benefit when we bring our unique experiences, ideas and skills to work. I am happy to be a part of a company that is committed to diversity, inclusion and belonging, and I am confident that the work of the Women of PFG will further those initiatives."

Rowley has been with PFG for seven years and currently serves as a warehouse coordinator.

"Diversity is especially important because ALL people have different views and as we all come together, we can accomplish anything. I also look forward to doing more things within our community."



Alexis Barnes



Sheri Clark

Barnes serves as a district sales manager.

"I was honored when I was asked to join the PFS team four and a half years ago as an area manager. In less than two years, I have become a district sales manager. I consider myself to be one of the lucky ones who was able to merge work with my passion for delicious food. Food positively impacts people's lives, and being a part of the Women of PFG is one way that I can do the same."

Clark is the contracts manager for Performance Foodservice - Florence.

"I have been with the company since 2004, holding several positions during that time. Everyone has a unique voice that should be heard. Diversity, inclusion and belonging is a vital role in a company's success. Without these key components, the progress and success of a company as well as an individual within the company is limited. I am proud to co-lead the Committee for the Women of PFG - Florence Chapter and to be a part of a growing company that values what each employee brings to the table."

Performance Foodservice - Florence delivers thousands of ingredients and related products to restaurant owners, big and small. Performance Foodservice is Performance Food Group's largest segment (PFG). PFG is an industry leader and one of North America's largest food and food service distribution companies. PFG's dedicated associates are committed to building strong relationships with the valued customers, suppliers and communities we serve (www.pfgc.com).

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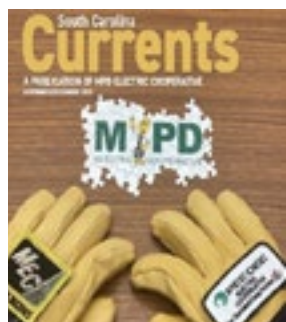
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**More Reliable
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BETTER TOGETHER: TWO LEGENDARY ELECTRIC CO-OPERATIVES BECOME ONE

Submitted by MPD Staff



Some things are just better together. Peanut butter and jelly..... Barbie and Ken.....pineapple and pizza..... Well, maybe not everyone will agree on that last one. But what everyone can agree on is that Marlboro Electric and Pee Dee Electric, while wonderful and special apart, are better together!

When you get your next power bill, you'll notice an impressive new name at the top. Thanks to the recent merger

that members collectively approved, the name of your electric cooperative has now officially changed to MPD.

Our shiny new name change is already looking really spiffy on our trucks, buildings, hats and uniforms. But one thing that hasn't changed is our continued commitment to you, our members. You'll work with the same helpful and friendly staff in our offices and the same dedicated linemen in the field. We'll all enjoy having access to more employees to speed our response time, and you won't even need to change your routine or fiddle with the map app on your phone. Our physical office will remain open in Bennettsville, and you'll love walking through the door of our inviting new location in Florence.

And here's an even bigger headline and reason to celebrate: MPD Electric Cooperative now has the lowest utility rates in South Carolina, and the lowest co-op in the Southeast!

"This smart and foresighted merger positions your electric cooperative to create even more economic benefits, long-term efficiencies and better reliability for the entire membership," said William Fleming, Jr., president and CEO of MPD. "All of us can be proud that our combined service area has created one of the largest geographical territories of

any cooperative in the state of South Carolina with the efficiencies and effectiveness that should stand the test of time, God willing."

That was then...

Our legacy co-ops made their mark on history after President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Rural Electrification Act (REA) in 1936. Cities like Charleston and Columbia had enjoyed power for almost 50 years, but for farmers and others in the rural areas of the Pee Dee, electricity seemed like a



dream. Running power lines for miles to serve three or four families didn't make economic sense for investor-owned utilities with shareholders from all over the world dictating investment strategy. Imagine how hard it would have been to look across the horizon from Mechanicsville or Society Hill and see the bright lights of cities like Darlington while you were still challenged to light your home with oil lamps.

After the REA enabled electric cooperatives to, "turn on the lights," across the nation, South Carolina received a loan to build 511 miles of power lines in 22 counties, serving more than 2,000 farms, ready to power the growth of South Carolina's vital agricultural



BETTER TOGETHER CONT'D

industry.

Pee Dee Electric Cooperative's legacy organization was up and running in 1939. Once based in downtown Darlington, it grew to provide electrical power to residential and industrial members in Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Lee and Marion Counties. Marlboro Electric Cooperative was founded soon afterwards in 1940. From its base in Bennettsville, it excelled at providing electrical power in Marlboro and Dillon Counties.



This is now...

Today as cooperatives across the nation face rising prices and the evolution of the industry, MPD is poised to serve as a model of excellence. Our efforts to work hand-in-hand over the past three years to combine forces reflect our board's commitment to serve our membership better than ever.

Going forward, our dedication to member service will be unprecedented. Our priorities will include quicker response time and faster power restoration, along with fewer service interruptions. Our community service and education commitment will

continue to include scholarship support for the hard-working students who will become our leaders of industry and the resilient backbone of our community.

All MPD members will now have access to:

--The SmartHub App, a convenient connection that makes it easier for you to get energy usage and power outage information, as well as to pay your bills.

--Operation Round-Up, an initiative to help MPD members support other members who are faced with trying circumstances, as well as non-profit organizations that provide greatly needed services. Being a part of the solution is as easy as rounding up to the next dollar when you pay your power bill.

--MPD's Power to Serve, a charity founded to give back to MPD Electric communities through donations and service projects such as wheelchair ramps for people with disabilities, an annual Christmas party for those with special needs and much more.

--And many programs and benefits that can be found on our website MPD.coop

"As illustrated by the six rate decreases that have benefitted MPD members since MEC and PDEC first joined forces in September of 2020, we are clearly better together and stronger than ever," said Bo McInnis, chairman of the board of MPD.

Now that the new gloves are on, the puzzle pieces of our merger are all in place, and we've made our new name official, there's nothing we can't accomplish together.

The best is yet to come!!

DEIB: FORGET THE LETTERS: FOCUS ON THE PEOPLE

Submitted By Simma Lieberman



You may have seen or heard the acronym DEIB, or maybe DEI, or maybe JEDI, or maybe something else. You may have heard people get outraged when a letter is left out.

But too often, the complainants are so wrapped up in criticizing the person who left out a letter, they forget the focus needs to be on the actual people in the organization.

DEIB stands for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, and it's supposed to capture the essence of what we need to do to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

Just knowing the letters and spouting slogans, however, doesn't equal deep

understanding, nor knowing how to put it into practice.

DEIB+++ Alphabet Soup

If you're feeling confused or overwhelmed by the alphabet soup of DEIB+++ , you're not alone.

Many leaders and organizations struggle to understand and implement the concepts behind the letters. They get caught up in the semantics and the politics, and they lose sight of the people. The people who work for them, with them and around them. People who have different backgrounds, cultures, experiences and perspectives. The people who have unique skills, talents and potential. The people who want to feel part of something greater than themselves.

I've always said that no matter how long people are at work, everyone wants to feel part of something greater than themselves, they want to feel part of a community. That community is called your organization, your department or your team.

It's not the letters. Focus on the people. Because that's what inclusive leadership is about. It's about developing a deep understanding of what it means to create a culture and a community where everyone feels they belong. It's about recognizing and celebrating diversity, ensuring equity, fostering inclusion and cultivating belonging. It's about transforming the way you think, feel and act towards other

people, and inspiring them to do the same.

But how do you do that? How do you become an inclusive leader from the inside out?

Here are three steps you can take to start your journey:

Action 1: Reflect on your own identity and experience.

Before you can understand and appreciate other people's identities and experiences, understand and appreciate your own. Know your own biases, assumptions, and blind spots, and how they affect your decisions, behaviors and results. Identify areas where you need to learn, grow and improve, and seek feedback and support. Discover your own sources of inclusion and belonging, and what makes you feel part of a community. Then you are better equipped to create an inclusive culture for everyone.

Action 2: Listen to and learn from other people's stories.

One of the best ways to understand and appreciate what other people need is to hear their experiences, which builds empathy, trust and connection. Stories help you see the world from their perspective. Stories can also help you discover the commonalities and shared values that unite us as human beings.

You'll be more able to feel and act inclusively and create a caring community where people will want to come to work every day and share their genius. They will feel that connection with you.

Share your own stories and invite others to join you in your journey. The most successful leaders develop an innate sense of what their employees need. That's when you become an inclusive leader from the inside out.



Action 3: Create and sustain a culture of inclusion and belonging.

The goal of, 'Inclusive Leadership from The Inside Out,' is to make human connections with other people. Then they will help build and sustain a culture that continues to welcome new people who are excited to contribute from day one.



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HONDA
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HONDA PRESENTED THE TURKEY RUN IN TIMMONSVILLE

Submitted by Honda South Carolina Manufacturing (SCM)



Established in 2012, the Honda Turkey Run offers two USA Track & Field (USATF) certified courses that encompass the Honda S.C. Manufacturing campus and circle through the town of Timmons ville.

TIMMONSVILLE— Honda South Carolina Manufacturing (SCM) is excited to announce the return of the Honda Turkey Run, in November. A fun and family-friendly fall event, the Honda Turkey Run is focused on fundraising for Florence County residents in need byway of an annual 5K, 10K and 20K run/walk event that starts and finishes at the Honda manufacturing facility in Timmons ville.

Established in 2012, the Honda Turkey Run offers two USA Track & Field (USATF) certified courses that encompass the Honda SCM campus and circle through the town of Timmons ville.

All registered participants received an event T-shirt and finisher medal. Additionally, a special-edition trophy was awarded to the top three winners in each age/gender category and race. It was open to the public and all races were open for virtual participation this year as well.

“The Honda Turkey Run has been a staple

in the Timmons ville community for many years, and after a brief hiatus, we knew it was time to bring it back,” said Travis Lee, Honda SCM site lead. “This event benefits the community where Honda associates live and work, and we are proud to host a fun event that can help bring joy and supplies to families in need during the holidays.”



Emma Kate Hendrix is awarded a second-place trophy in the Honda Turkey Run 10K with a time of 54:48. All registered participants in the Honda Turkey Run received an event T-shirt and finisher medal. Additional prizes included Honda branded sweatshirts, gift cards and special-edition trophies.

Each year, the Honda Turkey Run selects one local nonprofit organization to benefit from funds raised for the event. This year, Harvest Hope Food Bank was the designated nonprofit, and in addition to proceeds benefitting Harvest Hope, there were also food donations collected onsite at Honda SCM on the day of the event.

“We’re so grateful to Honda for supporting us, especially during the holiday season as the need for food access rises,” stated CEO Erinn Rowe, Harvest Hope Food Bank. “Events like the Honda Turkey Run help support our mission

– to eliminate hunger and food insecurity in South Carolina.”

All donations to Harvest Hope Food Bank are tax deductible. Run participants who wanted to donate nonperishable food items the day of the event were encouraged to provide canned vegetables, fruits, meats and tomato products, cereal, oatmeal, potatoes, dry pasta and mixes and individually wrapped snacks.

Registration fees for the Honda Turkey Run range from \$40 to \$55 depending on race selection. Participants can save on cost by pre-registering for the event.

The first 50 runners/walkers to register did receive a complimentary Honda beanie hat.

To register or to learn more about the Honda Turkey Run, please visit bit.ly/HondaTurkeyRun. Keep up with the Honda Turkey Run by following their event page on Facebook (fb.com/hondaturkeyrun).



Over 80 walkers and runners participated in the 2023 Honda Turkey Run, a fun and family-friendly fall event that was held on Saturday, Nov. 18 at the Honda manufacturing facility in Timmons ville. Proceeds from the Honda Turkey Run benefit Harvest Hope Food Bank.



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LET'S GET TO WORK.

PERSON-CENTERED LEADERSHIP By Susan Carter



Kristi Hylan

Kristi Hylan has worked at Automatic Data Processing (ADP) for 13 years. ADP has been a leader in human capital management for over 70 years. The Florence facility specializes in federal incentives with a focus on the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). WOTC is a Federal tax credit available to employers for hiring and employing individuals from certain targeted groups who have faced significant barriers to employment.

Her current role is to lead a compliance team that performs the essential role of ensuring that client authorizations are performed timely and accurately. Other hats Hylan wears include serving as audit coordinator and data security manager, answering any privacy questions that clients have. Throughout her tenure at ADP, Hylan has excelled as a team leader, engaging her staff through positive role modeling, and taking a sincere interest in them as individuals.

Hylan began her career at Fidelity Investments in Raleigh, NC, where she initially tried out some of the non-traditional leadership skills she still uses today. She used her experiences there to, “anticipate feelings teams might have,” so that she could explain why management makes decisions and changes processes that may be initially unpopular with employees. Hylan says that empathizing with her team about discomfort with change and then explaining the reasons for and benefits of new strategies keeps her team feeling valued and energized to do their best every day. Hylan has a naturally sunny disposition—her team refers to her outlook as, “rainbows and puppies,” which builds trust and friendship with her co-workers who enjoy feeling, “stuck together,” whatever the workplace asks of them. Hylan knows that her team has her back, and she has theirs. For example, when her team was asked to take on a new, difficult project completely different from their regular duties, Hylan was able to bring her team together by explaining why the decision was made, pointing out that they were asked to take on this assignment because they excelled at their current duties and leaders recognized that their group would be able to, “get it done.” Once her team understood that they were given the new role, “for a reason,” everyone pitched in and applied their usual excellence to making sure the project was executed flawlessly.

Hylan enjoys the flexibility ADP allows her to “lead in a non-corporate way.” She cares about her employees as people, and it is important to her that they are “engaged and happy.” Hylan emphasizes to her staff that she does not want their work life to affect their home life and she regularly checks in with them to ensure that they feel supported. Evidence of her effective leadership skills is shown in that her team consists of the same, “tight group,” people she started working with when she joined the company. Low turnover is a hallmark of ADP from top to bottom as many of the leaders have worked and collaborated together during the past 13 years. Each year Hylan arranges several team building activities for her staff, including a holiday party in December and outside of the office events such as birthday lunches and trips to Broadway at the Beach. Co-worker gratitude for each other is encouraged and recognized through, “My Moments,” in which team members note helpful and kind acts their co-workers have done on the intra-agency portal so that all can be aware and give them praise for exemplifying the values of the company and their team.

Originally hired to lead a team of, “performance improvement experts,” Hylan’s team was asked to shift to a new and complex project before the pandemic. ADP was tasked with replacing necessary paperwork and authorizations” As this was a huge undertaking, Hylan’s

team was chosen to complete the daunting task because of their proven track record of teamwork and excellence under her consistent leadership. Unsurprisingly, Hylan’s team pulled off the assignment successfully and clients didn’t experience any issues despite the team’s lack of experience. Because of her team’s success, they never went back to their previous role of performance improvement and are still engaged in compliance delivery initiatives today.

Hylan sums up her leadership philosophy as, “don’t forget about the person,” and cites ADP Vice President of Operations, Ali Parker, as a mentor. Parker is “knowledgeable, approachable and down to earth.” As a result of Parker’s example, Hylan uses the same accessible style with her team and co-workers. Hylan also credits her husband, Shawn Hylan, ADP senior director, with being the first leader she worked with to have a “true, open-door policy,” in which he is available to, “talk to anyone about anything, listen and give honest feedback.”

Away from work, Hylan enjoys spending time with her family, including her husband, 26-year-old son, six-year-old daughter as well as her father who has recently relocated to Florence. Her favorite activities include traveling with family to Biltmore, Dollywood and especially, Disney World. She also looks forward to volunteering with several non-profit organizations in the future.



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FULL LIFE. FULL FORWARD. IN FULL EFFECT FOR 2024! *Submitted by the City of Florence*

The City of Florence's brand slogan, "Full Life, Full Forward," was in full effect for 2023. The city's Downtown efforts, not going unrecognized, received the prestigious honor of being the recipient of the Great American Main Street Award for Excellence in downtown revitalization. Through strategic initiatives, the city's downtown has transformed its reputation, now perceived as a vibrant place of business enjoyed by locals and visitors alike.

In 2023, the city consulted with AECOM engineers on multiple projects, emphasizing public safety and enhancing quality of life. Several neighborhoods in the City of Florence service area have either received or are scheduled to receive new service lines and AMI water meters to improve water service. As part of the City's ongoing efforts to upgrade water system infrastructure, additional projects involved installing around 2,596 linear feet of new six-inch water line along East Howe Springs Road and approximately 2,964 linear feet of new six-inch water line, accompanied by 20 linear feet of new 12-inch water line, along John Paul Jones Road. Continuing their work into 2024, the city plans to collaborate further with AECOM to assess and develop suitable work strategies, ensuring high-quality water and sewer services for current needs while establishing a growth plan through 2040.

As a result of the "Third Penny Sales Tax," the third time voters have approved a one-cent sales tax for capital improvement projects, the city has been able to continue moving forward with its endeavor to improve over 170 streets and four intersections focusing on resurfacing streets, reducing traffic and increasing multimodal safety for cars, cyclists and pedestrians alike. Construction is set to continue as scheduled with the bids already under review for 2024. For more information regarding the completed and upcoming construction, visit the "Third Penny Sales Tax Project Portal" on the city's website under the, "Capital Improvements," tab on the homepage at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c5e0ad25ffae4bb7bc47385882863cf7>.

The City of Florence experienced continued success with its educational campaigns to enhance residents' understanding of local governance and community engagement. CityU's comprehensive six-week program offers a profound insight into the municipality's inner workings. Participants acquire in-depth knowledge about City Council functions, administrative procedures, city operations and budget planning processes. Those who complete the course will have the opportunity to attend a City Council Meeting and receive an official CityU Graduation Certificate.

Additionally, the Citizen's Police Academy, another prominent six-week program, provides an immersive experience in the Police Department's internal operations. Through live demonstrations and presentations by experienced officers, participants gain valuable insights into law enforcement practices, fostering transparency and trust between the community and the police department. Graduates of this program develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for local law enforcement, while the police department benefits from strengthened relationships with the city's residents.

In June of 2023, AESC, in partnership with BMW, commenced construction on their new \$810 million EV battery plant in Florence, SC, set to create 1,170 jobs. Alongside this groundbreaking project, additional utility infrastructure work is imperative to effectively service the plant and facilitate future economic development within the Technology Park. This collaborative effort involves the SC Department of Commerce, Florence County Economic Development, Florence County and the City of Florence. Expanding the water and sewer utility system is crucial to this comprehensive project. It involves constructing and installing essential infrastructure, such as 8,750 linear feet of 24-inch water main, 7,900 linear feet of 30-inch gravity wastewater line, 30,215 linear feet of 30-inch wastewater force main and a 12 million-gallon-per-day pump station. The construction of this infrastructure is scheduled to begin in early 2024.

The Florence Sports Complex celebrated its grand opening in March

FULL LIFE CONT'D



Florence Sports Complex

facility. Thanks to the city's dedication, revenue from sports tourism totaled \$11.75 million for 2023, marking a significant increase from the \$7.1 million generated in 2019.

So, what's ahead in 2024? Capitalizing on the recent success of being awarded the Great American Main Street Award for Excellence in Downtown Revitalization, The City of Florence has adopted Downtown Florence 2030. Significant work has been accomplished in the last ten years, and Downtown Florence 2030 will continue to propel the community forward into the next decade. The plan proposes a series of new programs,



Water System Upgrades

2023. The home of the Florence Flamings is now accompanied by 5 LED-lighted Little League Baseball Fields, an LED-lighted high school regulation diamond and an LED-lighted track and field facility. Thanks to the city's dedication, revenue from sports tourism totaled \$11.75 million for 2023, marking a significant increase from the \$7.1 million generated in 2019.

So, what's ahead in 2024? Capitalizing on the recent success of being awarded the Great American Main Street Award for Excellence in Downtown Revitalization, The City of Florence has adopted Downtown Florence 2030. Significant work has been accomplished in the last ten years, and Downtown Florence 2030 will continue to propel the community forward into the next decade. The plan proposes a series of new programs, development strategies and opportunities to create green spaces and bring much-needed housing to downtown with over 1,000 new apartments to accommodate residents of all ages, backgrounds and socioeconomic levels.

The City of Florence has also

adopted the Stormwater Master Plan, estimated to be completed by the summer of 2024. With the City of Florence having experienced numerous high-intensity storm events over the past several years, the City Council has authorized \$7 million with additional funding secured through the CDBG Mitigation Grants, raising the budget to \$18 million to address stormwater flooding. Through investigations and preliminary evaluations, improvements, including removing roots, sediment, mud, and trash from the existing pipes, performing necessary pipe repairs, and adding new inlets to increase capacity and reduce flooding, will be made to the following areas: St. Anthony and College Park, Sandhurst, Tarleton Estates Culverts, Malden Drive, Cannon Street Outfall, Thomas Road Outfall, Rebecca Street Outfall, Pennsylvania Street Outfall, Dargan and Elm Street Culverts, Cheves Street Underpass Culvert, Oakland Avenue, Wisteria, and Timrod Park.

Throughout 2023, the City of Florence has prioritized enhancing communication with its residents. We have actively listened to your feedback through a conducted survey and during the first quarter of 2024, residents of the City will gain access to our new chatbot. The public will now be able to communicate with the City via webchat and receive crucial push notifications concerning boil water advisories, water outages, public safety alerts, event updates, and more. This initiative allows you to communicate with the City easily by text and receive instant alerts. The City of Florence remains committed to improving communication, ensuring its residents stay well-informed about everything related to Florence.

As in recent years, the City's success is a direct result of critical partnerships and collaborations, which will remain a top priority as Florence advances into 2024. The City will continue to be diligent in addressing citizen concerns. Water quality will be of utmost importance as the City continues to update and enhance its infrastructure. With plans already in place to increase growth, improve quality of life, and ensure safety, Florence Full Life. Full Forward. Continues to be in Full Effect!



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BALANCING HOMELIFE WHILE GIVING TO THE COMMUNITY *By Cynthia Ford*



Erika James

It is essential to create balance and maximize your time as a business owner. The same balance is also expected in the home. Erika James is a young professional who has remained intentional about curating the life she desires. She is a stay-at-home mom who is heavily involved in her community.

She and her husband are a power-packed team and explore ways of giving back to the community by creating James Futures Inc. This organization sponsors several projects in the Florence area and has a foundational concept of giving. She hopes to take their efforts to as many places as needed. They have two

children and are expecting their third child in March 2024.

James transitioned to Florence County a little over seven years ago. Four years ago, she felt the need to bring young Black professionals in the Florence area together to network. The hope was to acquire professionals under 40 years old with similar values and professional goals. This led

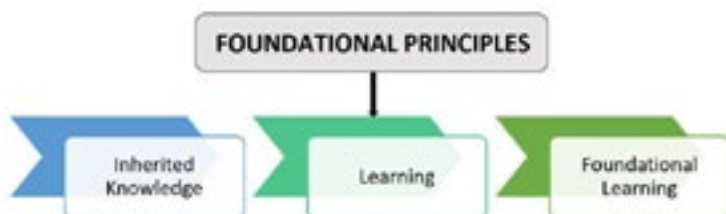


Children from the Montessori School and Wilson High School Baseball Players who participated in Adopt a Park.

to the creation of the Young Black Professional Mixer. “Professional isn’t defined by degrees, but what you are doing, and being the best at it,” James said.

James expressed that the Young Black Professional Mixer has brought together people of various backgrounds, including attorneys, barbers, politicians, judges and seamstresses. James works to keep a balance within the mixer to keep people from drowning within the mix. She creates an open space where everyone can be heard and gives the selected generation a chance to thrive. She recalls feeling her voice wasn’t heard due to her age and wanted to avoid this feeling for others in the mixer. James believes it’s about getting the right people in the right places.

The goal is to meet once a quarter in Florence. Attendees enjoy great company, good vibes and delicious food. The meetings are 100 percent sponsored by James Futures Inc. Professionals are allowed to share



BALANCING HOMELIFE CONT'D



Erika and husband Arnett James

business cards, network with others and share what their contribution is to the Florence area. James wants people to feel comfortable speaking, so speaking before the crowd is optional.

James also founded Mom's Anonymous to be a support group for mothers in Florence. A book titled, "To Have and To Hold," by Dr. Molly Millwood, inspired her to create the group. The book was about motherhood, marriage, modern dilemmas and all the expectations and challenges throughout life. The goal was to create a safe place to share

rewards and challenges. The scheduled meetings are held for an hour.

James believes in lifelong learning and has set a goal to read at least one book per month. She recognized the privilege she has as a mother and hoped to create a space for others, even if it was just for an hour. She understands how the initial challenges could impede the rest of motherhood, depending on how you respond.

In the midst of her other roles, James also facilitates, Adopt a Park. The idea stemmed from the Adopt a Highway program. James thought it would be a good idea to see what James Futures Inc. could do to assist the community further. Volunteers are responsible for ensuring the park is clean, safe and free of graffiti. If discrepancies are found, issues are reported to the park manager. James enjoys teaching her children and their classmates a sense of pride, ownership and various ways to give back.

James views her role as a stay-at-home wife and mother like any



James Futures Sign

other full-time job. However, she enjoys the flexibility. Even though James facilitates the volunteer organizations for free, she gives her all in what she completes. She recalls having ideas when she worked at her last job and being unable to execute them due to the time needed to focus on her children.

"My advice to other mothers is to find herself first, and the rest will fall into place," said James.

James serves as a champion for other mothers. She is the parent council chair for her children's school and coordinates volunteers for school events. James was a military child who learned the art of flexibility and change. She is a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. James has learned to prioritize what works best for herself and her family while leaving space to live out the desires of her heart. She has mastered creating, spacing and offering networking opportunities. She not only fills the rooms but provides a roadmap to address needs.



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PDRTA **DRIVING** Diversity

A Transformative Partnership

Since August 2023, PDRTA and Ruiz Foods have joined forces to provide a tailored workforce transportation solution for work visa holders, creating a model for diversity and inclusion.

Customized Transportation Routes

The heart of this collaboration lies in the development of a personalized workforce transportation route that caters specifically to the needs of visa holders working at Ruiz Foods.

The route is designed to take the work visa employees to and from work to their residence. PDRTA also provides these employees with a supplemental service in the event an emergency arises with the need to leave during their shift.

The door to door service provided by PDRTA to Ruiz Foods ensures that transportation barriers do not hinder their ability to contribute to the workplace.

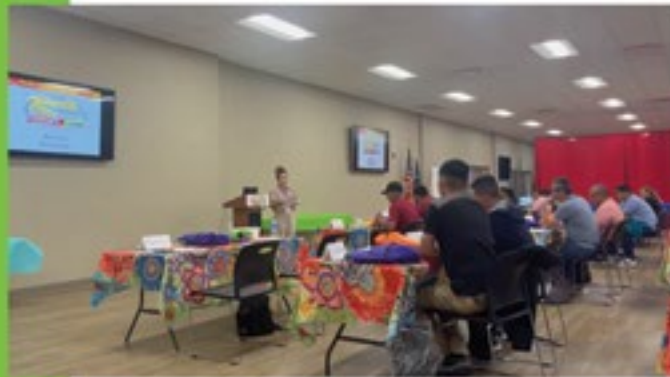


Ruiz Foods work visa employees on board PDRTA

Sustainability at the Core

Beyond accessibility, the collaboration also emphasizes sustainability. Exploring shuttle services and workforce transportation options demonstrates a commitment to environmental responsibility, aligning with the broader goals of creating a workplace that values both its employees and sustainability.

As we celebrate this step towards a more inclusive future, it is a reminder that diversity is not just a goal to achieve but a journey to embrace. This partnership stands as a testament to the power of collaboration in creating workplaces that welcome everyone, regardless of their background or journey.



PDRTA's Human Resources Director, Ania Dixon, provided language translation assistance for initial on-boarding at Ruiz Foods

Promoting Equal Opportunities

This initiative aligns with the shared commitment of both organizations to promote diversity and inclusion. By removing transportation obstacles, visa holders are provided with an equal opportunity to thrive in their roles.

The partnership underscores the belief that a diverse workforce not only enriches the workplace but also contributes to the overall success of the community.

For more information visit **PDRTA.org**



PART 1: ARE YOU FACING SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION? Submitted by Robin Lewis

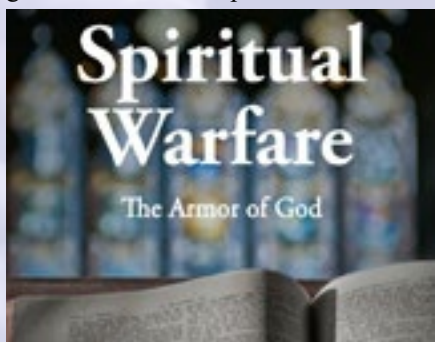


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Spirit-led Coach, Encourager, Author,
Retreat Leader, Daughter of the King

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HEMINGWAY-The children of God face daily spiritual opposition from the enemy of our souls. Not only do we have an enemy who seeks to target our weak areas, but our lack of knowing God's word along with low spiritual and emotional growth can leave us open to attack.



The enemy's goal is to discredit us and prevent us from living out the destiny God has already planned. The enemy seeks to provoke us to question ourselves, (Am I good enough?) and question the Lord, (Will God really come through for me?). Doubt, fear, worry and stress followed by bad decisions are the result.

How do you discern spiritual opposition when it happens?

Spiritual opposition can feel like a sudden negative attitude, confusion or lethargy, or even repeated sickness. The enemy often uses fearful or negative thoughts and emotions and wants to destroy your self-image. He loves to remind you of past traumas or abuses in your life. The enemy wants you to stay in bondage through

sin patterns in your generational line. Does anyone ever say things like, "You get mad at the least little thing just like your mother did," or "Don't start drinking or you'll end up an alcoholic like your father!" The enemy's favorite weapon is fear. He knows that if he can get fear rooted in deeply enough, he can stop you from advancing.

Where our beliefs are anchored firmly in God's word is where we will stand strong. The outcome will be inner peace and strength, not being easily blown about by every wind (Ephesians 4:14). The enemy can only knock us off balance where there is an inner wound, mental stronghold or a weakness in our beliefs.

The place where the enemy's lies take root and are acted upon will become strongholds that blind us and hold us back from experiencing the powerful life that God desires for us. The lies must be pulled up by the roots!

Anywhere we doubt God's faithfulness or ability will always be the areas of stress and fear. Where we are certain of the power of His love, care and protection for us is where we stand firm.

Activation:

Ask the Lord to give you greater discernment about spiritual opposition when it comes your way. Find a Christian mentor or coach to teach you how to fight and stand strong in His word. Scriptures to read: 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, 2 Peter 2:19, 21, and 1 John 4:4.

PART 2: RISING STRONG IN THE BATTLE



Being a Christian doesn't mean everything in life will always work out. Jesus said, "in this world we will have trouble" (John 16:33). As I grew as a believer, I faced battles, small skirmishes at first, then more intense spiritual warfare. Thankfully, I had mentors who taught me to not put my focus on the enemy, but on the faithfulness of God. He was training me in his word and how to use it as a weapon. While I didn't win every battle, I kept learning and grew strong enough to begin rising above spiritual opposition when it happened.

Do you feel like you're "more than a conqueror" as the word of God says (Romans 8:37)? We face many trials living in the world, and we can end up feeling defeated. Feelings don't always tell the truth! If you are focused on what is happening to you or around you, then your focus is on the problem. The longer we concentrate on the problem, the deeper we can spiral into discouragement, unbelief and fear. What we focus on, we empower.

So, how do we grow into the conqueror God says we are designed to be?

To rise above the spiritual opposition that comes our way, we learn (1) where to place our focus, (2) to pursue both spiritual and emotional growth, (3) to allow the Lord to do any needed inner healing within us, and (4) most importantly, to build our foundation in God's word.

Our focus is always our choice. If it's true that what we focus on, we empower, most of us are empowering the problem. Refocusing your attention on God will align you with His power, protection and peace, causing you to rise strong above spiritual

opposition.

Spiritual and emotional growth are designed to go together! If we are immature emotionally, we will be weak spiritually. Our overall growth as a person is God's goal for us so that we are able to face difficulties that come!

We can also be held back by inner wounding and wrong beliefs. If you want to unleash your potential, be willing to do the inner healing work needed. Find a Christian life coach or minister who specializes in this area.

The word of God is "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6). This is a mighty weapon against spiritual opposition. To become "more than a conqueror," you must know the word!

Activation:

Out of the four areas above, ask the Lord where you need to work first. Always invest in your own growth. You're created to experience an overcoming life. Scriptures to read: John 16:33, Psalm 34:18, Romans 8:31-39, Ephesians 6:10-18 and Romans 12:2.

BUILDING HOPE: NINE ESSENTIAL STEPS TO REDUCING YOUTH SUICIDE

(BPT) - Adolescence is a critical time in everyone's development - teens and young adults learn to make decisions, manage emotions, create deeper connections with peers and their communities, and build resilience. Young people's developing brains are well suited to these tasks, but too often, the systems that serve them are not. Moreover, the unique pressures they face today have fueled escalating rates of mental health challenges and the number of youths who die by suicide.

The Jed Foundation (JED) - a leading nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide among our nation's teens and young adults - recently issued, "Youth Suicide: Current Trends and the Path to Prevention," which highlights suicide trends among youth. One of the report's key findings was that 10 percent of high school students attempted suicide in the past year.

"Over the past few years, young people have been significantly impacted by society's greatest challenges, including the pandemic, war, climate change, racial disparities, and school shootings. They do this without the context, experience and resilience that adults possess," said John MacPhee, JED's chief executive officer.

Although overall suicide rates have continued to increase, there is reason for hope and actions to be taken. The report highlights provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that found that suicide rates for youth ages 10-24 declined between 2021 and 2022, including a significant drop (22 percent) for girls ages 10-14. With knowledge and resources, parents, educators, communities and policymakers can help reduce suicide rates among teens and young adults.

"We have an opportunity to actively protect teens and young adults by compassionately providing them with the skills and care they need to succeed while also working to reduce the barriers and risk factors in our society," said MacPhee.

Supporting youth mental health and preventing suicide requires a systemwide, evidence-based approach. As part of the report, JED outlined nine essential steps to reducing youth suicide that offer solutions to support all youth - including specific recommendations for groups of young people who face additional stressors - improve youth mental health and prevent suicide.

1. Take a comprehensive approach

Adopting a comprehensive approach is the first step in reducing suicide risk. A great example is JED's Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention, which focuses on developing life skills, promoting social

connectedness, identifying and supporting students at risk, increasing help-seeking behavior, providing mental health and substance misuse services, establishing and following crisis management procedures, and promoting means safety.

2. Create connection and community

In U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy's 2023 advisory, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," he points out that youth are especially disconnected and isolated, which can fundamentally affect mental, physical and emotional health. Designing communities of care in schools, creating opportunities and spaces for young people to meet and gather organically, and supporting intergenerational connections can help address youth loneliness.

3. Meet basic needs and address trauma

There are strong links between poverty, societal and racial inequity, trauma and mental health struggles. That is why it is important to strengthen social safety nets to meet students' basic needs - like housing, food, education and health care - and expand access to trauma-informed care.

It is also critical to use community- and family-based, trauma-informed approaches for reducing youth involvement in the criminal legal system to address important root causes of suicide. Youth (ages 10-24) involved with the criminal legal system die by suicide at rates two to three times higher than the general youth population.

4. Increase coping and emotional support skills

Self-awareness and interpersonal skills help young people better solve problems, manage emotional stressors, and control impulses, improving their ability to move through challenges. Trained, caring adults and young people can play a vital role in helping youth develop and access emotional support and coping skills, including how to identify and reach out to someone who may be struggling and connect them to professional support.

5. Meaningfully increase access to care

Too many young people reach out for professional help and run into barriers. We must support the implementation and enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, require insurance coverage of mental health services delivered in schools, ensure that provider networks adequately serve diverse populations, and design crisis services to meet the needs of communities.

6. Make widespread use of proven suicide prevention treatments and interventions

There are underutilized treatments that meaningfully reduce suicidal thoughts and attempts. Prioritizing the use of proven approaches like dialectical behavior therapy

(DBT), Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS), cognitive behavioral therapy for suicide prevention (CBT-SP), attachment-based family therapy, brief safety planning interventions and pharmacological interventions can help lower suicide rates.

7. Reduce access to lethal means

Reducing access to lethal means is a powerful way to reduce suicide. This is especially true for firearms. Firearms are the leading method of suicide death overall, and approximately 90 percent of suicide attempts by firearm are fatal. Everyone from families to gun owner groups to legislators can play a role in advocating for and implementing responsible gun storage to meaningfully reduce suicide risk.

8. Advocate for safe online spaces

More young people are engaged in online activities in a largely unregulated space. Policymakers and other stakeholders must take a pro-safety approach to apps and platforms where young people spend time, centering youth in any efforts to improve them.

9. Leverage technology to support youth mental health

Although technology can pose risks for young people, it also offers more ways to connect with each other and access mental health care. By leveraging technology, we can provide youth with access to professional help through telemedicine, connect to young people where they are in digital spaces, and use the virtual worlds of gaming, the metaverse, and extended reality to offer resources and support in real-time.

Everyone can do their part

"Suicide rates for young people have been rising for over a decade due to factors that include isolation, increasing access to firearms, and difficulty connecting to mental health treatment. Particular groups of youth are disproportionately impacted because of the effects of social determinants of health," said Dr. Laura Erickson-Schroth, JED's chief medical officer. "Our first-of-its-kind report aims to provide a nuanced perspective on how these influences are driving suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and deaths among different groups of youth, and identifies strategies that can help parents, educators, public officials and policymakers mitigate these trends to improve young people's mental health and save lives."

However, you are involved in the life of a young person - as a parent, educator, coach or any other type of mentor - you can be the support they need.

If you or someone you know needs to talk to someone right now, text, call or chat 988 for a free confidential conversation with a trained counselor 24/7.





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TEEN TALK: WHAT'S WEIGHING ON TEENS' MINDS AND MENTAL HEALTH



(BPT) – It is not uncommon for teens to experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety and depression during the school year as they contend with known stressors like bullying, peer pressure and academic and extracurricular demands.

What's Stressing Teens Today?

According to a report, teens are just as likely as adults, if not more than, to be concerned today about the job market, family financial stability

and the impact of inflation on food and housing costs.

Parents may be uncomfortable talking about certain current topics because they may not fully understand them, fear they might disagree with their teen's point of view or underestimate the impact of these issues on their kids. It is not always easy but leaning into these tough topics shows teens that open and honest communication is important and can positively impact on their well-being.

Engagement and Support

While discussing mental health with your children can seem overwhelming, here are five simple and attainable ways parents can address difficult subject matters and pinpoint any other concerns they or their children may have:

1. Do your homework

Talking to teens about significant societal topics requires sensitivity, empathy and a willingness to learn. Before you initiate a conversation, familiarize yourself with the topic, but be comfortable not being an expert. Teens want openness, not necessarily expertise, and they want to know

you will listen.

2. Keep your positions in check

Everyone has an opinion, but with your teens, it is critical to keep your views in check as the conversation unfolds. They may know your opinion already just from observing you. You do not have to hide your views but be sure not to downplay or dismiss their position or concerns.

3. Tune into social media

Consider social media as a window into your teen's world. While respecting their privacy, ask them about their favorite content creators or news channels they follow and start tuning into those channels yourself. This can give you a better understanding of the themes or ideas resonating with them and, in turn, help you determine the topics worth discussing.

4. Consider the approach

Rather than scheduling a specific time to talk, which may place undue pressure on them, consider initiating the conversation during a shared activity, such as cooking or hiking, to allow for a more natural and relaxed dialogue. Try asking specific questions like, "What was the best or most difficult part of your day?" or "Which one of your friends do you feel you have the most in common with?" These questions prompt answers that reveal their current mindset. Be consistent with these conversations, which will let your teen know they have consistent support from you.

5. Recognize the signs

Unlike a physical ailment, mental health struggles might not always present obvious signs. It is often the subtle shifts that may signal an issue, including changes in behavior, body language, academic performance, sleep or eating habits.

If your child seems to be withdrawing from previously enjoyed activities or from friends and family, it can also be a sign they're struggling, and time to talk to them about professional support.

LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT Fall 2023 Academic Awards Celebration



Lee Central High School



Dennis Elementary School



Lee Central Middle School



West Lee Elementary School



Lower Lee Elementary School

STUDENTS SHINE IN DISTRICT'S FALL 2023 ACADEMIC AWARDS CELEBRATION

BISHOPVILLE—It is commonly said that great achievement requires great sacrifice. Lee County School District recognized their student's sacrifice and honored them during their second annual Fall awards celebration on Thursday, November 30, 2023. The district honored over 260 students for excellence in academics during their second district-wide academic awards celebration. The number of award recipients increased by 30 percent since the district's first district-wide awards celebration in 2022. The event took place in the gymnasium at Lee Central Middle School and a reception immediately followed in the cafeteria.

"The Academic Awards Celebration is an opportunity to acknowledge the remarkable achievements our students have earned in the classroom," said Superintendent Bernard McDaniel, Sr. "This celebration also provides an opportunity to share students' accomplishments that otherwise might not be known within our district, community and beyond." We are ecstatic that there has been a 30 percent increase in academic award honorees. This is validation that our district is projecting the right message to our students, "academics are important."

Awards were presented for academic achievements on the Spring 2023 SC Ready, End of Course Algebra I, English II, Biology I, and U.S. History exams.

"Our students' academic achievements are extremely important, and they deserve to be honored at the district level," said Dr. Barbara Champagne, interim executive director of curriculum and instruction.

Our 2023-2024 Teacher of the Year, Ms. Marlene Golding served as the presider for the occasion. The program participants for ceremony were led by Lee Central High School students and academic award honorees; Welcome, Caniya Yates; Poem, Victoria Purvis; Purpose, Taylor Lewis and introduction of presenters by Ronnie Wells. School principals, Ms. LaToya Boyd, Dr. Veronica Bradley, Dr. Shelia Stukes, Dr. John C. Kennedy and Mr. Kevin Wilson along with their administrative teams presented

awards to their respective students. School District Board Chairperson, Mrs. Queenie Boyd and Mr. Bernard McDaniel, Sr., superintendent also assisted with the presentations.

Students were adorned in their Lee County Scholar Polo shirts as they received their scholar's medallions and trophies in the presence of their parents and family members. The honorees and their invited guests were treated to lovely reception immediately following the program. All students who scored EXCEED on two or more South Carolina Readiness Examinations and those who scored an A on any of the End of Course Examinations were presented with a special engraved, marbled plaque at the December Board Meeting.

Pictured in Photos:

Lower Lee Elementary School

Student: Skyler A. Wright

Principal dressed in Gold: Dr. Shelia Stukes

West Lee Elementary School

Student: Cameron Dennis

Principal dressed in black: Dr. Veronica Bradley

Dennis Elementary School

Student: Malia Edwards

Principal dressed in grey: Ms. LaToya Boyd

Lee Central Middle School

Student: Arronetta Lofton

Principal: Dr. John Kennedy

Lee Central High School

Student: Ali Doyle

Principal: Mr. Kevin Wilson

Ms. Queenie Boyd, Board Chairperson and Bernard McDaniel, Sr. Superintendent

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FMU HOSTS DEDICATION CEREMONY FOR NAMING OF HONORS CENTER FACILITIES

Articles submitted by FMU



Honor Center

On Tuesday, Francis Marion University (FMU) hosted a naming ceremony in the Honors Center on the main campus. The FMU Board of Trustees voted over the summer to name three areas in the building after longtime faculty members who have played important roles in

establishing the Honors Program at FMU.

Richard Chapman, former FMU provost who served as director of the Honors Program from 1996 to 1999, was recognized for his contributions to the program with the naming of the Richard N. Chapman Auditorium in the McNair Science Building in 2007.

The Duane P. Myers Seminar Room is named after longtime history Professor Duane Myers, who passed away earlier this year. Myers was the founding director of the FMU Honors Program and served as director

through 1995. During his tenure, he developed a rigorous curriculum and cultivated developmental opportunities for the students he mentored and taught.

The Pamela A. Rooks Classroom honors Pamela Rooks, director of the Honors Program from 1999 until 2013. During her tenure, the program experienced a period of extensive growth, resulting in students engaged in an expanded curriculum of instruction, research and service.

Jon Tuttle, current director of the Honors Program, had the Jon W. Tuttle Atrium named in his honor. Tuttle has served as director of the Honors Program since 2013, during which time he has expanded the program with innovative opportunities for student engagement in scholarship, research, and service through creative course offerings, activities, and domestic and international travel.

"This is a stunningly beautiful building, and it houses the finest honors program in the state. Duane, Pam, and Jon played such integral roles in developing this program and graduating 37 classes of honors students," said FMU President Fred Carter. "How appropriate it is that their contributions will be acknowledged here in perpetuity."

FMU BOARD OF TRUSTEES APPROVES NEW UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE



Dr. Dozier and Dr. Carter

Francis Marion University held its quarterly Board of Trustees meeting. During the meeting, a new undergraduate degree and holiday bonus were approved.

In fall 2024, the university will begin offering a Bachelor of Science in Education, Multi-categorical Special Education: Autism Studies, Pre-K through 12. This new program will focus on the needs of autistic individuals and students with other neurodevelopmental disorders.

This program is being created in collaboration with multiple disciplines, including Education, Psychology, Speech-Language Pathology, and

Occupational Therapy. The program will not only provide a strong scholarly and practical base in special needs education, but it will also address the specific educational, therapeutic, and interventional needs of autistic and neurodevelopmentally divergent students in the pre-kindergarten through high school student population. FMU's program will be the only one of its kind in South Carolina and only one of two programs in the southeastern United States.

Students who complete this program may receive special needs teacher or applied behavioral analysis certification. These certifications will uniquely qualify graduates to serve as school psychologists as well. Graduates of this program will have received the necessary undergraduate education to pursue a master's or doctoral degree not only in Education but also in Psychology, Speech-Language Pathology, or Occupational Therapy.

"The addition of this new degree in Autism Studies further solidifies the university's reputation for providing programs that are critically needed in our region and state," said FMU President Fred Carter. "With special legislative funding, we are starting the first multi-disciplinary, collaborative program in South Carolina. Our graduates will be fully prepared to meet the needs of autistic and neurodevelopmentally divergent students in K-12, collegiate, and workplace settings."

At the request of President Carter, the Board also unanimously approved a \$2,000 holiday bonus for all full-time faculty and staff. FMU has provided holiday bonuses for faculty and staff since 1999.

FMU ANNOUNCES EVENING COLLEGE COURSES FOR 2024



Francis Marion University (FMU) has announced eight courses as part of its spring Evening College program. Registration for Evening College courses is open now. Courses begin the week of January 22, and meet once per week for eleven weeks.

This semester's offerings include:

- The Artistry of Paper: Exploring Bookbinding and Paper Techniques, taught by Delaney M. Shin
- Cerveza with Compañeros:

Basic Spanish for Adults, taught by Dr. Kristin Kiely

- American Ghost Stories, taught by Dr. Rebecca Flannagan
- Boxes and Pens: An Introduction to Woodworking, taught by Dr. Christopher Johnson
- Exploring Watercolor 2, taught by Ms. Jane Jackson
- Nature and Landscape Photography, taught by Dr. Julie Mixon
- Yes! You Can Sing – Group Voice for All Ages, taught by Dr. Fran Coleman
- American Sign Language Essentials, taught by Ms. Jazzmyne Pipkins

The FMU Evening College program is for professional and personal development. Evening College credits are not applicable to degree programs. Each course requires a \$200 fee.

For more information on each course or to register, visit fmarion.edu/eveningcollege, email eveningcollege@fmarion.edu, or call (843) 374-4215.



(left to right) GSSM biology instructor Dr. Jennifer Brown and NCSSS Executive Director Todd Mann.

HARTSVILLE—The South Carolina Governor’s School for Science & Mathematics (GSSM) was awarded the Innovative Partnership Award at the National Consortium for Secondary STEM Schools (NCSSS) Professional Conference in Phoenix, Arizona for its work with the S.C. Sea Grant Consortium.

The NCSSS Innovative Partnership Award recognizes inventiveness in partnerships between member schools, local businesses, corporations, and post-secondary institutions. In the From Seeds to Shoreline program, Dr. Jennifer Brown’s marine biology students gathered tens of thousands of *Spartina alterniflora*

(smooth cord grass) seedlings in Charleston, South Carolina, and then her botany students replanted them at Huntington Beach State Park located in Murrells Inlet.

“Congratulations to Dr. Jennifer Brown, her students, and the team at the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium,” GSSM President Danny Dorsel said. “Anytime we can connect coursework with real life, it is a win. The South Carolina shores represent a precious resource for our state. To have our students and faculty be a part of the efforts to maintain and restore them makes the GSSM family proud.”

The From Seeds to Shoreline project spanned across an entire school year. In December 2022, GSSM marine biology students traveled to the College of Charleston Grice Marine Laboratory, located at Fort Johnson on James Island, to collect *Spartina alterniflora* seedlings. Students suited up in waders and jumped into Charleston Harbor’s cold water to collect more than 20,000 specimens.

“I would like to thank the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium and their marine education specialists for allowing GSSM to participate in this

fun, impactful initiative,” Dr. Brown said. “Our students have experienced an active restoration project and now understand how their actions can contribute to big changes within our South Carolina communities.”

When students returned from their holiday break, Dr. Brown and her class placed the seeds into a 70° incubator based in a classroom on GSSM’s campus in Hartsville. The process tricked the seedlings into springtime, which sped up the development timeline. Students planted the tiny plants into pots and eventually into a small temperature-controlled greenhouse.

In April 2023, GSSM students loaded onto the bus and traveled to Huntington Beach State Park, where they dug into the pluff mud to replant the *Spartina alterniflora* seedlings. The salt marsh restoration project will help protect the Murrells Inlet shoreline from high tides, hurricanes, and other environmental threats.

“The South Carolina Governor’s School for Science & Mathematics’ participation in the From Seeds to Shoreline program allowed them to take the concepts that they learned in the classroom with their excellent instruction and apply it out here in the field,” said E.V. Bell, Sea Grant Consortium Marine Education Specialist. “They were able to conduct transects, looking at different species, abundance, and diversity. They were also able to study concepts like climate change and other issues that are impacting our salt marsh.”

Dr. Brown has been teaching at GSSM since 2013. Her classes are known to be challenging and engaging. She often provides real examples in the classroom so that students can visually and practically experience the theory taught in class. Her students have opportunities to obtain real-world experience while out in the world among nature.

Originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, Dr. Brown has a B.S. in Biology from the College of Mount Saint Joseph, and a M.S. and Ph.D. in Botany from Miami University. Dr. Brown teaches AP Biology and three above-AP advanced elective courses: Botany, Marine Biology, and Molecular Biology of the Cell.

For more information on GSSM, visit scgssm.org or call 843-383-3900.

GSSM HOSTS 99 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS DURING 35TH RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM



GSSM senior Breanna Sherwood speaks to the GSSM community and guests about her research project, “Creating MXene Hydrogels.”

HARTSVILLE—More than 120 students presented their summer research projects during the South Carolina Governor’s School for Science & Mathematics’ (GSSM) 35th Annual Research Colloquium.

The annual Research Colloquium is a day-long event where GSSM students share research findings from their summer research experiences, and it also provides an opportunity to share, celebrate and learn as a community. This year’s Research Colloquium featured 99 presentations among the more than 120 students. The students completed their research with the help of 93 different mentors across 40 research locations.

“Our senior Govies shined once again at our annual Research Colloquium,” GSSM President Danny Dorsel said. “Students presented research on quantum computing, oxidant therapy, pancreatic cancer, driving safety in the era of intelligent vehicles and many other areas. They did it with poise and confidence. It was another great day at GSSM!”

This year’s research projects were conducted throughout South Carolina, the United States and abroad with top universities and companies that operate in healthcare, manufacturing, government, automotive and other fields. During the unique educational opportunities, GSSM students spent their summer helping researchers conduct tests and collect data in various ways.

“The GSSM mentored research and inquiry experience is a transformative challenge for our students that develops understanding of the process for rigorously solving problems and innovating through firsthand, real-world experience with professional researchers,” said Dr. Josh Witten, director of Research & Inquiry. “Research Colloquium has been both a celebration of that journey and platform for our seniors to share their discoveries with our community.”

Each year during the Research Colloquium, GSSM presents the Randall M. LaCross Distinguished Research Leadership Award to an individual who has made significant contributions to the success of GSSM student Research & Inquiry experiences. This year’s recipient of the prestigious award was Dr. Craig Nies, Director of Technical Staff in Materials Research at Kyocera-AVX Components Corporation.

“The most rewarding aspect of mentoring GSSM students in research projects is watching the growth of students, not only in the six weeks they work with us but also when they return for additional intern periods in the following years. Initially, students experience some intimidation in starting in an unfamiliar environment, but as they work with us, their confidence grows visibly, and their work and presentations reflect that growth. Being part of that growth is deeply meaningful for both me and my colleagues who work with them.”

The Research & Inquiry experience at GSSM has been required curriculum since 1990, and it provides students with the opportunity for exploration, discovery and individual growth. Colloquium also reflects the duty of scientists, explorers and innovators to not only discover but to effectively communicate that knowledge to others.

For more information on GSSM, visit scgssm.org or call 843-383-3900.

F1S APPLICATION BASED PROGRAMS

With the start of the new year, applications will be opening for several programs in Florence 1 Schools for the 2024-2025 school year. Each application has a set deadline and some programs require additional documentation such as a student portfolio or letters of recommendation from teachers along with the application. Parents are encouraged to visit www.f1s.org and to follow Florence 1 Schools on social media to stay updated with the program or programs that their students may be interested in.

Middle Years IB at Williams - Application opened in December. Deadline is March 1st.

Carver STEAM - Application opens January 2nd

WF STEM - Application opens January 5th

Montessori - Application opens February 1st

Delmae Language Immersion - Opens January

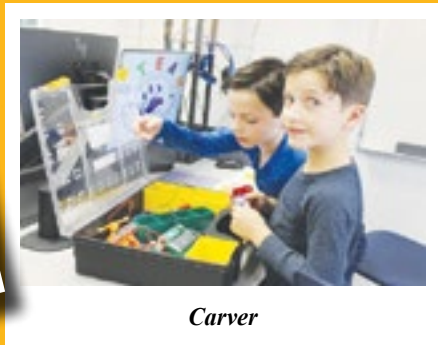
Advantage Academy - Opens January

Florence 1 Center for the Arts at SF - Opens February

Wilson IB - Application opened in December. Deadline is March 1st.



Williams



Carver



West Florence



Advantage Academy



McLaurin



Delmae



South Florence



Wilson



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HGTC AWARDED TITLE OF TURF BOWL CHAMPIONS FOR FOURTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR

Article submitted by HGTC



HGTC Students and Professors celebrate Turf Bowl Championship Win. (Left to Right) Charles Granger, HGTC chair and professor of Golf and Sports Turf Management, Will Turpin, HGTC Golf and Sports Turf Management student, Dominick Matthews, HGTC Golf and Sports Turf Management student, Connor Romanosky, HGTC Golf and Sports Turf Management student, Brian Matthews, HGTC Golf and Sports Turf Management student, Jim Huntoon, HGTC associate professor of Golf and Sports Turf Management

CONWAY—Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) proudly announces that its Golf & Sports Turf Management (GSTM) students have clinched the prestigious title of Turf Bowl Champions for the fourth consecutive year at the 2023 Carolinas Turf Bowl Championship. The championship, held during the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association (CGCSA) Conference and Show at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center, showcased the exceptional skills and dedication of the HGTC team.

The victorious team, coached by Professor Charles Granger and Associate Professor Jim Huntoon, consisted of four outstanding GSTM students: Brian Matthews, Dominick Matthews, Connor Romanosky and Will Turpin. Their triumph is evidence of the rigorous training and commitment fostered by the faculty at HGTC.

Granger, HGTC chair and professor of Golf and Sports Turf Management, expressed his pride in the team's achievements, stating, "I could not be prouder of a team that bonded and worked hard to achieve the win. Each student on the team is employed by a local golf course. The

win speaks volumes for academics and the importance of students being employed and supported by the golf course superintendents and turf managers while they are in school."

In a historic first-time tie, HGTC shared the victory with Clemson University, a testament to the caliber of competition in the Turf Bowl. Notably, no other college has ever secured the championship more than two years in a row, making HGTC's four-year winning streak a remarkable achievement in the competition's history.

HGTC has consistently excelled in the Turf Bowl, capturing the prize nine times in the last 11 years.

Dr. Marilyn Murphy Fore, HGTC president, expressed her immense pride in the team's dedication and success and emphasized the importance of this fourth consecutive win, stating, "This victory not only underscores the exceptional talent within our GSTM program but also highlights the commitment of our faculty, led by Professor Charles Granger, in nurturing a culture of excellence. The historic tie with Clemson University further demonstrates our significant standing among other esteemed institutions. I know it was a tough competition, but we can proudly say no other college has ever secured the championship more than two years in a row, making HGTC's four-year winning streak a remarkable accomplishment."

Other participating colleges in the 2023 Turf Bowl included Clemson University, North Carolina State University, Central Piedmont Community College, Alexander Baldwin Agricultural College and the United States Golf Association Greenkeeper Apprenticeship Program.

HGTC's win reveals the commitment the college has to providing quality education and fostering excellence in every field and the essence of pride and accomplishment that resonates throughout the HGTC community.

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

HGTC'S SAVANNAH RABON WINS GOLD MEDALLION AWARD FOR GRAPHIC DESIGN

Articles submitted by HGTC



Savannah Rabon, HGTC marketing coordinator & graphic designer

CONWAY—Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) is delighted to announce that Savannah Rabon, HGTC marketing coordinator and graphic designer, has been honored with a prestigious Gold Level Medallion Award by the National Council of Marketing & Public Relations (NCMPR) at the District 2 Conference.

The recognition comes as a testament to Rabon's exceptional talents and achievements in graphic design. Her outstanding marketing piece secured the Gold Level Medallion Award in the competitive booklet category. This

accolade places her work in the spotlight, standing out among entries from other two-year community colleges within the expansive District 2 Conference. District 2 encompasses Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands and The Bahamas.

"I am immensely proud of Savannah Rabon's remarkable achievement in receiving the Gold Level Medallion Award for Graphic Design from the National Council of Marketing & Public Relations. This prestigious recognition not only underscores Savannah's exceptional talent and dedication but also reflects the high caliber of professionals we have at HGTC. Savannah's success is a testament to our commitment to excellence and innovation in all facets of education and communication. Congratulations to Savannah on this well-deserved honor and for exemplifying the excellence that defines HGTC," said Lari Roper, HGTC director of marketing.

The NCMPR Medallion Awards celebrate outstanding accomplishments in design and communication within community and technical colleges across NCMPR's seven districts. This regional competition is dedicated exclusively to recognizing the achievements of marketing and public relations professionals in two-year colleges.

The National Council for Marketing & Public Relations is the premier professional development association exclusively serving those working in communication at two-year community and technical colleges. It is the go-to organization for two-year college communicators, providing a platform for networking, learning, and recognition.

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

HGTC ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JIM HUNTOON HONORED FOR YEARS OF SERVICE



Tim Kreger (right), executive director at the CGCSA, presents Jim Huntoon (left), HGTC associate professor of Golf and Sports Turf Management, with award for service.

CONWAY—Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) proudly announce that Associate Professor Jim Huntoon, a distinguished faculty member in the Golf & Sports Turf Management program, has been recognized and honored by the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association (CGCSA) for his outstanding contributions to the association over the years.

Huntoon, who has been an integral part of the HGTC community since January 2023, was presented with this honor in light of his four-year service on the CGCSA board of directors. His

dedication and leadership within the association have left a lasting impact, contributing to the success and growth of the CGCSA.

A graduate of Iowa State University in 1998 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Community and Regional Planning and Horry-Georgetown Technical College in 2001 with an Associate of Science Degree in Golf Course Operation and Grounds Management, Huntoon's journey in the golf course industry spans over two decades. With a passion for golf that extends beyond the classroom, he has held various positions, including assistant superintendent, transitional director of agronomy, transition team member and superintendent, accumulating a wealth of industry experience.

Huntoon shares his perspective on his journey, stating, "I am in the golf business because I love golf. I feel the most important aspect of the golf business is golf. I work hard to never lose sight of that fact."

His commitment to the industry and the sport is evident in his extensive experience and continuous efforts to instill a genuine love for golf in his students at HGTC.

HGTC President, Dr. Marilyn Murphy Fore, commended Huntoon's achievements, saying, "We are incredibly proud of Associate Professor Jim Huntoon for this well-deserved recognition. With over 20 years of experience, his dedication to the golf course industry and his commitment to our students make him an invaluable asset to the HGTC community."

The acknowledgment from the CGCSA highlights not only Huntoon's individual accomplishments but also the excellence and expertise that HGTC faculty bring to the broader golf community.

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

HGTC RECEIVES NEW EQUIPMENT FOR DENTAL SCIENCES PROGRAM



Dr. Mark McCoy of Dentistry at Carolina Forest presents HGTC with equipment for the associate in applied science degree in Dental Sciences. Dr. Mark McCoy, dentistry practitioner at Dentistry at Carolina Forest, Kaitlin Downey, dental assistant at Dentistry at Carolina Forest, Michelle Meeker, HGTC chair and professor of Dental Sciences

CONWAY—Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) is thrilled to announce a significant contribution to its Dental Sciences Program. Dr. Mark McCoy from Dentistry at Carolina Forest donated a state-of-the-art Chairside Economical Restoration of Esthetic Ceramic (CEREC) Acquisition Center (AC) Omnicam Scanner, to enhance their educational experience.

The CEREC AC Omnicam Scanner enables students to gain hands-on practice, where they will

apply their skills in real-world scenarios. Dental assisting students will benefit from the technology, using it for restorative procedures, aligners and removable appliances. Dental hygiene students will also leverage the equipment for patient education.

Guided scanning with the CEREC AC Omnicam allows practitioners

to create digital impressions of the entire jaw. This process incorporates advanced computer-assisted technologies, facilitating the fabrication of ceramic dental restorations. Unlike traditional techniques, CEREC AC Omnicam enables teeth restoration, reducing treatment time and improving the overall patient experience.

Michelle Meeker, chair and professor of Dental Sciences, stated, "The CEREC AC Omnicam equipment introduces our students to cutting-edge technology that continues to evolve in dentistry. The software associated with scanning technology is designed for easy learning, allowing impressions to be clearly delegated to a dental assistant. This donation is a game-changer for our dental program, providing students with another tool for success before entering the local workforce."

"The commitment of Dr. Mark McCoy to advancing dental education aligns perfectly with HGTC's mission to provide students with the best resources for a successful career in the industry. This generous donation not only enhances the learning experience for current students but also positions HGTC as a leader in dental education within the community," said Dr. Marilyn Murphy Fore, HGTC president.

For more information, contact Meeker at michelle.meeker@hgtc.edu or 843-839-1091.



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SEVEN TIPS FOR NAVIGATING THE COLLEGE APPLICATION JOURNEY



(BPT) - With many moving parts and high stakes involved, it's essential to approach college applications with a well-thought-out plan. From planning to budgeting to submitting your application, here are seven tips for navigating the typical college application process.

* Create a timeline for your college application. The college application journey requires meticulous planning and ample time for execution. When you begin applying, create a timeline with clear deadlines. This way, you'll know when you need to finish each step and won't get overwhelmed by the number of tasks ahead.

* Identify key milestones related to your applications. Some schools offer Early Decision or Early Action options, with different deadlines from the standard decision deadline. Set personal deadlines too for gathering recommendations, crafting your essays and submitting your transcripts. Leave room for hiccups too.

* Research your schools. Not all colleges are a perfect fit. That's why it's important to find a school that aligns with your academic, personal and career goals. Dive into what makes each institution unique and how it may line up with your values and interests. Explore their academic programs, extracurricular offerings, campus culture and location.

* Figure out your financial aid options. Note the cost of tuition as well as things like room and board, books and program fees. Look into whether the school offers scholarships, grants, financial aid or work-study opportunities. If you need additional funds to cover costs that federal student loans, scholarships and grants don't cover, consider a private student loan from your trusted bank or credit union.

* Build a budget for your college applications. In most cases, there are costs involved, including school application fees, fees to send test scores and fees to send high school transcripts. Students and parents should identify a savings goal and set money aside just for the college application process. If you're a low-income student, you may get waivers for both SAT/ACT testing and college applications. Military members and Veterans may also be eligible for application fee waivers. Ask your high school guidance counselor or college's financial aid department if these waivers apply to you.

* Prepare your application to help you stand out. Colleges will look at your test scores and GPA, but they also want to know more about who you are as a student and professional. Extra application requirements, such as resumes and essays, showcase your skills and what makes you unique. Make sure you prepare for these important components of your college applications. This can also include passion projects, academic achievements and honors.

* Submit your application to the school. As your deadlines approach, double-check your applications for accuracy and ensure you have all the materials you need. For example, create a checklist that covers all your bases, such as proofreading your application, submitting test scores, and paying any application fees. Once completed, submit your applications with confidence. Take pride in knowing you've put your best foot forward.

The college application process is an adventure, but with careful planning, you'll find the perfect school that fits your goals for the future.

BUTLER ACADEMY'S MOVEMENT OF CAN

Articles submitted by Barbara Chappell, vice president of Development and External Affairs



Butler Academy President Dr. Jerome Reyes provides one-on-one instruction to a third-grade scholar.

HARTSVILLE—First screened during Butler Academy's Taste of Giving celebration on National Philanthropy Day, the new cinematic video, "I CAN. YOU CAN. WE CAN.," presents the school's mission and vision through the lens of the local families it serves.

"As we were preparing to host our school's first community-wide event last month, we knew we wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to share the BA story," explained Butler Academy President and Co-Founder Dr. Jerome Reyes. "Given that we are working to

change the narrative where education is concerned, it felt like we had a responsibility to be explicit about our own."

"This work is simply too important not to share. Our scholars' futures are at stake."

Developed by local artists Seth and Greyson Johnson of Lochwood Studios, "I CAN. YOU CAN. WE CAN.," invites viewers to resist the notion that persistent achievement gaps must be permanent achievement gaps and recognize, instead, that with hard work and a keen eye for doing what it takes to meet each child's individual needs, academic success stories need not be reserved for just a few.

"As I said in the video, 'everyone wants education to be better,'" Reyes added. "It pushes you to really get personal, to get involved, to get intentional and see what we can do as adults to help them get to that next level."

For more information about Butler Academy, visit www.butleracademy.us. "I CAN. YOU CAN. WE CAN.," can be viewed online at <https://www.butleracademy.us/storygoals/>.

BUTLER ACADEMY RECEIVES GRANT FOR ONE COMMUNITY PROJECT



The Eastern Carolina Community Foundation Women in Philanthropy Fund Celebrates 2023 Grantees and Members at St. John's Anglican Church in Florence on Giving Tuesday.

HARTSVILLE—Butler Academy was awarded a \$4,900 grant for a new program to provide vouchers to families to help defray the costs of school uniforms. The award ceremony was part of the Eastern Carolina Community Foundation Women in Philanthropy Fund's annual Giving Tuesday celebration.

"Women in Philanthropy's support could not be more timely," explained Butler Academy Co-Founder and Vice President of Operations Venesa Reyes. "We were fortunate to receive some early donations for our One Community Project, and these were spent at the beginning of the school year. But, as every parent knows, clothes that fit a child well in July do not tend to fit nearly as well in December or January."

According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, students cite appearance as the top reason for being bullied. With this fact in mind, Butler Academy created an income-based financial assistance program earlier this year, the One Community Project, to help families purchase new school uniforms. Even with the cost-savings that uniforms provide for up to 70% of Butler's families, even modestly priced uniforms are unaffordable. The average cost for enough uniforms to get a scholar through one week before having to launder them is \$285. To meet the need for the 2023-2024 school year will cost \$38,475.

"By discretely providing scholars with new, well-fitting uniforms, our school will be able to more effectively set a tone for excellence, discipline, respect and, at the same time, remove a host of distractions that stem from superficial socioeconomic differences," Reyes added. "In short, this program helps our scholars to be better positioned for academic success!"

"I am pleased that Butler Academy has been selected by the Women in Philanthropy grants committee as one of our 11 grant recipients for 2023. Providing needs-based vouchers for school uniforms is a great project that fits perfectly with WIP's mission," Tiffany Straus, Women In Philanthropy President, said.

This year, the Eastern Carolina Community Foundation (ECCF) provided \$116,000 in grant funding across the seven counties it serves. The ECCF Women in Philanthropy Fund committee received 46 grant applications from local nonprofit organizations this year and, besides awarding a grant to Butler Academy, also made awards to: CMD's Pantry, Dillon County First Steps, Foster Care Clothing Closet, Lydia's Bowels of Mercy, Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault, Pee Dee Hearing Center, Potter House Recovery, Senior Citizens Assoc. Florence County, Stirrup Hope, and The Performing Arts & Science Academy.

Year-end gifts to support Butler Academy's One Community Project can be made online at www.butleracademy.us/donate and are tax-deductible.



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MARION COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT LAUNCHES NEW SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Submitted by Dr. Kandace Bethea, superintendent



Dr. Kandace Bethea

MARION-The Marion County School District (MCSD) is excited to announce a new partnership with SOPAKCO, Inc. and Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC). Through this partnership, MCSD is launching a scholarship program to help fund up to 160 dual enrollment scholarships for its students to take classes at Florence-Darlington Technical College.

The Unaka Foundation, a nonprofit affiliate of SOPAKCO, will provide scholarships to enhance educational opportunities throughout the communities where its operating affiliates have facilities. SOPAKCO has been a member of the Marion County community and operated a production facility in Mullins for over 50 years. This scholarship program will provide MCSD students with greater access to dual-enrollment opportunities. "SOPAKCO is proud to have been able to assist Marion County Schools with this program," SOPAKCO, Inc. President Lonnie Thompson said. "SOPAKCO is committed to continuing to work with the school districts in its various communities to further enhance student opportunities."

We're excited to watch these expansions and offerings for the students in Marion County as they continue to grow. Our students will have a pathway to a four-year college or university or a two-year technical college. "This is a great opportunity to advance our K-12, college, career and industry pipeline," MCSD Superintendent Dr. Kandace Bethea said. "I'm especially excited as this transformative initiative can reach a population of students

that traditionally may not have participated in a dual education course."

A dual enrollment or dual credit course is any course that allows high school students to earn both high school and college credits simultaneously. This pilot program will initially fund 40 students per semester to enroll in a single class. Students who complete this class will be eligible to enroll in the South Carolina-funded dual enrollment program, which consists of two courses per semester.

"We are so excited to partner with both the Marion County School District and SOPAKCO to make this opportunity a reality," FDTC President Dr. Jermaine Ford said. "Giving students access to college courses through our Dual Enrollment and Early College Academy programs is so vitally important. These students will gain valuable college experience while still in high school that will help them be more prepared for their college experience and also show first-generation college students that college isn't as scary as it sounds."

Marion County has partnered with FDTC to fill the funding gap for students enrolled in the Dual Enrollment Program. The grant from SOPAKCO acknowledges the significance of expanding accessibility to the FDTC Dual Enrollment Program, which will help with workforce development in Marion County. Local businesses need graduates ready to enter the workforce

with certifications and real-life experiences, and we are excited to offer and expand those opportunities for Marion County School District students. We look forward to seeing the positive changes that come from this important grant through this generous gift from SOPAKCO Inc., President Thompson, and our partnership with Florence-Darlington Technical College, President Ford.



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DUKE ENERGY FOUNDATION GRANTS FDTC \$10,000

Articles submitted by FDTC



Duke Energy Government and Community Relations Director Mindy Taylor (center) presents FDTC President Dr. Jermaine Ford (middle, right) with a \$10,000 grant for recruiting women and minorities into energy sector trades during a check presentation

Duke Energy Foundation presented Florence-Darlington Technical College with a \$10,000 grant for recruiting women and minorities into energy sector trades during a check presentation on Thursday, December 14. “Preparing our next generation of utility workers is one of the top priorities of our company,”

Duke Energy Government and Community Relations Director Mindy Taylor said. “As we work toward a smarter energy future, we are proud to partner with organizations like Florence-Darlington Technical College to help ensure our workforce is diverse and inclusive.”

Duke Energy awarded the College this grant as part of its initiative to recruit more women and minorities into its ranks. The company continues to focus on attracting talented employees from all population groups to improve its ability to deliver better service and the right product options to its customers.

“Duke Energy is such a generous company and we are honored to receive this funding,” FDTC Educational Foundation Executive Director Sheryl Love said. “This grant will help us reach a very important target audience as we increase our STEM programming.”

The College plans to use the funding to implement two initiatives around recruiting women and minorities into energy sector trades. The first is to provide extensive student support services for minorities to

help them overcome academic and social challenges that may prevent them from being successful in their programs. The second is one of institutional change. FDTC continues to make changes to remove structural barriers that students who are very low-income and/or minorities struggle to overcome.

“Florence-Darlington Technical College provides equitable access to all students,” FDTC President Dr. Jermaine Ford said. “We want to thank Duke Energy for granting us this money so that we can continue to offer and create opportunities for all students regardless of their race, age, sex, or circumstances.”

Additionally, the college plans to pair this funding with another grant to provide a series of interactive workshops to develop leadership in women and minorities in technology programs. Programs that this grant funding will target include automotive technology, computer technology, engineering technology, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Technology (HVAC), machine tool technology, mechatronics, welding, and pipe welding.

FDTC encourages anyone interested in one of these programs to reach out to its Admissions office at - Phone: 843-661-8289 Text: 843-351-1940 or by email: admissions@fdtc.edu.

About Florence-Darlington Technical College: Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) has provided affordable technical education to many thousands of Pee Dee-area students since 1963. The college strives for student success and workforce development while providing its students with a high-quality education that leads to post-graduate success and little to no debt. FDTC currently enrolls more than 3,500 curriculum students and another 3,500 noncredit students annually through the college’s Corporate and Workforce Development division. Additionally, the College is home to the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology (SiMT). For more information, visit www.fdtc.edu.

FDTC EMPLOYEES DONATE TIME TO COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS



FDTC Employees Amanda Brown and Sharon Jackson work in the kitchen to prepare breakfast at the Manna House in Florence during the College's Community Day on Wednesday, November 16.

More than 100 Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) faculty and staff members donated their time to local organizations throughout Florence, Darlington, and Marion Counties during the College’s Inaugural Community Day event on Wednesday, November 15.

“Florence-Darlington Technical College has been around for 60 years, and while we’ve provided an educational experience centered around student success and workforce development, this is the first time in our college history doing community day in all three counties at the same

time.” FDTC President Dr. Jermaine Ford said. “Not only are our hands in, but our hearts are in, and the community is feeling our presence because we believe in making a difference within our communities.”

The College’s faculty and staff volunteered at nearly a dozen locations, including the Boys and Girls Club of the Pee Dee, Darlington County Habitat for Humanity, Marion Intermediate School, House of Hope – Florence, OM Ships, the Manna House, Lighthouse Ministries, the Greater Lake City Community Resource Center, Heritage Home of Florence, Pee Dee Speech & Hearing, and the Lord Cares.

“Giving back to the community is an important part of growing,” FDTC Allied Health Administrative Assistant Leah Howard-Newell said.



FDTC Employees Amanda Brown and Sharon Jackson work in the kitchen to prepare breakfast at the Manna House in Florence during the College's Community Day on Wednesday, November 16.

“We need to show our counties that they are important and that we care. When we serve together, we grow stronger.”

During the event, volunteers unpacked boxes, organized books, stacked shelves, cleaned tiny houses, made small repairs, painted, organized, served breakfast, and much more.

The college kicked off this inaugural event as part of its week-long celebration for its 60th anniversary. The week of events also includes the College’s annual Family Day for its employees, its first-ever Presidential Inauguration of its President, Dr. Jermaine Ford, on Thursday, and its Educational Foundations 60th Anniversary Gala on Thursday night.

“FDTC has a rich history and we want to make sure we honor all the accomplishments of our college while at the same time looking towards the future,” Ford said. “We are all about student success and workforce development here at FDTC. Our students are number one to us, and we want to make sure we give them the best opportunities to succeed in life with an affordable education that will lead to a family-sustaining wage.”

Learn more about FDTC by visiting their website at fdtc.edu.



Consider... what's next? We'll help you get there.

FDTC offers a diverse range of more than 60 programs designed to meet the demands of today's fast-paced industries. Our dedicated faculty will provide you with a top-notch education that will prepare you with the knowledge and skills you need to excel in your chosen field. Ask us about our affordable tuition, financial aid assistance, flexible class offerings, and student experience, we are happy to share!



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EMPOWERING FUTURES

Florence-Darlington Technical College

EARLY COLLEGE ACADEMY



Every high school student's college journey is different.

Most go to high school, graduate, and then move on to College. Some take a few dual enrollment courses in high school to get a feel for what college classes are like and then upon graduation head off to College with a few college credits under their belt.

At Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC), they are offering high school students an innovative third pathway through their Early College Academy (ECA). This program not only accelerates the route to degree completion but also opens doors for a swift transition into the workforce or a 4-year college experience with junior status.

"We are committed to creating fast-track educational opportunities," FDTC President Dr. Jermaine Ford said. "Our ECA program is designed for high school students eager to jumpstart their careers. The program allows students to eliminate two additional college years, minimizing accumulated debt and expediting their journey toward professional success."

Recent Darlington High School and FDTC graduate Stefanie Stewart is one of those students who chose the ECA pathway.

"For people that are interested in the Early College Academy, I want to say that it seems bigger than it is," Stewart said. "Once you first come in, you're younger. When I came in, I was 14 [...] and having college classes or even thinking about being in a college class was very intimidating. But once you get into it, it's not that scary [...] It's hard work. I don't want to say it's not hard work. Of course, everything that you want is going to be hard work, but it's worth it in the end."

The College's commitment to academic excellence and workforce development laid the foundation for the ECA. The program was established with the vision of providing students with an unparalleled educational experience, merging the best aspects of high school and college.

Extending its reach to public, private, charter, and home school association students, the program ensures equitable access to college-level courses. One of the program's primary goals is to offer students the opportunity to earn college credits while completing their high school education. By enabling these students – as early as the 9th grade – pathways to completing an Associate's degree, the program empowers students to enter the workforce sooner or seamlessly transition to a 4-year college experience with a head start.



Stewart, for example, graduated in 2023 as Salutatorian from Darlington High School and simultaneously graduated magna cum laude from FDTC with both her Associate of Science and Associate of Arts.

"I think [Early College Academy] is very beneficial [...] I'm going to Florida A&M as a Junior and saving two years of tuition, which is not cheap," Stewart said. "I'm saving two years of work. So I think that the benefits definitely outweigh anything that you're scared of." The impact of the Early College Academy is evident in the success stories of its graduates. Students who have experienced the integrated learning approach, the sense of community, and the hands-on opportunities provided by the academy are well-prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.



"I'm going to Florida A&M as a Junior and saving two years of tuition"

"This is an equitable opportunity for all, for those students who are mature enough to be able to handle that type of a schedule," Ford said.

The College offers a number of wrap-around services to provide support to the students who participate in this program.

From counselors to workshops and tutoring, the College equips students with the tools they need for success. These initiatives aim to remove barriers, ensuring that students can focus on their educational journey without hindrance.

Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) has provided affordable technical education to many thousands of Pee Dee-area students since 1963. The college strives for student success and workforce development while providing its students with a high-quality education that leads to post-graduate success and little to no debt. The College currently enrolls more than 3,500 curriculum students in its more than 60 programs and another 3,500 noncredit students annually through its Corporate and Workforce Development division. Additionally, the College is home to the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology (SiMT).

For more information about the College or the ECA program visit fdtc.edu.

Graduates have gone on to pursue diverse paths, from entering prestigious universities to directly entering the workforce with a competitive edge. The academy's alumni often speak of how their time in the Early College Academy not only shaped their academic knowledge but also instilled in them a love for learning and the resilience to face the evolving demands of the modern world.

"If I could do it again I would, honestly," Stewart said. Recognizing that the ECA program might not be for every high school student, the College works with students individually to determine if they can handle the workload that comes along with this pathway. Students on track for an associate in arts degree can expect up to five college classes each semester in addition to their high school studies.



KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHTS IN POWER By Jennifer Robinson



Bryanta Booker-Maxwell

In 2024, several elections will occur that will shape the future of our nation. The world watches with intensity as political candidates state their positions to lead councils, towns, cities, our states and our nation. Voters exercise their rights to select candidates who share the same values and interests. For many municipalities, the goal is for increased voter participation at the polls during upcoming elections. In recent years voter turnout for various state elections has been low. [SCVotes.org](https://www.scvotes.org)

reports in 2022 there were approximately 3.3 million registered voters in the state of South Carolina, but only a little over a half a million of those registered voters participated in the elections. Some may question the accuracy of the number of voters who actually vote. Why are there only 17 percent of voters actively participating in the election process? How can the number of registered voters be increased? Part of the solution is to introduce voter education to inform voters of rights, candidates, polling locations, and correct usage of voting equipment. The number of young voters also must be considered in addressing voter education. Seventeen- and eighteen-year-old students who are made aware of election and voter information are more likely to vote. The cliché, “the children are the future,” is very real and appropriate for our most recent elections. Representation at the polls from Millennials, Generation Z and the Alpha Generation will decide all levels of political offices in the United States for years to come. Maxwell has been proactive in leading the charge for the next generations to be voter informed, so they

can elect officials with their interests in mind.

Maxwell is a voter advocate by passion, but her career as Advance Coordinator with the U.S. Department of Housing of Urban Development in Washington, DC, has allowed her to witness social and political issues many people face, in not only SC, but also the country. The Laurens, SC native has been active in social organizations and political campaigns since childhood. Her upbringing with her grandparents watching the local 5 p.m. news peaked her interest in the happenings in the world at that time. Maxwell remembers as a child the highlights from the Clinton presidential campaign of the 90s. She also remembers being enthralled in the Bush vs. Gore debate in 1999. The election gained her interest, and she turned it into a college degree in political science with a pre-law concentration from South Carolina State University.

Maxwell has worked with several elected officials including our very own, Congressman James Clyburn, who continues to reach across the political aisles to serve those who face several disparities. Maxwell said she learned from Clyburn about sacrifice, equity and equality and will work hard to preserve his legacy.

Her own personal values: integrity, loyalty, empathy, patience and family first are what guide her personally and professionally. Maxwell believes that what has hindered this nation from being as great as it could be is selfishness. “We are at a standstill and at a crossroads,” Maxwell declared. The public must, “tug at the heart strings,” of officials and if necessary, complain.” Voters must know what bills are being reviewed and voted upon. It is in their best interest to understand the legislature. Political empowerment and education are tools to guide all generations in future elections. Without those tools blind decisions are made at the polls that affect economics, health and social issues.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MIKO PICKETT, IS LIVING THE DREAM!

By Cynthia Ford



Miko Pickett

MULLINS - It takes action for anything to transform. The transformation process involves merging components, leading to the ultimate curation of something new. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was heavily involved in the vast transformation across the nation. King presented his vision for America to a crowd at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. The, “I Have a Dream,” speech echoed loudly throughout the crowd and is still being echoed today. This speech ignited a transformation across

the land.

It is people like Miko Pickett, one of the many who picked up King’s torch to make this vision a reality. King spoke of equity, feeding the hungry, and addressing the needs of people. Years later, in Marion County, Pickett echoes the same. She thrives as an activist, line dance instructor, property manager, philanthropist and executive director of the Pick 42 Foundation. She is also the South Carolina Food Policy Council chair and board member for Women of Philanthropy. Among her many titles, her most prized titles are wife, mother, daughter and grandmother. She and her husband have four children and six grandchildren. Pickett

answered the call to help push the vision forward and commits her time to help address the community’s needs.

Reared in Southern New Jersey, Pickett grew up idolizing Philadelphia. She recalls gazing at the tall buildings and seeing people walk around carrying briefcases, and she dreamed of doing the same. Her dream became a reality, and she thrived as an assistant vice president of Business Intelligence for a major corporation. As her life evolved, she and her husband, Dominic Pickett Sr, felt a pull to move south.

“It was an incredible pull, and I was more connected to the work in Marion County,” Pickett said.

She and her husband established Pick 42 Foundation with their first mission to help provide bicycles to youth in Charlotte, NC. At the time, the Belmont section was high in poverty. However, she and her husband used their resources and networks to give to youth in need. Pickett believes that their life’s work has evolved into what they are doing now.

Pickett began to attend meetings and make connections throughout the county. She sought to resolve issues, such as fixing storm damage in the area. She became a Clyburn Fellow and established solid relationships throughout the state. Pickett ran for office with the thought that her voice was needed in Columbia. After losing the race, she refused to quit her campaign to help the community have better outcomes. Pickett will not run for political office again and has committed to supporting the community.

Pickett believes she is living the life of her dreams. She loves

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CONT'D

the community and often encourages those who have moved away to return to live in the area or to invest in helping it thrive.

"The weather is gorgeous, and there's a strong sense of community," stated Pickett.

Her dreams evolved throughout her life. She acquired the career and the man of her dreams. Her family is expanding. She continues to advocate for better outcomes for her family and community. She hopes to see a thriving and recovered community with people living in safe homes, consuming fresh, healthy foods and farmers thriving on their farms to make enough money to feed their families.

Pickett has received constant inspiration from the acts of King. She is in awe of his ability to eloquently express himself and to move a crowd to action. Pickett reflects on how King made the speech only one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. Pickett expressed how shortly ahead of King's generation were people with subpar education, yet he spoke to people with dignity. Pickett believes it's essential to serve every client with dignity and respect. Pickett believes King left us a roadmap, and we should focus on what he left us and move forward.

Pickett joins in King's expression of higher-paying wagers and equity. Pickett advocates for increasing the minimum wage to \$15/hour and asking partners to do the same.

"We have to make those changes, and if we don't, our people will suffer," Pickett said.

She takes pride in a King photo in her home office, highlighting dedication, unity and integrity. She loves going to work each day and can't wait to see the work done across the Pee. Dee. People of all backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses grace the grounds of the Pick 42 Foundation with a collective thought in mind.

Pickett desires to build a food hub system in Pee Dee that helps to eradicate food insecurity. During her campaign, she created the concept of using your Vs (BE VISIBLE, use your VOICE and exercise your right to VOTE). Using this concept in various aspects of life will be the foundation of different outcomes.

Pickett's work in the community speaks for itself. She was recently honored by the Dillon Marion Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta for Women's History Month. She also received the Citizen of the Year award from the Chi Iota Chapter of Omega Phi Si Fraternity in Florence, SC. She's grateful for the emails, texts and gratitude for the work Pick 42 Foundation does in the community.

Pickett often says it's not about herself but about all of us coming together to get that job done. She enjoys learning from the older generation and believes in having a balance of younger and older as a platform for learning. Pickett states that her mentor at Lincoln Financial took a chance on her, and she was offered several opportunities as she climbed the corporate ladder. She, in turn, paid it forward.

"We're all working together, leading with our hearts and backed by data," Pickett said.

SENATOR MIA MCLEOD - A VOICE FOR CIVIL AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS By Les Echols



Senator Mia McLeod

South Carolina Senator Mia McLeod has been a voice for civil and women's rights since her stint with the South Carolina House of Representatives from 2010 to 2016. She currently serves as South Carolina senator for the 22nd District.

McLeod was born and raised in Bennettsville, SC and attended public schools along the infamous, 'Corridor of Shame,' the poorly performing impoverished school districts

along the I-95 corridor. With the support and guidance of her parents, a public-school teacher and librarian, and small business owner respectively, she was able to get the quality education that she believes every child deserves. While she was a student at the University of South Carolina, she served as a page for then-Representative David Beasley, who is also from the Pee Dee and later became Governor of South Carolina. This experience introduced McLeod to the legislative process and South Carolina politics. After graduating, she worked in human resources at the SC Chamber of Commerce before earning her Juris Doctorate at the University of South Carolina School of Law. "Running for public office was never on my bucket list," McLeod stated. "I ran for the S.C. House in 2010 because my representative was a friend who left to take a position with the Obama Administration. For the first time in my adult life, my sons and I had a representative who cared enough to engage with us about the issues and challenges our district and communities were facing. It was also very important to me that they saw someone who looked like them, truly representing them. Representation matters."

But McLeod made it clear that being able to represent the underrepresented comes with its own unique set of challenges that face the senator as a Black female. "Professionally and financially, I've struggled to earn a living while I serve," continued McLeod. "Because I'm so vocal, I've had legislative colleagues in my own party engage their friends in the media, to go after my clients and manufacture stories about me that

were meant to destroy my character. Thankfully, their efforts failed. And despite all the personal and political adversity I've had to overcome, my faith in God persists and I'm still here, better and stronger than ever, because God is a healer, and his protection covers me. I pray that my story inspires others to keep praying and keep pressing. In politics, it seems that too many of today's leaders lack the courage to address issues like equity and inclusion, especially when the Republican majority is being very intentional about rolling back affirmative action, women's reproductive rights and freedoms, equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity, health care equity, equal justice and so much more. Instead...choosing to prioritize and pass legislation to ban books, rebrand slavery, rewrite history that makes them feel comfortable and provoke fear within our constituencies and communities that is centered around our differences, especially as those differences pertain to race and gender," McLeod continued.

McLeod spoke of systemic barriers and ways to minimize and eventually eliminate them. "When it comes to the systemic barriers we face in this state, we didn't get here overnight, and these inequities won't be resolved overnight. The best way to begin the process of change is to acknowledge and address these challenges and commit to doing the work...no matter how hard or how long it takes. Our differences shouldn't prevent us from tackling critical issues, but too often that's exactly what happens, which slows our individual and collective progress and allows these vicious cycles of systemic oppression to continue," McLeod stated.

McLeod concluded by elaborating on two quotes and what they mean to the state, building a better nation. "Dr. King said, 'Everybody can be great because anybody can serve.' His words remind me of another famous quote that has been attributed to Edmund Burke, 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.' When good men (and women) care more about the greater good...the good they can do for others, more than the good they can do for themselves, we...as a state and nation, shall (finally) overcome," concluded McLeod.



DR. MARCUS A. MCGIRT, A TRANSFORMED DREAM *By Cynthia Ford*



Dr. Marcus McGirt

Dr. Marcus McGirt is the founder of the Save Our Youth Mentoring Movement. He started the nonprofit organization in 2016 to help mentor and navigate youth through life obstacles and to help show them they are more than ordinary. The organization serves an average of 15-20 youth throughout the Pee Dee. Since its inception, 22 members graduated from the program (four in the military, six in the workforce, ten in college and two college graduates.) Through local partnership, Save our Youth has given away over \$27,000 in scholarship awards to seniors.

McGirt serves on the Latta town council and is Mayor Pro-Tem. He is also the Lake City Youth Intervention program director. His most prominent goal is to cultivate and help others recognize their potential by creating solid strategies to help them excel.

"Everyone comes from different walks of life, and building strong strategies will help them see the brighter side," McGirt said.

McGirt noted that he didn't have big plans and dreams growing up. He was fascinated with buses and wanted to be a bus driver. He expressed that he was not the perfect child and never imagined being the man he is today. His dreams have changed since that time. He believes he is living a part of his dreams and is well on his way.

McGirt lost his father at age 11 and became involved with the legal system at age 12. McGirt expressed that some thought he would not live to see age 18 or 21. He obtained his last charge as a juvenile at age 15. He was enlightened after attending court and seeing others walk into the courtroom but not returning to their parents after being ordered to be committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice. That moment was eye-opening for him, and he began making better

decisions.

An experience in church with his grandfather was a pivotal moment that helped move his dreams forward. The Pastor then inquired if any youth wanted to attend Morris College and to let him know because the first year would be paid. His grandfather nudged him and asked if he planned to go. That nudge made him feel that someone believed in him. McGirt struggled during his first year in college and contemplated withdrawing. Dean Blackmon at Morris College suggested that he take a week to reconsider. After being home for two days, early mornings with his grandfather on the farm, he quickly returned to Morris. His life shifted upon his return, and he experienced gaining a second family at the college. McGirt pledged Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., became the treasurer of the Student Government Association and became the senior class president. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice with a minor in religion.

The life and actions of King inspired McGirt. He often uses one of King's quotes during speaking engagements.

"If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward."

McGirt esteems King as a change agent during his time. McGirt expressed that he desires to do the same. King's efforts inspired McGirt with his work with council, youth, and senior citizens. McGirt believes King's concept was simple as he gave people hope to fulfill their dreams.

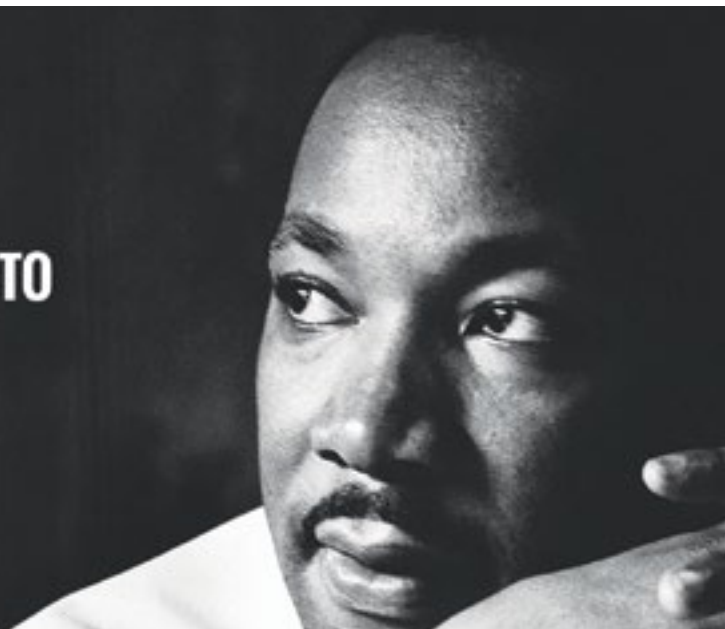
McGirt's vision is for young people to stand on what they believe, be adaptable, be willing to accept constructive criticism and grasp what they want in life. McGirt urges people to be empowered but not let the power consume them. He believes once the power is unlocked, one can sink or swim. He challenges others to be the best in the job they were elected to serve. McGirt believes in igniting thought-provoking change. He is committed to being the voice for change.

McGirt has received several honors, including the Key to the Town of Latta in 2018, the 2023 Alumni of the Year for Morris College and an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Christian Humanities from the School of the Great Theological Seminary in Columbia.

McGirt overcame many of life's hurdles with the help of others divinely placed in his life. He endeavors to be a community change agent as he continues to serve in each phase of his life. He is working towards publishing his first book. McGirt plans to continue working in social and criminal reform areas and believes that many counted him out when he was younger. However, he decided to use the imperfections in his life to help transform the lives of others.

**IF YOU CAN'T FLY THEN RUN,
IF YOU CAN'T RUN THEN WALK,
IF YOU CAN'T WALK THEN CRAWL,
BUT WHATEVER YOU DO YOU HAVE TO
KEEP MOVING FORWARD**

-MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.



ART CONTRIBUTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS By Glaceria Brown Mason



Collage Artist and Author, Leroy Campbell

focuses on the contributions and impact Black Americans have made in the art world.

Art is the creative expression of a broad range of talents that include film, literature, music, culture, spoken word, painting, sculpting, visual artistry and more. Diversity Works is honored to have been granted an interview with renowned Collage Artist and Author, Mr. Leroy Campbell.

Campbell is a highly successful, well-known and extremely talented, African American collage artist who stands squarely among other luminaries in the art world. His art is described by E&S Gallery, Inc., as, ‘connecting the past and present, despite separation of decades.’ Campbell’s contribution to the field of art grew out of a place of pain, scorn and rejection of a birth defect. A birth defect which subsequently taught him how to

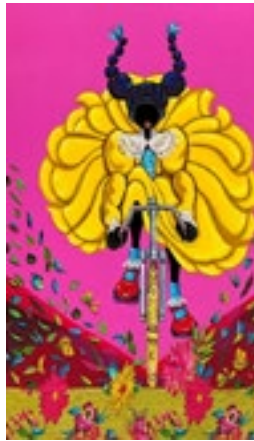


The Trailblazer

draw as a way of emotional recovery and healing. Today, Campbell’s work is the culmination of his rich heritage and cultural roots. He characterizes himself as a man of African descent, who has made an agreement with the ancestors to use his big spirit and gift as an artist, to help uplift and inspire whole and broken souls.

In the 18th century, West Africans were brought to the Lowcountry of South Carolina and enslaved on Southern plantations to produce rice, cotton and indigo. They are known as Gullah Geechee people. Campbell, a descendant, is a native son of Charleston, South Carolina. He was raised in the village of the Gadson Green Housing project, “In our Gullah language, we call it, Back-Da-Green,” Campbell shared. The African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” meaning it is a community effort, applies to Campbell’s upbringing. He was reared in African culture and the belief, ways, traditions, food and spirituality which are the foundation, and the underpinning of his art. Campbell says, “My Gullah Gee-Chee people deliberately poured into me a sense of collective consciousness which is often expressed in my work.”

In 1984, Campbell found himself in a rich art haven community in the Fort Green-Clinton Hill neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. His art experiences and exposure there, compelled him to join in and make his contribution to the arts. Campbell says, “Art can influence, inspire and encourage dialogue. I believe that art heals, breaks down stereotypes and advocates diversity.” Campbell is inspired by luminaries in the art world, American artists, Jacob Lawrence (1917 – 2000), a story telling artist who worked in series and Romare Bearden



Trailblazer

of the greatest gifts the Most High has given to me,” Campbell affirms.

Embracing the theme, ‘African Americans and the Arts,’ Campbell has, and is, an active participant in modern day humanities, sharing his gift with art lovers across the globe. He shared his views on the importance of African American art to society. “Artistic expression in society has played an important and critical role in helping us comfortably co-exist. Our art is rooted in sustaining and building the foundation of America from its inception. Art taught me to appreciate group uniqueness. Every group’s history and stories told through the expression of art, makes for a society grounded in expectancy. Most things we touch and experience today in this country, are the result of African American creativity.”

With a wealth of knowledge, 30 plus years of experience, amazing talent and a determined spirit, Campbell encourages budding future artists to, “Find your path. Don’t compare yourself to other artist, be inspired by them. Keep working and exploring new medias. Never stop learning about the world of art. Go to galleries and museums as often as you can. Tell your story. Learn the business and politics of the art world to help figure out what path you want to take.”

As a Collage Artist and published Author, Campbell speaks to his audience, by capturing pieces of history and fusing it with art. He tells stories using imagery and messages within his creations like, “Let Us Guide Our Own Destiny,” “Remember to Vote” and many more. Whether you enjoy works like, “A Lot of Learning,” “Divine Order,” “Rich Soil,” “No Man’s Band” and far too many to name here or, if you’re unfamiliar with Campbell’s work, make it your objective to get to know more about his artistry, and let it speak to your soul.

Leroy Campbell is an alumnus of Pratt Institute, author of two books, ‘My Authentic Self,’ and an upcoming memoir, ‘Extended Hands, A Love Story,’ to be published in 2024. He is a public speaker, art consultant to the New York and Georgia Board of Education, A Cultural attaché for the United States



Passing Down the Tradition

(1911-1988), who unapologetically embraced and depicted his Southern roots through collage expression.

Campbell’s cultural influences are depicted in the faceless silhouettes of his strikingly colorful yet relatable art. The faceless images, representing an enslaved people, stripped of their personalities and embodies perseverance and a will to survive. For Campbell, art is his passion! His creativity can be seen and admired in his thoughtful and extensive work. “For over thirty plus years, it has given me something each day to look forward too. Doing what I love is one

and a Gullah-Gee-Chee ambassador for the University of Connecticut, All Things Gullah Workshop.

To learn more about the artistry of Leroy Campbell and experience the vibrancy of art which speaks to you, visit leroycampbelloriginals.com.

SANKOFA, WHERE HEALING BEGINS By Adalia Ellis



Adalia Ellis

Sankofa, a word whose origin is in the Akan ethnic group of Ghana, translates to, “it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.” For the past four months I had the opportunity to practice Sankofa with a special group of students at Francis Marion University. I primarily teach public speaking courses but have had the privilege to offer special classes through the African and African American Studies program. Over the years I have taught a course in the History of Afro Latin Dance and Movement as well as, Hip Hop: An American Story.

This past semester I offered a course on generational trauma and healing that centered on the African American experience. The text and workbook that the course was built around was, “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,” by Dr. Joy Degruy. The course was heavy on discussion, research and the sharing of knowledge with the “homework,” being the creation of three forms of art that reflected the students’ thoughts and feelings. What was produced was a beautiful, diverse, artistic montage that was the combination of various forms of art.

As someone who has been in therapy for years, I can understand trauma and its impact as an individual. From my own lived experience, to understand the impact of trauma and how to experience healing, it is important to know the origin story. When I am in therapy and am able to identify the root of the trauma, I am able to remove the emotional charge that causes trigger responses. Trigger responses can be completely disconnected from the original trauma as it has more to do with how I perceive, process or feel about the triggering event. Traumatic experiences lead to adaptive behaviors for survival which can be physical, mental and/or emotional. If the trauma is within the family of origin, adaptive behaviors become part of the fabric of the family until someone decides to break the cycle. For me, dance and poetry have been powerful ways to break cycles, release trapped emotions and to tell stories that are hard to tell with words alone.

Now, imagine an entire community of people who have experienced extreme, sustained traumas over hundreds of years. To heal, that



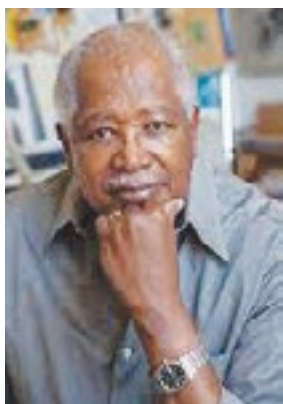
Student first names for left to right: Tykeria, Azayvya, Ciara, Faith, Destiny, Jayla and Carly

community needs to know the origin of the trauma to be able to identify the adaptive behaviors and the root of triggering events. To be able to create new, healthy patterns of behavior it is imperative to remove the emotional charge of the original trauma. For the African American community, the original trauma is hundreds of years in the past with recurring traumas heaped on top of it. And the traumas and adaptive behaviors are passed on from one generation to another and can be mislabeled as culture. It feels daunting, overwhelming and scary to even consider the process of healing on such a large scale.

The thing I learned over the past four months is that the process of healing is possible. Healing happens in stages. It happens in quiet moments when you are alone and in big ways with others present. Healing can happen in small increments and in leaps and bounds. The thing is healing can only happen if you are actively willing to commit to the process. Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is real. It exists. When considering the story of skin color in America, everyone has been impacted. Whether you are of African, Native American, Asian or European descent, you have been impacted. Depending on the role your ancestors played in history is the place to start to begin to understand what you can do today to change things. I believe the African American community needs to be about healing. Healing is the key. Healing in a country that has yet to come to terms with its place in history is hard, but it can be done.

Healing as a community is possible. In my small class of students where there were Black, White, and Mixed-race students we learned, shared, and created together. We were able to do so because we were unified around the truth that is history and the impact it is having on our present. Once that unifying principle was established then the work of talking, listening, and understanding was able to occur. We practiced Sankofa and this is where the process of healing begins.

DR. LEO TWIGGS: PREMIERE SC VISUAL ARTIST By Susan Carter



Dr. Leo Twiggs

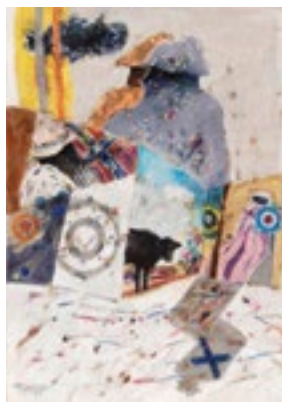
Born in St. Stephens, SC in 1934, Leo Twiggs defied odds and became one of our state’s preeminent artists and art educators. He grew up in St. Stephens and first became aware of his artistic talent when he participated in a multi-school field day in which elementary students from the Berkely County region, including Pineville, Bonneau, Gourdin displayed their artwork. Twiggs’ artistic impulse to, “want to do something different,” propelled him to choose an unexpected material—wallpaper—on which to create his art. He drew a picture of the school on wallpaper and, “everyone

started talking about it.” He loved the “buzz,” and this turned him on to art and unusual, attention-getting formats. Later, as a high school teacher, he adapted the popular song, “Shop Around,” by Smokey Robinson as a theme for a bulletin board advertising art electives students could sign up for, “Don’t just take any course; take what is best for you, Shop Around!”

Twiggs received his BA summa cum laude from Claflin University in 1956. He studied with Arthur Rose, whom he credits with teaching him how to communicate with students as well as how to make art. His first career was as high school art teacher at Lincoln High School in Sumter, SC, where his accomplishments include helping students to attain 135 regional and national awards. One of his students became the first senior high school student in the state to win a National Gold Key Award from National Scholastic Magazine Art Awards, a significant accomplishment considering his students lived in a segregated society and attended a segregated school. This contest was the first to include all students in the state because, Scholastic Magazine said, it would NOT segregate their awards. Students swept the awards, winning two of five top state Gold Keys which were presented by Governor McNair and also the National Award. Twiggs values these accomplishments deeply because this repeated state and national recognition showed the students that, “they could compete with anybody, EXCELLENCE HAD NO COLOR.” In addition, his Lincoln High students won, “so many Carolina Automobile Association Awards, a student won an award in the Maritime Poster Award, the only one in the state. The award was presented to him by one of the state’s congressmen.”

During the summers, Twiggs continued his education, first at the

DR. LEO TWIGGS CONT'D



Dangerous Places

specific colors in selected locations. Fascinated by the medium; he experimented with it and is, “still working on it.” The technique and application are unique to Twiggs. “Everything I learned, I taught myself.” He now conducts workshops to show other artists and students how to conduct the long and arduous process to make batik art. For example, three feet by four feet piece takes six weeks; dyes must dry before putting wax on them; the process must be repeated over and over again. A knowledge of color theory is essential as the process cannot be done without knowing which colors must be combined to make other colors, batik also allows the artwork to demonstrate texture, which cannot be created in a traditional painting. As an example, Twiggs described his confederate flag series which depicted the flag’s “dry, rotting, falling apart” nature. The batik process allows him to work with different materials, including cotton, as the ancient wax resistant process retains the color of the material while the paint lies on top of the canvas. This process is best appreciated in person as photographs are not able to capture the sophisticated, multi-layered batik process.

After receiving his master’s degree from NYU, Twiggs moved to South Carolina State University where he developed the Fine Art Department with a strong studio emphasis. He taught there from 1973 until 1998. As the first person to develop a visual arts program at the college, Twiggs prioritized teaching developing artists/teachers by showing them how to teach rather than what to teach. He emphasized the importance of future art teachers developing and creating art throughout their careers so that they have the skills to do what they are teaching. His success in developing artists/teachers is evident in the numerous students who have gone on to win awards from their art, which Twiggs describes as one of his, “greatest rewards.” Although he never had a lot of art majors, Twiggs made sure his students had good teachers and the resources to create in whatever medium they chose. He hired a print maker, sculptor, and multi-dimensional specialist to round out his department. In 1970, Twiggs became the first African American student to receive a Doctorate of Arts (Ed.D) from the University of Georgia. Twiggs also developed the I.P. Stanback Museum at SC State and was named professor emeritus in 2000.



Requiem for Mother Emanuel

Art Institute of Chicago and then completing a master’s degree at New York University, where he studied with Hale Woodruff, the acclaimed African American painter and muralist. Twiggs began experimenting with unorthodox painting techniques at the Art Institute. Driven by his signature urge to do something different, he picked up a method of painting as a craft that he developed into an art form. Starting with, “dime store scarves,” wax and dyes, he learned how to control dyes so that they would not run everywhere after wax is placed on it but instead develop into

request of First Lady Laura Bush.

He has been an active church member and leader at New Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Orangeburg throughout his adulthood. He was closely involved with the design of his church’s two most recent remodels. As church membership grew to 1100, a bold, crown design was chosen for the second remodel.



Moonlit Studio

Twiggs worked with the architect and builder to ensure the result was aesthetically pleasing. Twiggs was instrumental in making sure the “front of the crown is very prominent with the zenith or crescendo in front,” by daily consultations with the architect and builder to ensure the church design was successfully completed. Twiggs’ own artistic contribution to the church was a six-foot circular stained-glass window that can only be seen from inside the church, which likely encourages more visitors to attend the church so that they

can see the church’s only stained-glass window while also hearing a message from the pastor, Twiggs explains with a smile. As Twiggs notes, art is a way to capture a moment in time for a lifetime of appreciation by many, “Lasting things have to have some meaning.”

Twiggs appreciates the meaning art has given his life, “As an artist, it doesn’t just begin and end in the studio; art enhances life as it makes you more observant.” Artists “see things other people don’t see,” including viewing the mundane subway rider as well as the natural world’s sunrises and sunsets,” in a transcendental light. One of his favorite experiences is to observe the moon rising and cloud formations shifting from the high windows in his studio. He designed the windows purposefully so that he could walk from window to window noting the wind, weather and time of day.

Twiggs was the first visual artist to receive the Verner Award (Governor’s Trophy) in 1981 for outstanding contributions to the arts in South Carolina. He went on to win a second Verner Award in 2017 for Lifetime Achievement. Also in 2017, Twiggs received the Order of the Palmetto, the state’s highest civilian honor, and he was inducted into the South Carolina Hall of Fame in 2020. SC ETV is working on a documentary about his life expected to be completed in 2025.



A PASSION, EYE AND HEART FOR ART

Articles by Les Echols



Harry McFadden

of being self-taught, I prefer, God-inspired. I honestly don't know who I would be without art."

McFadden explained that his earliest memory of art was at Cades-Hebron Elementary and High School when his teacher Mrs. Daisy Johnson would have him create art for the bulletin board and to hang around the classroom. He would then be awarded funds which he used to purchase weekly readers and snacks from the canteen. McFadden explained that later, there was a period when he stopped creating art for more than 20 years. "A friend stumbled upon a painting which I thought was hidden and encouraged me to finish it. Harry has been a prolific artist since then, with past shows including the Visual Soul-International James Brown Festival in Augusta, GA, 'Soulsapes' at Francis Marion University, 'Celebration' with the Black Creeks Arts Council, MOJA Festival, as well as serving as the Pee Dee Boys and Girls Club as an artist in residence,"

Born the seventh of seven children in Cades, South Carolina, Harry McFadden is the definition of an individual with a passion, eye and heart for art. A science/robotics teacher, McFadden uses the analogy that he was, 'baptized,' in a rural experience surrounded by singers, musicians, mechanics, dancers, athletes, intellectuals and seamstresses. "I didn't get into art and creativity, they got into me," McFadden explained. "I am convinced that I carry ancestral DNA from the African diaspora in my genes. The innateness of these indigenous genes was awakened early in my journey. People use the description

Harry stated.

We asked McFadden about his art and how it correlates to Civil Rights and Black History. "I am a descendent of Civil Rights/Black History. A descendent who encounters and creates from the intersection of being Black, male, marginalized and southern. Art did not start or stop with colonization. Culture held within chained bodies was brought to foreign lands. My art tends to be symbolic like the coded quilts navigating through the hostile routes of emancipation. They are open and encouraged for the interactor to interpret. Art has always been and will continue to be a part of my Civil Rights/Black History journey. Art in the form of rituals, masks, protest posters, paintings, sculpture, music, poetry, dance and fashion, among other things," continued McFadden.

McFadden attended Cades-Hebron Elementary and High School, Kingstree Senior High. His higher education credentials include attending South Carolina State University and Francis Marion University, where he earned his BS, and Lesley University, earning his [M.Ed.](#)



McFadden is always open to events and talks which allow him to showcase his art journey. He has a solo show entitled, "The Audacity of Pluto," on February 10, 2024, from 10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., at the Lake City Public Library. It explores the relationship between ancestral bodies of the diaspora and the universe. He is available to lead workshop experiences as an arts integrationist and promotes art as a healing source.

THE LOVE OF ART AND ITS IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES



Kyle C. Coleman

COLUMBIA-Kyle C. Coleman serves as the fine arts manager for ArtFields, where his primary responsibilities are the facilitation of all aspects of the annual visual arts competition and celebration. This includes the recruitment of visual arts professionals to serve on Selection and Jury panels and acting as the liaison between ArtFields and their participating venues, managing the delivery, installation, and de-installation of artwork and of course, facilitating the experience of participating artists.

Coleman is an arts administrator, art historian, visual arts educator, graphic designer and writer from Columbia, South Carolina. He studied graphic design and art history as an undergraduate at Howard University in Washington, DC, and Alabama A&M University in Huntsville, AL. Coleman earned a Master of Arts degree in Arts Administration from Winthrop University. He is currently a doctoral candidate for an Ed.D. in Learning and Organizational Change at Baylor University.

Beginning in 2013, ArtFields is a celebration of Southeastern art and artists that draws submissions from twelve Southeastern states and culminates in a nine-day exhibition and visual art event. Those twelve states are engaged, and fundamental constituents in supporting the mission of highlighting and promoting the thriving community of visual art talent that resides within them. ArtFields was deliberately planted in Lake City, SC, in order to bolster the transition into a thriving, contemporary model with arts and culture at its center and to bring new economic opportunities to help revitalize their southern town and improve the lives of its citizens. During ArtFields, downtown Lake City is transformed into a town-wide art gallery, consisting of non-traditional art spaces, retail venues, warehouses

and galleries.

Coleman spoke about his love for art and its impact on communities. "I am absolutely an art history nerd, and honestly, I am avid about history in general," explained Coleman. "Art often serves as a mirror to the artist that creates it. We are well-represented among painters, sculptors, printmakers, digital artists, sequential artists; no matter the style, method, or technique, we are there! It is edifying to see artists from throughout the diaspora creating in every medium and sharing their unique experiences through the conduit of their craft. And just as other cultures add to the whole, our stories and work are indispensable."

Coleman's doctoral dissertation focuses on diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion in the administration of arts-centered, not-for-profit organizations. "I have been researching this subject to explore where our organizations are and where we are headed in making art spaces truly representative of the diverse communities that they serve," Coleman



ArtFields

explained. "What's more, I have worked in this industry for more than two decades and I yearn to see more diversity in this field that I appreciate and love. As with most things, diversity brings the strength of perspective and experience to our organizations," Coleman concluded.

Among his accolades in the arts community, Coleman serves as the national president of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, the nation's oldest and largest fraternity for men of music (as the first Black national president in Sinfonia's history). He is also a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated, Kappa Kappa Psi National Honorary Band Fraternity and Kappa Delta Pi, an international honor society in education. He is married to Levata Marie Coleman and father to a son Alex (21) and a daughter Kyle Cristina, six.

ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

By Jennifer Robinson



Keiada Holmes

HARTSVILLE- Keiada Holmes may be the teacher of the art students at LOL Steam School of the Arts in Hartsville, but her energy and enthusiasm for the students that she teaches is unmatched. Her enthusiasm began when she was a child growing up in her home church. She served in several capacities but always was drawn to singing and performing as a form of worship. Holmes graduated from high school and attended Winston-Salem State University with the intent on being a teacher, but she said, “God had other plans for my life.” Holmes believed in the children she grew up encouraging and

mentoring from her church and her neighborhood. They need places to go that would use their talents and a way for them to express themselves. Holmes said, “I wanted to know where’s the village?” She began creating the support she wanted to see. Through her church, she created an art program. Children were engaged in singing, painting, dancing and other ways to showcase their gifts.

Her teaching career path started in 2015, at Jacob’s Ladder of the Carolinas and then to Darlington County Community Action Agency with head start. During this time, she founded LOL (Living Out Loud) Youth Ministry. Living Out Loud Youth Ministry, or LOL for short, was founded by Holmes and Carmen Jackson in December 2014. A non-profit 501c3 organization with a focus on maximizing worship through the arts working in the Darlington County School District as a part of Teach for America. Holmes then worked at Butler Academy in Hartsville after having worked in the public and private sectors of education. She also worked with several after school programs where she helped students develop their talents. Students and parents were so impressed with their development, she began her own school. Though she paused on efforts to continue LOL following the death of her grandparents, she drew emotional strength from their legacy. Holmes then returned to her passion and rebranded LOL Youth Ministry as LOL Steam, because of her unwavering devotion to arts to the students, she wanted to encourage. LOL Steam is now known nationally, and inquiries have been received internationally. Holmes has worked hard and earned Best of the Pee Dee in 2021, Teach for Americas Top 30 and, “Black Pages Magazine Powerful Under 40.”

LOL Steam is now LOL Steam School of the Arts, a private, faith-based school of arts that serves fifth through eighth grade students. Their vision is, “to establish a learning community meeting the holistic needs of students. We commit to maintaining an environment where students exceed their expectations academically, creatively, emotionally, socially and spiritually.” In its inception, LOL Steam offered only arts to help develop students. Now the school has expanded to offering athletics and has become a member of SCISA, accredited for independent schools. Holmes said there is currently a waitlist of applicants who want to enroll in the school. Because their teacher student ratio is 10:1, parents are attracted to not only the artistic offerings of LOL Steam School of the Arts but the curriculum that will prepare students for post-secondary education endeavors.

Holmes has been an innovator in creating a modern school that encourages its students to appreciate creativity, remain on the course to maximum growth and always use their talents in their community. She says LOL Steam School of the Arts has many plans for the future to assist in building families and memories for the students. She also plans to expand school extra curricula activities by including music engineering, mental health, business schools and ASL as a second language. The LOL Steam School of the Arts is the school of the future. What it brings to the community prepares students to lead our nation and our world.

2023 SCAEA ARTFIELDS JR. ED&I SCHOLARSHIPS

Submitted by Carla Angus, director of Community Engagement & ArtFields Jr.



Carla Angus, director of Community Engagement & ArtFields Jr.

LAKE CITY-The South Carolina Art Education Association (SCAEA) Business Supporter of Art Education Award is presented to an individual or a business that has made contributions to SCAEA and/or arts education at the local or state level, volunteers support of arts education and provides assistance for the publicity and advocacy of art education.

Mrs. Carla Angus and ArtFields Jr. were awarded the 2023 SCAEA Business Supporter of Art Education Award. ArtFields is a charitable program and event sponsored by the Lake City Creative Alliance located in Lake City, South Carolina. Its mission is to enhance the area schools and greater community through both creative and audience development by fostering a culturally rich environment, connecting our communities through the arts, integrating arts into the education system and serving as the lead in cultivating and advancing our region’s creative economy. ArtFields Jr. offers an array of year-round art programs such as field trip opportunities, interactive hands-on experiences and a statewide art competition that provides creative fine arts outlets for children and teens in the Lake City and its surrounding areas. This year, ArtFields Jr also worked with SCAEA to develop its new Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Scholarship in partnership with SCAEA.

The Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Scholarship was designed to increase equity, diversity and inclusion in arts education and remove barriers to access for underserved and underrepresented individuals. Recipients demonstrate a commitment to ED&I in arts education, a desire to build ED&I into their daily practice and a commitment to reflective practice in ED&I work.

The 2023 SCAEA ArtFields Jr. ED&I Scholarships were presented to Ms. Jasmyne Wall of Edisto Primary School in Orangeburg County School District, Ms. Brenda Reyes of Mt. Zion Elementary in Charleston County School District and Ms. La Toya Thompson of Lake City High, Florence 3 Schools.

This is an amazing contribution to the growth of our art educators in South Carolina. ArtFields Jr is helping SCAEA reach educators in areas that have our lowest participation rates. The SCAEA is grateful to Angus for her vision and commitment to the visual arts and this state.

If you are interested in submitting into the ArtFields Jr. Art Competition, submission is now open! Visit <https://www.artfieldssc.org/artfields-jr/competition/>.



Picture from left to right Aba Kwofie, ArtFields Jr. Coordinator, Brenda Reyes educator, Jasmyne Wall,

THE WHIMSICAL AND SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS ART OF LANCE RHODES



Lance Rhodes

unique gift when he participated in his first group exhibition while still in high school. Held at the Black Creek Arts Council, Rhodes' entry consisted of the celebrity illustrations and paintings he completed as a teenager.

Rhodes describes his college years at Coastal Carolina studying Studio Art as a, "wonderful experience." He learned many skills involving drawing from life and observation as well as material and medium use. Rhodes credits his college teachers and mentors with showing him, "how to observe an object, scale and transition it to paper or canvas. I have been able to mix color very well." John Schiro



Don Carey III

was one of his mentors. Schiro encouraged him when he changed his major from Business Management and taught him many art foundation courses. Coastal was the site of several early accomplishments including a second group exhibition and an appearance on the Coastal Today Show. He was also published in three, "Archaios Literary Magazines," through Coastal.

Upon graduating from college, he presented his senior work in a group exhibition at The Rebecca Randall Bryan Gallery. The work was entitled, "A School of Two Convictions." It was a large, mixed media stitched four panel watercolor self-portrait. The subject matter drew from the Renaissance art period and Charles Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities." The work was, "his personal relation to being torn between philosophies of creation and spirituality. By using mythology and allegory, I created a very emotional self portrait of my own duality."

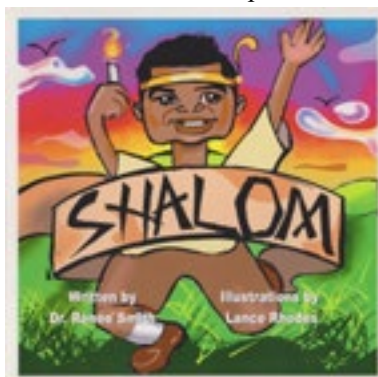
Rhodes has created several eye-catching murals including the Foxes Corner mural, his first commissioned project, completed in, "freezing cold," weather that is a source of community pride today. Another mural is at Florence Cabinetry and showcases Rhodes's technical as well as artistic skill, as the mural was, "all hand-measured and painted." He also painted a mural for a game room that tested his skills as well.

HARTSVILLE-Lance Rhodes, Hartsville native and artist, illustrator and writer, began showing interest in art at an early age, "probably around four," he estimates. His early creations were images of grass, skies and female figures with boots. As he matured, he drew characters from DragonBall Z and SailorMoon. By high school he was drawing celebrity faces. His peers, community and family all saw his passion for drawing and initially regarded it as his, "escape." However, the community appreciated his

media using a combination of black and white illustration and splashes of color. I've found a liking for acrylics because I can use them the same as watercolor at times."

Rhodes is also an effective promoter of his work as seen in his ability to reach out to people from all walks of life to share his artwork on social media forums such as [linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com). As a result of reaching out to Don Carey III, he gained an unexpected commission to complete a painting which was, "the largest I've completed. It was a stitched five-panel mixed media painting that was about 72 x 72 inches." Rhodes describes Carey's request as "one of my greatest joys in my art career."

Rhodes wrote and illustrated a children's book, "The Boy in the Mirror," about common experiences many queer, feminine and gender-neutral boys face growing up. Published in 2022, the book has received five-star reviews on Amazon including one reader who commented, "This is a superbly illustrated children's book with a positive message of inclusion and acceptance." Another appreciated the "amazing



Shalom

artwork," and "beautiful Black characters." Rhodes was inspired to create the book "because I feel all young queer and gay boys deserve to know they have value. It's a mini story of my own childhood experience with being bullied and ostracized. I was also inspired by the point of argument that boys can't play with dolls and [I wanted to promote] the notion of letting children be children. Most

important is the self-esteem of a child."

Rhodes is a multi-talented artist with an eye on future projects including a sequel children's book, "The Boy In The Mirror: Varsity Edition." Another painting workshop and a children's workshop are in the planning stages as well as brainstorming for, "my next body of work, "Thrones," where I deal with virtues and vices being at war. He is also completing a series of celebrity portraits for the upcoming "Glory" series. The Pee Dee region is fortunate to have such a multi-talented and community-minded artist working in his prime.

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CONCEPTUAL ARTIST HANK WILLIS THOMAS' COMMUNITY TIE

By Glaciria Brown Mason



Hank Willis Thomas



Henry 'Hank' Thomas



Dr. Earl Ernest Guile

The 2024 theme of Black History Month celebrates the contributions and impact Black Americans have made in the art world. In 2023, national media was a buzz about the beautiful new 22-foot-high, 40-inch-wide bronze sculpture, the largest monument in the country dedicated to racial equality, unveiled in the nation's oldest public park, Boston Common.

"The Embrace," is a permanent monument commemorating the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King upon King receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, the most prestigious award for contributing the greatest benefit to humankind in the U.S. "The Embrace," is a profound creation by one of this century's most brilliant artist," shared one of the Co-Founders of the project and CEO of Wellwithall, Demond T. Martin. "The Embrace," sculpture was created by Guggenheim Fellow and Conceptual Artist, Hank Willis Thomas, and unveiled, January 13, 2023, in Boston, MA. Of his work, Thomas says, "It's there for everyone to embrace that kind of unconditional love for all humankind. That is the kind of love that impels people to go into the community and try to change conditions for others, to take risks for what they believe in."

During Black History month, Diversity Works highlights Thomas (left), Henry 'Hank' Thomas (center) and Dr. Earl Guile (left) for their contributions to history in our nation and in Florence, SC.

Thomas is the son of Florence native, Henry 'Hank' Thomas. Henry Thomas and Guile are alumni of Florence's first public school, Wilson

High School and have had impressive and amazing careers.

With assistance from the Thomas family, Guile, Curator Stephen Motte and the Florence County Museum and E.N. Zeigler Jr., we are able to share the historical narrative which became the catalyst for change within the Florence Public Library System. In the turbulent 1960s, a time of significant social, political and racial unrest, the two, by their actions, helped move the needle in local civil rights history.

In 1961, after several attempts and being denied a library card, Henry Thomas and Guile persisted and kept returning to apply. At that time, the library was controlled by the school board. Although the landmark Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education* had outlawed segregation in schools in 1954, saying it violated the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, change in the south was slow. The final denial of a library card closed its doors for several months rather than integrate. The chain of events that followed, resulted in legislation, removing the library from the control of the school board and creating an independent institution. The bill, introduced on March 31, 1961, passed and Henry Thomas and Guile became the first recipients of a library card in Florence, SC, thus integrating the Florence Public Library System.

This proved to be the catalyst for further integration in Florence. To learn more about the history of Florence, visit the Florence County Library at 509 S. Dargan Street and the Florence County Museum, 111 W. Cheves Street, Florence, SC. 29501.





*Retired Chief Master Sergeant,
USAF, Dr. Karen Wright Chisolm*

"We all profit from a more diverse, inclusive society, understanding, accommodating, even celebrating our differences, while pulling together for the common good." -Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

National Women's History Month is observed annually. The month-long observance highlights and celebrates the contributions of women in history and today. It reaffirms the commitment of advancing the rights of women. This year's theme, 'Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion,' recognizes women who understand that the elimination of bias and discrimination is the path to a more positive future.

As we understand more about diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), and encourage the practical application of it in the workplace, we recognize that 'diversity works for all of us,' and people, specifically women, need advocates for DEI to sustain a better work-life balance. Diversity, defined as the representation of all races, gender identities, sexual orientations, religion, political beliefs and socioeconomic status; coupled with fair treatment, equity of all people and ensuring they all have the same opportunities, resources and support is achieved with inclusivity which ensures a welcoming space for everyone.

In celebration of Women's History Month, Diversity Works Magazine is excited to highlight and introduce to our readers, DEI Advocate, United States Air Force (USAF), Retired Chief Master Sergeant, Dr. Karen Wright Chisolm.

Chisolm is a native of Charleston, SC. She is a daughter, sibling, wife, mother and retired chief master sergeant who has held high ranking positions within the USAF and federal civilian service. Chisolm is an advocate, bestselling author, business entrepreneur, founder, public speaker and leader who rose to the highest enlisted level of leadership in the USAF, a rank only obtained by one percent of the force.

With more than 40 years of experience combined, in the U.S. military and the federal civilian service, Chisolm's DEI experience thru numerous military and federal civilian appointments, her educational background, civic and spiritual leadership roles qualify her as a DEI advocate. Chisolm says, "While serving over 27 years in the United States Air Force, there were more times than I can count, where I witnessed almost daily, incidents of diversity, equity and inclusion inadequacies throughout my career." A large, nurturing family encouraged and poured into her, at an early age to, "be the best individual you can be," Chisolm shared. She was determined to be an example for those individuals which she was responsible for training, teaching and molding to be good citizens as well as good Airmen. "I wanted to ensure that my presence in the workplace was viewed as more than a supervisor or boss, but more of a role model, compassionate and a support system for my employees and co-workers," said Chisolm.

Chisolm's work history is extensive and impressive. This chief master sergeant is the first African American and first female to serve as superintendent of the 315th Mission Support Squadron at Joint Base Charleston, SC. Chisolm's principal duties included leading and mentoring Airmen on the importance of professional military education for a successful military career. Her last four years on active duty were served at the Pentagon, in Washington, DC, where she served as superintendent, Headquarters; United States Air Force Air Staff. Her duties included translating Department of Defense policies and decisions into workable plans of action. Here, Chisolm was advisor to the chief, systems and analysis, director of personnel

and chief of Air Force reserve on matters pertinent to military systems programs and data systems supporting the Office of Air Force Reserve. Chisolm worked with division chiefs and staff, to ensure personnel program management actions were following federal law, DoD, USAF and USAFR guidance.

Much like her professional career, Chisolm's education which provided the foundation for her impressive accomplishments includes: Doctor of Divinity, Ambassador Bible College and Seminary, Doctoral Management Candidate, Organizational Leadership – University of Phoenix, dual Masters of Art Degree in Human Resources Management/Human Resources Development, Webster University; B.S. Degree in Human Resources Management, Southern Wesleyan University and Associate of Arts Degree in Human Resource Management/Personnel Administration, Community College of the Air Force (CCAF).

Chisolm is a decorated military retiree with multiple awards and decorations, all of which are distinguished and received from the U.S. Secretary of the Air Force or other high-ranking officials. Chisolm's accolades include:

Meritorious Service Medal with one device, Air Force Commendation Medal, Air Force Achievement Medal with two oak leaf clusters, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with six devices, Air Reserve Forces Meritorious Service Award with five devices, National Defense Service Medal with one device, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal with one device, Air Force Longevity Service Award with four devices, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with one "M" device and bronze hourglass, USAF NCO PME Graduate Ribbon with one device and Air Force Training Ribbon and Civil Service Award.

To accomplish all that Chisolm has, requires a strong faith. In her spiritual, social and civic life, Chisolm serves on and is an active participant on many advisory and executive boards. She is a life member and Trustee – Pro-Tem of Greater St. Luke African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., a Diamond Life Member of Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority, Inc.; Board Member of Ladies Enriching the Community; Life Member of Tuskegee Airmen; Recently elected as the 50th Imperial Commandress of the Imperial Court Daughters Auxiliary; A.E.A.O.N.M.S., Inc. and the first-ever elected in the over 113 year history of the organization from Charleston, SC as well as the second from the state to be elected and first to serve from South Carolina. She is a past commandress of Arabian Court No. 128, Charleston, SC; life member of the National Board of NAACP; former executive board member of the Charleston Branch NAACP; regional coordinator for the State Branch of NAACP; legacy member Jack & Jill of America.

In retirement, Chisolm continues her outreach and support to organizations and operations to make a difference in the community. Chisolm is the author of, "You Deserve Life," recognized as a number one best seller, published November 2021. Chisolm has also contributed to two, number one best sellers along with other female authors, 'Camouflaged Sisters Silent No More,' and 'Camouflaged Sisters – Leadership through the Eyes of Senior Military Women Leaders – Mentoring Is Critical To Your Success.'

As a DEI advocate on behalf of women for diversity, equity and inclusion, Chisolm is also an advocate and public speaker for survivors of domestic violence abuse. She shared a personal story of being a survivor of domestic violence abuse at an early age. Chisolm says, of her experience, "It took me 27 years to reveal my story of domestic violence. Once I revealed my story, it helped me to heal and helped those I touched to heal. It was then that I devoted my time, my experiences and my wisdom to advocate on behalf of women for diversity in the workplace, equity in the workplace as well as communities and inclusion in where ever or whatever women want to do." Chisolm shared, "God gave me the wisdom and the courage to advocate not only for Domestic Violence victims on ways to save

WOMEN WHO ADVOCATE CONT'D

them, protect them and help them to understand and know that God created each of us to be the best that we can be, and no one should ever make them feel that they are any less than the beautifully, wonderfully made creature that God created.”

In Chisolm’s extensive history of leadership, she has experienced and witnessed many unfavorable DEI practices in the workplace. “While serving in the Air Force I was aware of the many issues and challenges across the globe facing the Air Force. Continued issues of the Air Force’s policy on race, ethnicity and gender biases. Even though these issues may have improved over the years, I am sure that challenges still exist,” shared Chisolm. It is because of her certainty that DEI inadequacies are ongoing, she started and maintains Boots-2-Heels, South Carolina Chapter, Inc. Boots-2-Heels is a nonprofit organization that assists female veterans transition from the military to the workplace. This organization reached out to female veterans that have retired or are still serving. They provide networking seminars, resume writing and interviewing techniques as well as dress to impress workshops and free clothes to women to help prepare them for employment or progression in their current positions.

“I believe women’s voices used to be under-represented in the workplace. I believe that more women are taking a stand and are gaining confidence in their voice, their knowledge and their skills and are starting to take a different turn. Being intimidated by the forces of the men in the room and the lack of the presence of more than one woman in the room. For the most part it stemmed from our voices being ignored or drowned out,” says Chisolm.

On her weekly podcast entitled, “A Centralized Moment – The Focus Is You,” which airs every Sunday at 8 p.m. on Zoom, she features women from across the U.S., and they have, “Girl Talk,” about anything and everything. Women speak and voice their concerns about issues they are

facing, be it at work or at home and encourage each other to use their voice and demand respect and be heard. This podcast started in March 2020 and continues with over 30-65 women every Sunday.

Advice Chisolm offers to businesses in making DEI an authentic part of their work place operations is:

- Develop ways to learn about and foster the various talents of the employees,
- Foster more inclusive environments to meet the needs of all employees and not just cater to the few.
- Encourage and display trust and respect throughout.
- Empower employees to showcase their talents and skills and help employees feel more engaged in their roles.
- Encourage ownership of their responsibilities.

Chisolm grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, the seventh of 11 children born to the late Noble Benjamin (Bone) and Adell Meyers Wright. She is married to Paul Chisolm, Jr. and they are the proud parents of four children, Tamara, Eric, Paul III and Jazmine. The Chisolms are the proud grandparents of eight, and great-grandparents to three children. Chisolm loves the Lord, and her faith is grounded in his word. Her favorite scripture is Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” Her motto is, “Never underestimate the power of someone else’s struggles, unless you have walked in their shoes.”

As a Veteran of the United States Air Force, Chisolm holds true and lives by the USAF three core values, even as a civilian, and they are:

1. Integrity First
2. Service Before Self
3. Excellence In All We Do

MOVING FORWARD WITH THE GOALS FOR DEI By Jennifer Robinson



Dr. Nika White

GREENVILLE - As the Founder and Lead Principal Consultant of Nika White Consulting (NWC), a full-service boutique DEIB consulting firm, White leads a team with the mission of making DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) practical so that organizations can shift systems to cultivate a culture of belonging and go to the next level of the DEI journey. White helps maximize people and organizations’ effectiveness, potential and capacity through optimized systems and culture. She takes a holistic approach centered on the organization’s most essential asset - human

capital. The heart of White’s work is at the intersection of organizational development and industrial psychology.

“Diversity, equity and inclusion historically has been about encouraging and educating individuals about the explicit and implicit bias and racism that many Americans face daily. Many of the challenges related to DEI have been because of organization and employee resistance to change. Sometimes people don’t like to be told that they have been biased which leads to many pushing back instead of leaning in.”

White stated, “While I say that diversity, equity and inclusion work found me, I also made a conscious effort to align myself with work that helped others and was closely related to my values. When I realized DEI was the field I wanted to pivot into, I started paying more attention to some of the things that I had associated myself with, especially as it relates to a lot of my volunteerism.” She noticed there were few professionals of color in her field. She worked in client services and went to the president/CEO with whom she had a good rapport, and candidly asked why there weren’t others who looked like her? The president listened intently to her concerns and agreed with her assessment. He assigned her to lead the charge to make changes. White’s observations were not limited to race but also gender. Systematically women do not receive equality in the workplace.

“Throughout history, women have typically been disenfranchised, however, women continue to push against sexism, stereotypes, and the pay gap, among other issues, White stated. Things have improved, but policies and procedures keep women from reaching their peak earnings and capabilities compared to men. As a woman, I know what it’s like to push against and past the glass ceiling. This is personal because as a mother to an activist daughter, I don’t want her to fight the same fights. When we diversify organizations, we exponentially improve the lives of women and POC. DEI can greatly improve the lives of people that look like me and that’s important.”

Unfortunately, Black women are disenfranchised more than white males and females. “Women still must fight against being heard, taken seriously and stereotyped for speaking up. Black women specifically are underrepresented at manager or higher levels. Due to generational racism, Black women must work twice as hard to receive the same recognition and compensation as men and white women. During Black Women’s Equal Pay Day, we discovered that Black women must work until July of this year to make what White men have made the previous year. This is very disheartening and there typically aren’t many avenues for women to complain about this unfair information. We already know that greater diversity leads to greater innovation. Organizations need to listen to women to remain relevant.”

Diversity, equity and inclusion must be an authentic part of business operations. Productivity and office relations may improve if systems would put into place policies and procedures that address DEI. White concluded by stating, “I would advise businesses to first understand their ‘why.’ Why is this important? Why are they making the effort? Once they understand their, ‘why,’ they can clearly understand how and where this will affect processes and procedures. For example, if your ‘why’ is to make sure all employees feel seen and heard, you should first start with creating ERGs. Next, I would advise businesses to make changes in their policies and procedures. If you want to make a consistent and lasting impact, create change in day-to-day operations.



Dr. Cynthia Walters

COLUMBIA - Dr. Cynthia Walters has never been afraid to address workplace indiscretions in reference to inequality to people, more importantly women of color. Her forty-nine-year career includes being the first woman of color in many professional positions. She has served as unit secretary, education assistant and education instructor (1974-1983) for SC Baptist Hospital and first AA director of education (1984-1999) at Baptist Medical Center. When the new millennium began, she was appointed as the first AA director of education & organization development,

corporate director of diversity and inclusion for eighteen years. Since 2019 she has represented Prisma Health as director of diversity and inclusion. Not only is she an advocate within the workplace for women and inclusivity, but she also founded Women in Wisdom Ministries to help women holistically be successful.

As a Black woman who was marginalized before diversity, equity and inclusion were identified, she realized the importance of Black women having a place in the workforce. "As a first several times, particularly in white America, I have felt invisible, not respected and not heard. Some years ago, during a conference I heard Dr. Roosevelt Thomas (father of diversity and inclusion) speak about everyone being included and feeling a sense of belonging. So grateful I was able to personally meet and shake his hand. It sparked a passion in me to help the disenfranchised, marginalized and those who could not speak/would not speak for themselves," Walters shared. Women, particularly Black women, underestimate their power. Walters believes women should understand their purpose in order to be most effective not only professionally but also in their personal lives. "By almost any measure,

Black women are facing disproportionately high barriers in the workplace. They are heavily impacted by bias in hiring and promotions; Black women are promoted at a significantly lower rate than white women at the first step up to manager and more than a quarter of Black women say their race has led to them missing out on an opportunity to advance. They experience more microaggressions than other groups of women and are three to four times as likely as white women to be subjected to disrespectful and, "othering," comments and behavior. They are also less likely to report that their managers check in on their well-being or help them balance priorities and deadlines." (leanin.org)

"Implementing and maintaining diversity, equity and inclusion is, 'heart,' work and, 'hard' work, declares Walters. It is, 'heart,' work for, in many cases, we are asking people to challenge their cultural upbringing, generational expectations and biases (implicit or explicit). In some cases, they must realize that these actions are simply wrong. They must accept that what family and others have taught them requires a change in heart, thinking and perspective. It is "hard" work because it moves to destroy the systemic standards of America and those who believe that power belongs to them and there is no desire to share the power. No one wants to lose power or feel like they will have to give up something."

Businesses are recommended to recognize the value in each of their employees, not just a selected few. Those who are a part of daily operations would give their best if they were free to have safe discussions about equity in their workspaces, not just for them but for the future impact on their families. Employees deserve recognition and promotion for their contributions to their business. The caveat is recognition. Promotion should not be given based on an employee's race or other diversity dimensions, but because of their merit. As this happens, "employees and businesses with both succeed," Walters stated. "Include all dimensions of diversity," Walters recommends, "it will strengthen businesses and erase division among employees."

Celebrate Women's History Month



WOMEN REQUIRE MORE THAN EQUITY



Hannah E. Parker

Diversity Works® met with State Board Member and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion director for the South Carolina League of Women Voters, Hannah E. Parker. A global human resources leader versed in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), she has championed and created DEI practices, training and inclusive policies for major corporations and higher education institutions since 2001. As the state's DEI director, she shared more about the history of fighting for women's equality and the importance of advocating for women and all voters to have not just

equality but equity throughout our society.

The League of Women Voters (LWV) formed by the suffragists of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, began as a,

"mighty political experiment," designed to help 20 million women carry out their new responsibilities as voters (www.lwv.org). Following World War II, LWV was the first organization to be established as a unit with a nonpartisan stance with the United Nations.

"To understand equity, we must refer to systems, processes and approaches based in fairness that ensure everyone is given equal opportunity and treated with dignity and respect. To do this, we must also accept that equity seeks to balance any disparities in the amounts of or access to resources amongst the groups or individuals within those groups." Parker explained that inclusion should be noted as the approach or act in which we engage and ensure representation of people and perspectives in our groups or organizations. Parker challenged, "But, how do we get people to buy into these concepts or see themselves in others or our work?" Without that view of people, of humanity, outside of themselves, it is challenging to meet the needs of others. All voters' issues are or can be different from others. Many people are trying to determine how they belong. As a Global DEI

WOMEN REQUIRE CONT'D

Award recipient, Parker said, “To understand DEI is to understand the details.” Diversity includes all people regardless of their innate similarities and differences. The LWV continues to build upon the work of its founders – empowering voters and defending democracy through advocacy, education and litigation at the local, state and national levels – by remaining nonpartisan in politics.

Companies are employing women in executive positions and in some respects, their wages are becoming more competitive in the marketplace, with American women typically earning 82 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2022 – compared to 65 cents for every dollar in 1982 ([pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org)); and according to Forbes Magazine, women CEOs run 10.4 percent of Fortune 500 companies. These efforts did not come without hefty feedback. In the 1970s, the movement to demonstrate women’s rights and provide information about the discrepancies in equality was met with negative outcomes. Parker adds, “To put this in a historic context, in 1972, shortly after the congressional passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), LWV voted officially to support equal rights for all regardless of sex.” Parker further explained that in our recent history, a Joint Resolution was introduced in both chambers of Congress that would affirm that the ERA is a valid part and should be included in the United States Constitution. “In fact, it was brought to the Senate floor in April 2023 where it had a bipartisan majority of senators supporting it, but it failed to reach the 60-vote threshold. Despite having met all requirements to be added to the US Constitution, the League is still actively pushing for Congress to officially recognize it as the 28th Amendment,” said Parker.

According to their website, “The League of Women Voters functions as a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.” Their website explains that some of these policy and advocacy areas include passing voting rights legislation; adding the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution and restoring reproductive freedom to women and those who can become pregnant.

Parker believes that to approach these and other public policy issues with a DEI lens, organizations must act with authenticity. “The approach cannot be a “quick fix,” “program,” or “campaign,” as the result of a civil issue.” To continue in our efforts to acquire equity and remain effective, members of LWV are often asked to examine their



work through this lens. First, who is to be included in the process? Who has been excluded? Who will be impacted? What are the intended and unintended outcomes? Does this align with our vision for an equitable and inclusive organization? And lastly, what changes could be made to make this work more equitable? Parker recognizes that approaching inclusion (and conversely, exclusion) with this mindset or with a DEI lens can most often provide a psychologically safe space for people to work and share ideas that can better progress society.

Final Thoughts:

Parker said that DEI “lens” is why the League of Women Voters is still relevant. DEI is not an absolute resolve, but the associated issues and effects must continue to be explored. Through its intentional efforts to leverage diversity, the League of Women Voters not only provides services to all voters but continues to seek, include and educate people about their rights and the importance of voting for their representatives. “To paraphrase what we know from our National President of the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF), Dr. Deborah Turner, the reason why this is important is so that, ‘their representatives can effectively represent them, their ideals, beliefs and their community regardless of party, regardless of religion, regardless of race, regardless of ethnicity and regardless of their identities.’” The hope is that people will begin to understand that diversity, equity and inclusion are not a tagline, checkbox or goal, but a set of intrinsic and extrinsic values that must be embraced to fully appreciate, address, and resolve issues, and create a healthy, high-performing organization and community.





USAF Force Support Development Flight Chief, Dr. Sarah L. Sloan

National Women's History Month celebrates the achievements and contributions of women throughout the United States. Although the first celebration of women in the U.S. was held in 1909, its roots date back to 1857 over a protest of poor working conditions in NYC factories. The history, notwithstanding the sentiment and the need to recognize the importance of women's contributions to society, remains.

The national theme for Women's History Month is, "Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (DEI)." It recognizes women throughout the country who understand that, for a positive future, we need to

eliminate bias and discrimination from our lives and institutions, knowing that when we inspire others to value women's inclusion, we forge a better world. When women are included, that inclusion gives them a sense of belonging, relevance and empowerment.

Today, we see women in leadership roles in all segments of society from business to entertainment, sports, politics and more. However, we also see women flourishing in careers that not so long ago were atypical fields for women with few to no women leaders such as, architecture, construction, engineering and the military, for example.

Seventy-five years ago, the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, granted women the right to serve as permanent, regular members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and the recently formed Air Force. Despite the passage of the act in October 1949, the Army established, a regulation that mothers with dependent children were ineligible to serve in the military, and female servicewomen with children under the age of 18 were to be discharged.

Dr. Sarah Lucille Sloan is a leader who advocates for individuals daily. In her role as flight chief, she leads military and civilians from all diverse backgrounds. Her leadership skills in the public as well as professional arena have aided her as a DEI leader.

As a DEI leader, Sloan advocates for those of various backgrounds, genders, races and ages, as well as those needing a chance or for someone to believe in them for access to opportunities. Much like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Sloan believes, "Everyone needs to experience a sense of belonging, a feeling of acceptance and respect."

Having served in leadership roles in Information Technology and Library Science, Sloan's leadership philosophy is based on life principles, basic beliefs and the ability to know when it's time to change. "Leadership starts with obedience, respect and planned goals. Leading engagingly helps you set the bar for those around you, then you can measure the progress and succession, just know when it's time to shift," says Sloan.

Sloan remembers, from a young girl, "I've always been a leader and demonstrated passion for people, of all backgrounds." Sloan's grandmother taught her the importance of work ethics. "Everything you do in life, do it as unto the Lord, doors will open that only you can shut," she would always say to me, Sloan recalls.

The 11-year flight chief says, as a leader, advocating on behalf of women for DEI means fostering a positive workforce culture, and educating those around her about the unconscious bias, discrimination, privilege and injustices women may encounter. Sloan shared, throughout her career, she has had mentors of both genders and multiple races who believed in and trusted her. These instrumental players poured into her, she says, "as long as I was teachable, which is key." She references an old adage, "You can lead a horse to the water, but you can't make it drink."

Sloan conveys to every woman, wanting to grow, that career development is a critical process that exemplifies faith, values, relationships,

attitude, priorities, family and growth. She recounts that, each stage of her life took her down a path of resiliency, strength and growth. Early on, she was taught to take complete charge of her development and ultimately her career. "I am doing what I love, and I believe I'm good at it. I'm always seeking to know more about how to lead people with compassion, understanding and wisdom," she says.

She recalls another truism shared by her beloved grandmother, "Determination and motivation will take you places the average can't go." Leading people is not easy; it takes strength in knowing who you are. Leadership starts with obedience, respect and planned goals. Leading engagingly helps you set the bar for those around you, then you can measure the progress and succession. She shares, "again just know when it's time to shift." DEI has been around for a long time; however, recent social justice movements have spotlighted the need for DEI across society, and the workplace is no exception. Only recently has there been a, "buzz," about DEI practices reflecting the latest social fad, primarily focused on the, "new genders," not necessarily on race or women. Education is the key, Sloan says. "You don't know, what you don't know. We tend to implement plans but need to do better at getting buy-in and improve on follow-up actions for these highly important initiatives."

As an advocate for DEI practices, Sloan further acknowledges that progress has been made; however, women still have a long way to go. "It is often difficult for men in leadership to receive direction from a woman, even when she has a seat at the table. Although women command military installations, run major companies, etc., in some instances, they are often uninvited or dismissed as invaluable members of decision-making in leadership. I think a woman is much more thoughtful and her words resonate in a way that makes men uncomfortable because they are forced to consider emotions, which may be deemed as a weakness in business decisions and masculinity," Sloan says.

In a workplace setting, DEI relates to actions taken to shift mindsets, behaviors and practices toward equitable and inclusive leadership for individuals, teams and organizations. For businesses seeking to make DEI an authentic part of their workplace operations, Sloan encourages:

- Create an environment that notices and corrects inequities and unconscious bias and holds employees accountable.
- Recruit and promote women in leadership roles – make them more visible.
- Mentor women; and
- Provide training to change company culture.

Sloan says, "DEI leaders must actively listen without judgment, from a desire to empathize, improve decision-making and ensure those around them feel valued."

Sloan is a native of Mooresville, NC. She holds two master's degrees: one in Business Management and Information Technology and the second in Library Science. In addition, Sloan holds a doctoral degree in education, with an emphasis in Community Care and Counseling. She serves as an installation Volunteer Victim's Advocate (VVA) Level II responder on Shaw AFB, where she meets the needs of the Shaw community. She will assume the role of adjunct professor at Morris College in Spring 2024 and is also a certified Grief Coach by the Institute of Professional Grief Coaching.

Diversity Works Magazine salutes Dr. Sarah L. Sloan for her DEI advocacy for women.



CELEBRATING WOMEN'S EXCELLENCE IN DARLINGTON, SC

By Jennifer Robinson



DARLINGTON-In 1983, Dee Dee Kehl took a job in banking as a recommendation from her sister-in-law. She did not know it would lead to a 40-year career in the financial industry and awards for excellence in her community. Before her career in banking, she was prepared for customer service from her experience in the retail industry. Her first jobs in banking were as a teller, customer service and administration. Kehl said she loves working with people. This mother of three and grandmother of three is currently a lender at the Darlington office of Dedicated Community Bank where she has worked for two and a half years. Kehl said she loves Dedicated Community Bank because of their dedication as the premier relationship bank in the communities they serve. She assists customers with commercial loans, consumer loans and mortgages. In addition to her responsibilities as a lender, Kehl is the bank security officer. Offering solutions to customers' financial needs is rewarding to Kehl, especially the multigenerational aspect such as assisting young people with their first car or first home and offering financial guidance through the process.

The Darlington Professional Women's Group awarded Kehl the Professional Woman of the Year in 2023. The Professional Women's group recognizes excellence in women professionally and personally. It is no surprise that she received this prestigious honor not only for her work in the banking industry, but also because of her community engagement. In addition to being a member of Darlington Professional Women, Kehl is an active member of the Darlington Rotary Club and has been a Rotarian for fifteen years. She was also awarded Rotarian of the Year with this organization in 2022. One of the highlights of the Rotary year that is important to Kehl is the annual auction that raises funds to award high school students scholarships to college. She also volunteers with them at a local soup kitchen. Kehl is a board member with the Downtown Darlington Revitalization Association and serves as their treasurer. This organization supports local businesses and awards improvement grants. Kehl is proud to see the development and growth of downtown Darlington through the association's assistance. "Serving with these organizations," Kehl said, is how she, "gets to know the community."

Kehl said many of her career goals have been met, but her main personal goal is to make a difference to someone every day. She looks forward to continuing to serve at her church with her husband, Pastor Rusty Kehl of St Luke Lutheran Church in Florence, SC and spending time with her children and grandchildren. Kehl mentioned there are several community projects she has been involved in and she wants to continue to have an impact, not for the awards and recognitions, but because of her love for people. Kehl deserves all recognition for her work, and she deserves appreciation for her heart.



CONGRATULATIONS!
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PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S
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CAN MONEY BUY HAPPINESS? MORE THAN HALF OF AMERICANS SAY YES



(BPT) - How much money would make you happy? According to the average American, the price tag comes in around \$1.2 million.

New research from Empower, a leader in financial planning, investing and advice, reveals six in 10

Americans believe money can buy happiness, though just 17 percent say financial contentment is about reaching a certain net worth. It turns out that a little goes a long way and incremental financial wins can make a massive impact on Americans' well-being.

"Every generation has grappled with questions of how to calculate financial happiness: hard work, a lot of planning, consistent savings, and even a little bit of luck, in just the right measures," says Carol Waddell, president of Empower Personal Wealth. "A spirit of financial confidence prevails, with seven in 10 saying they have clear financial goals and Americans continue to envision a bright future."

The financials of happiness While the study found that seven in 10 Americans (71 percent) believe more money would solve most of their problems, for a third (32 percent) a relatively attainable gain of \$15,000 would make a meaningful impact in their lives, boosting their feeling of financial happiness for six months. That number surges to 42 percent with a \$25,000 gain, and just \$5,000 would do it for 17 percent.

Indeed, happiness manifests in big and small ways. Most Americans say it's on-time bill payment (67 percent) and living debt-free (65 percent), while roughly half say it's the ability to afford small luxuries without guilt (54 percent) and home ownership (45 percent). Over half say their contentment can be found in spending on experiences with those they cherish

(53 percent) and in optimism for what's next, including retiring on their own terms (37 percent).

Readying for retirement Nearly three-quarters of Americans (73 percent) say they're currently experiencing financial stress, with today's economic pressures like inflation (81 percent), rising interest rates (66 percent) and student loans (32 percent) dampening their sense of prosperity. Half report carrying debt (54 percent overall, and 72 percent of Gen X) and nearly four in 10 (36 percent) say that they couldn't handle an unforeseen expense over \$500 without real worry.

In the current financial environment, Americans now expect to retire three years later, at age 63. Those with a less detailed financial plan (or no plan at all) don't expect to clock out until age 70, five years later than planned.

For about four in 10 Americans (37 percent), and exactly half of Gen Xers, retiring by a certain age is the meaning of financial happiness. The majority (84 percent) are taking steps to reach this target, including putting more money into retirement savings (39 percent), short-term savings like a high-yield account (31 percent), and working with a financial advisor (26 percent). A quarter of savers (25 percent) are paying off debt more aggressively than they would otherwise, and 22 percent are delaying a major purchase like a car.

The power of planning

The majority of Americans (73 percent) say a solid financial plan would bring them happiness, and they would like help to get there: (57 percent) of Americans wish they would have gotten advice sooner. Nearly half of Americans (45 percent) say they haven't gotten the financial advice they need, including (55 percent) of Gen Zers and (57 percent) of Millennials. But those who already have a plan are proof of its power.



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ABB ANNOUNCES KEY APPOINTMENTS

Articles submitted by Samantha Strickland, marketing coordinator.



Bryan Lenertz

MULLINS-Anderson Brothers Bank is pleased to make the following announcements:

Richard Carroll has been appointed senior vice president. Carroll is the regional executive for western Horry and Sumter Counties and serves on the Loan Approval Committee.

Bryan Lenertz has been appointed senior vice president. Lenertz is the regional executive for the Grand Strand, Georgetown and Florence Counties and serves on the Loan Approval Committee.

Rivers Anderson has been appointed senior vice president and chief credit officer. Anderson serves on the Board of Directors, the Asset Liability Committee and chairs the Directors Credit Committee.

CEO David E. Anderson said, "We are fortunate to have these leaders for many years to come as they occupy a pivotal role in our continued growth and success, ensuring we remain a leader in community banking."

Hammond has been appointed to their Board of Directors. Hammond is a 2003 graduate of the University of South Carolina and is employed with Sinclair Broadcast Group as regional director of Sales for eleven markets throughout South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia.

"Ashleigh's appointment to our board is an important step in preparing Anderson Brothers Bank for our next generation of banking service," said Anderson, president and CEO of Anderson Brothers Bank. "Ashleigh, along with cousins Taylor and Rivers Anderson, assure we will continue, 'treating you like family' for many years to come."



Ashleigh Anderson Hammond

ABB DONATES TO THE CELLIS MAJOR DRIFFIN I – CEDRIC MOSES DRIFFIN PANTRY & RESOURCE HUB



Pictured left to right, Kelly Timmons (ABB's BOC), Areaanna Driffin (CMD's Pantry Program Manager) and Jennifer Kimbrell (ABB's CRA Officer)

KINGSTREE — Anderson Brothers Bank donates \$1,000 to CMD's Pantry. This donation will assist with general expenses related to food deliveries to low-income residents throughout Williamsburg and Florence Counties.

CMD's Pantry is a non-profit organization established in 2019 and is run by the Driffin family. The organization aims to provide healthy food to low-

income families, senior citizens, and disabled individuals in Williamsburg and the surrounding counties. This is made possible by partnerships with Low Country Food Bank and Food Share South Carolina. CMD also partners with Neighbor to Neighbor of South Carolina's volunteer network to deliver fresh, healthy food options to individuals who cannot travel to its facility.

In addition to providing food, CMD's Pantry offers many other free services through its Resource Hub program. These include transport services to doctor appointments, assistance completing certain government assistance forms, case management services and much more.

When asked about her family's work, Areaanna Driffin said, "The institution is a labor of love, which honors the Driffin family's legacy of helping others." Visit cmdpantry.org to learn more about CMD's Pantry.



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HOMEOWNERSHIP 101: KEEPING YOUR HOME AND WALLET HAPPY

Submitted by Palmetto First Federal Credit Union



Owning a home is a fantastic achievement, but it also comes with its fair share of responsibilities. Don't worry, though! We're here to guide you with some practical tips to keep your house in tip-top condition, stay on top of repairs, and make savvy financial choices to protect your investment.

Create a Budget and Emergency Fund

Budgeting might not sound like the most exciting thing, but it's a game-changer when it comes to homeownership. Take a good look at your monthly income and expenses and allocate a portion for home maintenance and repairs. Having a clear budget will help you plan and avoid any financial surprises. And speaking of surprises, creating an emergency fund for unexpected home expenses is one of the biggest ways you can give yourself financial peace of mind.

Regular Maintenance Saves Money

Your home is your space to relax and recover, and it deserves some TLC. Regular maintenance is vital to keeping everything running smoothly, so do yourself a favor and inspect your HVAC system, plumbing, roof and electrical stuff regularly. Catching small issues before they become big problems will save you both headaches and money in the long run.

Prioritize Like a Pro

Home repairs can sometimes feel like a never-ending to-do list, but don't let it overwhelm you. Focus on the must-haves first: those things that are essential for safety and the structural integrity of your home. Once you've got those covered, you can tackle the nice-to-haves when the budget allows. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither is your dream home.

DIY vs. Professional Services

When it comes to repairs, it's sometimes tempting to channel your inner DIY-er and save some bucks by fixing things yourself. Minor tasks, like changing a light fixture or fixing a leaky faucet, might be doable, but some repairs are better left to the pros. This is especially true if you're dealing with electrical or plumbing repairs when trying to fix the issue yourself could cause further damage. Assess your skills honestly, and if in doubt, call in the experts. It's better to be safe than sorry.

Crunching the Numbers: Refinancing and Loan Options

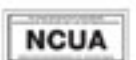
Now and then, it's smart to reassess your mortgage and refinancing options. Interest rates and financial situations change and refinancing at a lower rate could save you a bundle in the long run. Do your homework, weigh the pros and cons, and see if refinancing makes sense for your situation.

By following these tips and tricks, you're well on your way to becoming a financially responsible homeowner. While managing your finances might seem overwhelming, remember that you can always rely on Palmetto First Federal Credit Union to have your back. Our team is ready to serve you on your financial journey, so don't hesitate to reach out to us!



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As Americans, we can take pride in the fact that we are a nation of givers. And as the economy improves, charitable giving is on the rise. In fact, according to the National Philanthropic Trust in 2020 total charitable giving from U.S. individuals, corporations, foundations, and bequests exceeded \$471 billion with 69% coming from individuals.¹

While money may be tight for many Americans, it's nice to know that there is a way to support a favorite charity without having to worry about the impact it could have on your budget. How? By giving the gift of life insurance. Here are just a few ways you can use this proven method to contribute money to your favorite causes:

- **Donate an existing policy**—If you already have a policy and no longer need the death benefit, you can gift the policy to your desired charity, which may give you some tax benefits. The charity will receive the full benefit amount when you die.

- **List the charity as a beneficiary**—As the owner, you remain in control of your policy and can leave money to as many beneficiaries as you like: children, grandchildren—even multiple charities. Or, you can name a single charity the sole beneficiary, and it will receive the

entire amount.

- **Purchase a separate policy**—There are times when it makes sense to have separate policies: one for loved ones and one for charitable gifts. This technique can prove especially helpful if you would like to retain ownership of one policy, but not the other.

- **Create a Charitable Remainder Trust**—While this planned-giving tool is designed to shelter appreciated assets such as stocks and real estate, you can also incorporate life insurance if it's set up properly. Be sure to consult a trusts and estates advisor before pursuing this approach.

Giving life insurance can be a lasting legacy to support causes dear to you. Depending on the method you choose, it may also offer a variety of tax benefits.

This educational, third-party article is provided as a courtesy by Julie A Cord, Agent, New York Life Insurance Company. To learn more about the information or topics discussed, please contact Julie A Cord at 317.289.3010 or jacord@ft.newyorklife.com.

¹“Charitable Giving Statistics,” National Philanthropic Trust, 2021.

<https://www.nptrust.org/philanthropic-resources/charitable-giving-statistics>

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TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR FINANCIAL JOURNEY



(BPT) - If you're just beginning your financial journey, it might feel overwhelming. Finances are one topic many are unwilling to talk about, leaving you on your own to figure out basics like budgeting, building your credit score or negotiating your first salary.

To help young women develop skills so they won't have to sweat the stress, Secret Deodorant has gathered resources and partnered with financial experts to provide young women the tools they need not just to survive but thrive. Through their, "No More Financial Secrets," initiative, Secret Deodorant is offering free resources, and tips from a diverse group of financial experts at [Secret.com/Money Moves](https://secret.com/money-moves).

One of these experts is Carmen Perez, creator of the MUCH budgeting app, which helps individuals manage their money and paychecks.

"While finances may seem intimidating when you're just starting out, remind yourself how far you've come," said Perez. "Don't be afraid to face finances head on, talk to trusted people and use resources available to you."

Here are some tips to help empower you on your journey to financial wellness.

Get a clear picture of your finances!

While the word "budget" can sound scary, it just means planning

for how to best use your money. You need to understand your financial picture before planning where you want to go. It begins with two steps: know how much money is coming in (what you earn) and how much is going out (tracking all your spending). Budgeting apps can help you get started.

"Always make sure your needs are being met before spending on wants," Perez recommended. "If you spend more than you earn, you'll need to make some changes, or you could end up in debt." If you find yourself in a situation where you have more bills than income, your first focus should be on increasing your income. Increasing your income could look like taking on a side hustle temporarily, learning a new in-demand skill, asking for a raise, or changing jobs to get a bump in pay.

After tracking your spending for a few weeks, you'll see areas where you could cut back. Some costs are essential (like rent and utilities, food and debt repayment), but other areas may be possible to trim, like going out to eat and non-essential purchases.

How to build your credit score

Having a good credit score makes it possible to open new credit cards or get loans, to buy a car or home - and can even impact your ability to rent an apartment. From a lender's point of view, a good credit score means you'll be reliable when paying your bills.

To build a good credit history, you need to use credit (make occasional purchases on a credit card), then pay your bills on time every month (preferably in full). You shouldn't use over 30 percent of your available credit, so if a card is maxed out, it's time to pay down debt more aggressively.

"Building a good credit score takes time," advised Perez. "But the habits you need to get a good credit score, like paying bills on time and not over-using credit, are financial habits that will benefit you throughout your lifetime."

NEW HOSPITAL INDUSTRIAL MAINTENANCE YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM LAUNCHING IN THE PEE DEE

Submitted by McLeod Health



Pictured L to R: SC Department of Workforce Cheryl Lewis; Board member of SC Student Loan Corporation Octavia Williams Blake; Workforce Development Coordinator Jernasia Gaskins; McLeod Vice President of Facilities Management Emily Lucero; Big Picture Learning Regional Coordinator Crishell Johnson; McLeod Director of Construction Lee Burris; Power:Ed Executive Director Claire Gibbons, McLeod Director of Recruiting & Workforce Development Charity Gerald; Harbor Freight Fellows Initiative Regional Coordinator Charlie Plant; and McLeod Health Careers Program Coordinator Matthew Peake.

Big Picture Learning (BPL), has been awarded a \$25,000 grant from Power:Ed, the philanthropy of SC Student Loan Corporation, to support the creation of a hospital industrial maintenance youth apprenticeship program in the Pee Dee region. The funds will be used to support scholarships for participants and cover the costs of their tools and work clothes.

BPL will provide all necessary logistical support to McLeod Health, (the host venue), and local youth, educators, and businesses through its Harbor Freight Fellows Initiative (HFFI). McLeod and HFFI will collaborate to select the students needed for this industrial experience.

HFFI is a partnership between BPL and the Harbor Freight Tool company's Tools for Schools program. The goal is to increase support and investment in skilled trades education through apprenticeship experiences for youth.

"The Harbor Freight Fellows Initiative is committed to connecting youth interested in skill trades pathways with the assistance of a skilled trades mentor," shared Crishell Johnson, Regional Coordinator for Big Picture Learning's HFFI Initiative. "As a South Carolina native myself, I couldn't be more excited to bear witness to this important partnership to open up new career pathways for the young people of this region."

HFFI has been successfully supporting skilled trades apprenticeship experiences for South Carolina youth for over five years. This project will create a model for cost sharing partnerships with industry that can

significantly increase apprenticeship opportunities for youth.

This project is seen as a pilot and a proof of concept to develop a long-standing partnership with McLeod Health and other hospitals regionally. Additionally, it will serve as a catalyst to develop similar opportunities for youth statewide in other industries involving the skilled trades - construction, manufacturing, aviation, maritime, transportation, etc. The goal is for industries that employ the trades to develop in-house, self-funded apprenticeship programs.

The project will focus on the soft and hard skills needed for the workplace, increased knowledge of the tools, procedures, and safety practices in the health care industrial maintenance environment, the acquisition of necessary certifications (OSHA), and exposure to, and engagement with a professional environment and the communication skills needed with both staff and the public. The goals are to secure potential employment for participating youth and to build a pipeline of skilled workers benefiting the larger Pee Dee community.

"We appreciate community partnership opportunities such as this to allow students to gain exposure to the vast career opportunities at McLeod Health" said Charity Gerald, director, Recruiting & Workforce Development. "Our goal is to use a people-first approach for placing individual on a career path for success."

"We are so excited about the transformative impact this workforce development pilot program could have in

the Pee Dee and for rural communities across South Carolina," said Power:Ed Executive Director Claire Gibbons. "It addresses the critical shortage of needed industrial maintenance technicians for hospitals as well as advanced manufacturers and offers a pathway to prosperity for SC's rural youth.

In FY2023-24 Power:Ed will award \$1,000,000 in grants to South Carolina education and career readiness nonprofit organizations. In this second quarter, Power:Ed has awarded eight grants (including this grant to BPL), totaling \$287,000. Grants are administered quarterly, and the next grant funding deadline is January 1, 2024.

About Big Picture Learning (BPL)

BPL has been at the work of evolving education to be more equitable and student-centered for over 25 years. It joins and leads local and national conversations, as well as partners with others whose collective efforts will influence the future of learning.

Harbor Freight Fellows Initiative (HFFI)

HFFI is an initiative of Big Picture Learning, in partnership with the Harbor Freight Tool company's Tools for Schools program. It supports youth for whom the trades are the appropriate and chosen post-secondary path to a fulfilling life as a professional and community member - especially those who have been historically marginalized in the trades through race, ethnicity or gender bias.

McLeod Health

Founded in 1906, McLeod Health is a locally owned and managed, not for profit organization which includes seven hospitals: McLeod Regional Medical Center, McLeod Health Dillon, McLeod Health Loris, McLeod Health Seacoast, McLeod Health Cheraw, McLeod Health Clarendon and McLeod Behavioral Health, and more than 90 physician practices throughout its 18-county service area.

About Power:Ed

Founded in 2019, Power:Ed, the philanthropy of SC Student Loan is dedicated to creating opportunities for South Carolina's youth and adults by supporting low-income, minority, and first-generation students; improving access to college and degree completion; and creating pathways to quality workforce opportunities. Organizations serving middle school through post-college talent who are interested in applying for a grant or partnering with Power:Ed, should visit power-ed.org.

CAROLINA PINES MEDICAL GROUP MODELS 'PATIENT-CENTERED CARE'

Submitted by Hanna Caddell, marketing and communications coordinator



CPRMC nurse assessing newborn patient.

HARTSVILLE—Earlier this year, Carolina Pines Medical Group (CPMG) announced a significant achievement as a healthcare provider – it had attained recognition as a Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) for Primary Care by the National Center for Quality Assurance (NCQA).

Those 14 words, while not, “splashy,” in and of themselves, are a big deal to current and future CPMG patients. What it means, according to CPMG Chief Medical Officer Dr. Brian Sponseller, is that

the primary care practice is now positioned to provide care built around the individual patient’s all-around needs.

“There are now mechanisms in place and things going on behind the scenes to make sure that if our patients are in need of something, we will reach out to them,” said Sponseller, who practices family medicine with the group. “It’s more of a proactive approach to care.”

CPMG is a multi-specialty physician group, affiliated with Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center (CPRMC), that offers family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, OB/GYN, cardiology, nephrology, orthopedics and urology services to patients throughout the Pee Dee region, including Darlington, Chesterfield and Lee Counties. The PCMH model of care allows providers such as CPMG to build better relationships between patients and their clinical care teams through patient-centered, coordinated care that supports access, communication and patient involvement.

Sponseller gave an example of the more holistic approach to care provided within the PCMH model.

“We moved from episodic care – meaning if you came in with a cold, we treated just a cold – to now, where we’ve taken on the collective responsibility to make sure that when you are in front of us, we are looking at your preventative care, too,” he said. “So, it is more of a ‘wrap-around’ care.”

“Under the PCMH model, we now have population health managers – nurses who are care managers in the background – who are calling and checking in on patients, making sure that things are done for you in advance. So, even if you come in with a cold, we are going to make sure your mammogram or colonoscopy is up-to-date, and anything else needed is taken care of.”

Research shows that PCMH care models lead to a more satisfied patient experience through a more effective and collaborative dialogue between the patient and their provider. This leads to individualized overall care plans for each patient, resulting in better health outcomes.

Physician practices that earn PCMH recognition have committed to continuous quality improvement and a patient-centered approach to care.

“NCQA Patient-Centered Medical Home Recognition raises the bar in defining high-quality care by emphasizing access, health information technology and coordinated care focused on patients,” said NCQA President Margaret E. O’Kane. “Recognition shows that Carolina Pines Medical Group has the tools, systems and



CPRMC nurse assessing newborn patient.

resources to provide its patients with the right care, at the right time.”

Sponseller said CPMG is already seeing positive outcomes in the few months in which the PCMH model has been in place.

“There are a lot of things we can see in terms of positive outcomes, such as decreased use of urgent care and emergency room utilization,” he said. “We are already seeing decreased hospitalizations among these patients – especially with the sicker patients with the more services we can wrap around them.”

“On the population health side, in the background, we see the screening rates going up of mammograms and colonoscopies, we see a reduction in sugars for diabetes and A1c control, so there is a whole quality side of this that’s being run in the background even if the patient isn’t in front of us. And we are constantly looking at the process and making changes and improvements.”

To become an NCQA-Recognized Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH), CPMG team members from the gamut of disciplines – including providers, medical assistants, LPNs, primary care managers, coordinators in process improvement and electronic medical records, front desk/receptionists and even marketing – first learned the NCQA PCMH concepts and required criteria. Throughout the several-month-long process, NCQA conducted online check-ins to assess the organization’s progress and discuss the next steps in the evaluation. On April 28, 2023, NCQA announced that Carolina Pines Medical Group met the criteria and earned PCMH Recognition.

Sponseller noted the extensive work involved in building out the program and attaining PCMH designation.

“It was a complete overhaul of policies and we put procedures in place so the things we needed to happen could happen,” he recalled.



Dr. Casey Wadsworth talking to OB/GYN patient.

“So, we had to build the population health managers, the care managers and the policies and the procedures for this to be able to function and give you as the patient a point of contact.”

“You just have to make the mindset shift that a visit is more than the patient’s immediate symptoms. We have to be intentional about caring for the patient as a whole, always.”

The NCQA Patient-Centered Medical Home program reflects the input of the American College of Physicians (ACP), American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and others. It was developed to assess whether clinician practices are functioning as medical homes and recognize them for these efforts.

Attaining the designation, as vague as those 14 words might sound, is a significant achievement for CPMG, CPRMC, and the region.

“This recognition culminates an incredible effort from team members across our primary care practice to meet PCMH criteria and learn and put into practice the many concepts that drive more effective, patient-centered care,” said Bill Little, CEO of Carolina Pines. “It truly reflects our organization’s continuous efforts to improve the quality, compassionate care we provide as part of our mission to improve the health and well-being of our community.”

Carolina Pines Medical Group is located at 701 Medical Park Dr, Suite 207, Hartsville, SC 29550. To learn more about its services or schedule an appointment, call 843.383.2764.





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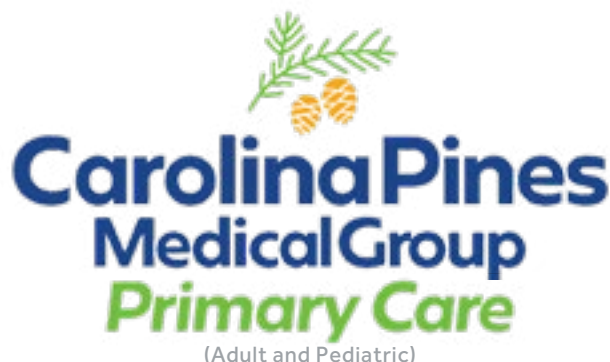
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Francisco X. Barrera, MD

January is Thyroid Awareness Month, which raises awareness to thyroid-related diseases and thyroid cancer. The thyroid is incredibly important as it produces critical hormones.

The thyroid gland is butterfly-shaped and located on the lower front of the neck. Thyroid hormones produced by the gland help the body use energy, stay warm, and keep the brain, heart, muscles and other organs working. In children, thyroid hormones are necessary for normal growth.

Thyroid disorders involve the thyroid hormones and include excess production (hyperthyroidism) and lack of secretion (hypothyroidism). Both disorders can affect your bodily functions.

Hypothyroidism means the thyroid gland can't make enough thyroid hormone to keep the body running normally, resulting in too little thyroid hormone in the blood. Common causes are autoimmune disease (such as Hashimoto's thyroiditis), surgical removal of the thyroid and radiation treatment.

When thyroid hormone levels are too low, the body's cells can't get enough thyroid hormone and bodily processes start slowing down. Symptoms can include feeling colder, easily fatigued, dry skin, depression and constipation. Symptoms are variable and non-specific and can be present in a myriad of other medical conditions. Due to this, the only way to know for sure whether you have hypothyroidism is with a simple blood test for TSH. This is the most important test when evaluating thyroid disorders.

Massive weight gain is rarely associated with hypothyroidism. In general, five to ten pounds of body weight may be attributable to the thyroid, depending on the severity of the hypothyroidism.

Hyperthyroidism on the other hand, means the thyroid gland is making too much thyroid hormone. Hyperthyroidism can be caused by an autoimmune condition (Graves' disease), inflammation of the thyroid (thyroiditis), or resulting from thyroid nodules making too much hormone (hot nodule or toxic multinodular goiter). Symptoms of hyperthyroidism include hand tremors, anxiety, feeling like your heart is racing, frequent bowel movements, difficulty sleeping, increased sweating and feeling hot.

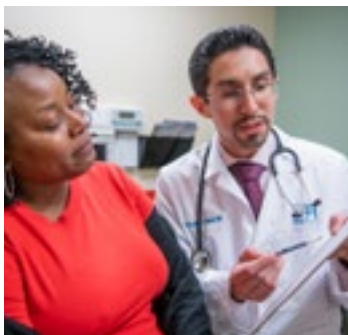
Treatment of these conditions needs to be discussed with either your primary care provider (PCP) or an endocrinologist for proper evaluation, counseling and management. It is important to seek professional care, rather than attempting to treat these conditions in another way - through supplementation or with lifestyle changes.

A word of caution about natural supplements containing thyroid hormone "extracts" or desiccated thyroid preparations from animals. These supplements are not natural for humans, and therefore, should be avoided, as they are not FDA-approved and may cause harm.

Thyroid hormone supplementation should be avoided for the sole purpose of weight loss induction as this can induce overt thyroid hormone excess, associated with major negative consequences like

the loss of muscle protein, loss of bone mass and/or heart problems.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to bring back a failed thyroid with diet or lifestyle changes. Food that contains high amount of selenium and/or iodine are not recommended, and excess quantities of these minerals can be harmful. Additionally, there is no data to support any benefit of a gluten-free diet in thyroid disorders.



Dr. Barrera consults with the patient.

The importance of the thyroid cannot be overstated - so many of the body's organs and processes rely on the small gland for optimal function. While thyroid-related conditions are easy to treat, up to 60 percent of people with thyroid problems are unaware they have them. If you think this might be you, consider reaching out to the Endocrinology Department at HopeHealth for more information and treatment options. Visit hope-health.org or call (843) 432-3717 for more information.

Barrera is an endocrinologist providing care for patients at the HopeHealth Medical Plaza in Florence. He completed his fellowship in endocrinology, diabetes and metabolism at the University of Miami/Jackson Health System in Miami Florida. He completed Internal Medicine residency at Ascension Saint Francis Hospital in Evanston, Illinois. He earned his MD degree from the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua in Managua, Nicaragua. Barrera is fluent in English and Spanish. He is a diplomate of the American Board of Clinical Lipidology and the American Board of Obesity Medicine.

HOPEHEALTH WELCOMES NEW PROVIDERS

Submitted by Sheridan K. Murray, BS, BA, publications coordinator, HopeHealth



Eboni Littlejohn, LMSW

Eboni Littlejohn, LMSW, is a behavioral health consultant in the Pain Center at HopeHealth on Palmetto Street. She graduated from Limestone College in Gaffney, SC with a Bachelor of Social Work, and from Baylor University with a Master of Social Work. She is trained in eye movement desensitization reprocessing (EMDR) and trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT).

Littlejohn is a member of the National Association of Social Workers and Phi Alpha Honor Society.



Barbara Slusher, MSW, PA-C, DPAAPA

Barbara Slusher is a physician assistant providing rheumatology care at HopeHealth in Manning. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Social Work and a Master of Social Work from the University of Maryland in Baltimore, Maryland. She received her Bachelor of Science in Physician Assistant Studies from the University of North Texas in Fort Worth, Texas. Slusher has received numerous awards and honors. She is a member of the Association of Rheumatology Professionals, Society of Physician Assistants in Rheumatology, South Carolina and Texas Academies of Physician Assistants and American Academy of Physician Assistants.



Nicholas Lee, LPC

Nicholas Lee is a licensed professional behavioral counselor at the HopeHealth Medical Plaza in Florence. He received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Charleston Southern University and a master's in clinical counseling from the Citadel both in Charleston, South Carolina. He completed his internship at iHope Christian Counseling Center in Florence, South Carolina. From Olanta, Lee is involved with Floyd Chapel. He is the co-chair of the SC Citizen Review Panel in the Pee Dee and is the recipient of the Foster Care Innovator Award.

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.

TIPS FOR TEEN DATING

Submitted by Kira O'Neal, LPC, NCC



Kira O'Neal, LPC, NCC

Teen dating violence is a common concern with today's youth. Unhealthy or violent interactions with others can have a significant impact on a developing child. According to the CDC, teen dating violence can include physical violence, sexual violence, psychological aggression and stalking. Experiencing these forms of abuse can impact a teen's behavior, identity, overall well-being and future. Small controlling behaviors are often ignored until they turn into bigger problems that can be more difficult to address.

Early intervention is always best and can help prevent violent behaviors from affecting youth as they transition into adulthood. Targeting these concerns in childhood can lead to a healthier and more promising future. Regardless of the type, relationships should be healthy and free from abuse.

A few red flags that may signal unhealthy relationships include:

- Increased desire for power and control
- Aggressive behaviors or increased moodiness
- Jealous tendencies
- Pressure to engage in high-risk behavior (sex, drugs, etc.) that make the partner uncomfortable.
- Monitoring, tracking or otherwise invading privacy.
- Physical aggression, such as hitting, kicking, hair pulling, scratching, etc.

Common behaviors and other signs to be aware of in youth who may be experiencing dating violence include:

- New or worsened symptoms related to depression and anxiety.
- Diminished overall health.
- Poor self-esteem or poor self-image
- Engaging in unhealthy and risky behaviors
- Worsened academic performance.
- Suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts

Teen dating violence is preventable. Early intervention can lead to healthier teens and the potential for healthier relationships in adulthood. A few ways to help prevent dating violence in youth include:

- Teaching youth what is and is not acceptable in intimate relationships - including abusive and violent behaviors.
- Empowering teens to only engage in and accept healthy and respectful interactions with others.
- Modeling healthy relationships at home, school and in the community
- Ensuring teens have a safe space or trusted person with whom they can address concerns.

If you are or know of a teen experiencing dating violence and would like additional resources or support, please visit the National Domestic Violence website at thehotline.org, call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), or text START to 88788.

Kira O'Neal is a behavioral health consultant serving patients at HopeHealth in Lake City. O'Neal graduated from Francis Marion University in Florence, SC, with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and minor in Biology. She received a Master of Arts in Counseling from Webster University in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. She treats patients with a wide variety of concerns, including depression, anxiety, self-esteem/self-image, motivation and behavior concerns.



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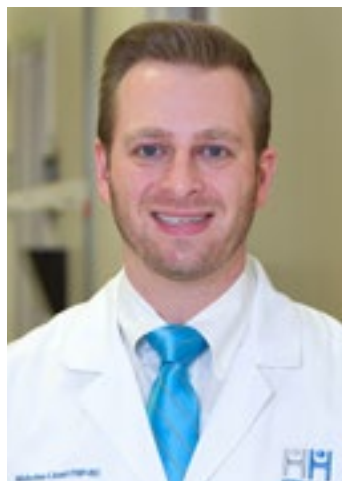
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STATIN DRUGS FIGHT HEART DISEASE

Submitted by Family Nurse Practitioner, Nicholas Licari



Nicholas Licari

As a health care provider, I consider my personal mantra to be, “live longer, feel better.” I carry this mantra with me as I treat patients for a variety of ailments, including heart disease. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and globally. Each year significant resources are allocated for research, treatment and prevention of this deadly disease. Thankfully, significant advancements in the fight against heart disease have been achieved over the past 40 years, and perhaps no achievement has been more significant than the discovery of statins.

Statins are one of the most prescribed drugs in the U.S. with over 40 million Americans taking them. Statins (HMG CoA reductase inhibitors) are a type of medication specifically designed to lower LDL. The term LDL stands for low-density lipoprotein and is frequently referred to as the “bad cholesterol,” since high levels of LDL in the blood leads to increased risk of heart blockages, heart attack and stroke.

Over time, too much LDL in the blood builds up in arteries and causes plaque, a fatty, waxy substance. The process is called atherosclerosis and causes arteries to become harder and narrower. When this occurs in the coronary arteries (ar-teries of the heart), it restricts blood flow to the heart itself. A blockage in the coronary artery may result in chest pain or a heart attack. If the buildup is in the arteries leading to the brain, this increases the risk of having a stroke, and buildup of plaque in the arteries in the arms and legs leads to peripheral artery disease.

Statin drugs work to slow the liver’s ability to make cholesterol, which then helps to remove LDL from the blood and arteries. Additionally, statins may help reduce inflammation of the arteries. Medical research has clearly shown that statins reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and other vascular diseases.

Who is a candidate for statin therapy? There are multiple factors that come into play when your healthcare provider evaluates your cardiovascular risk. The higher your risk, the higher the potential benefit there is from taking a statin drug. Before prescribing a statin, a provider takes into consideration several health determinants:

- 1) A personal history of cardiovascular disease including heart attack, stroke and/or peripheral artery disease.
- 2) Very high LDL levels, 190 or greater
- 3) People with diabetes
- 4) People at increased risk for cardiovascular disease

When the decision is made to start any prescription drug, your provider will evaluate the risk versus the benefit of the treatment. The benefits of taking a statin include reduced risk of heart attack, stroke, and vascular disease. These events and diseases can be disabling or even cause death - prevention is a key consideration.

Taking statin drugs comes with potential side effects. The most common side effects are muscle aches, reported in up to 20 percent of people as muscle soreness, weakness, or fatigue. The use of CoQ10 supplements may help alleviate this side effect. There is also an associated increase in blood sugar with statins increasing the risk of developing diabetes by about 10 percent, although the reason for this is unclear. However, since many people with diabetes are already at an increased risk for heart attack and stroke, the benefit outweighs the risk in this case.

Around one percent of statin users develop elevated liver enzymes indicating liver inflammation, typically only seen with a high dose of



statins. This can often be resolved by regularly taking a break from the statin for a period of time. It is important to discuss the risk of statin drugs use with your health care provider and report any side effects.

Being on a statin is typically a lifelong decision. LDL levels can be reduced significantly in three months’ time, with up to a 50 percent reduction seen with certain types of statins. However, when the drug is stopped, the LDL usually re-returns to its previous higher level. It is,

therefore, recommended to continue use of the drug once use has started.

Statins are safe medications that have been widely studied. Many generic forms of statins are available, making them more affordable for patients. Side effects are possible but can be treated, and the benefit largely outweighs the risk for treatment of cardiovascular disease. Statins help people decrease their risk of heart disease, improving overall quality of life for many patients and allowing them to, “live longer, feel better.”

Licari is a family nurse practitioner at HopeHealth Medical Plaza in Florence and is currently accepting new patients in his Family Medicine practice. Call 843-667-9414 or visit hope-health.org for more information.



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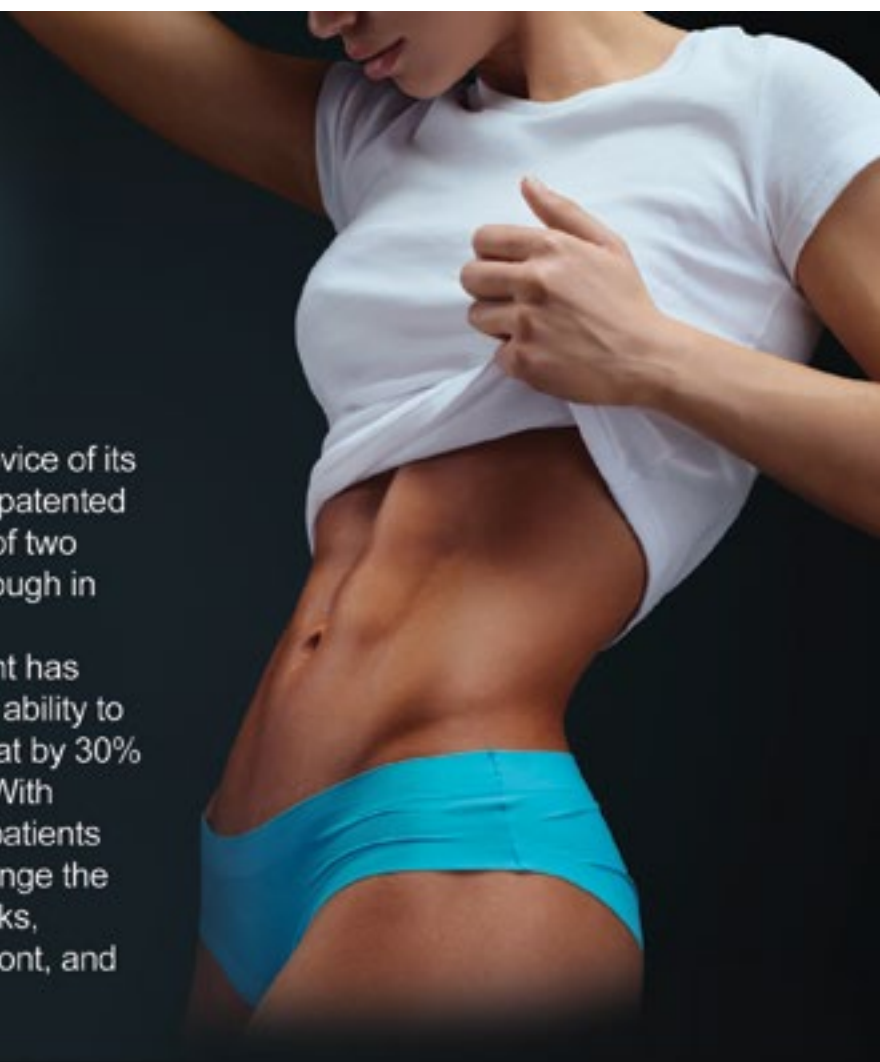
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MUSC HEALTH FLORENCE MEDICAL CENTER EARNS RECOGNITION OF THE AMERICAN DIABETES ASSOCIATION®

Submitted by Marketing Manager, John Russell



MUSC Health - Endocrinology Diabetes Staff

The American Diabetes Association (ADA), the nation's leading organization committed to fighting diabetes by driving discovery through research and innovation, intensifying the urgency around the diabetes epidemic and supporting people living with and affected by diabetes, announced the recognition of MUSC Health – Endocrinology – Florence Medical Pavilion through the Education Recognition Program (ERP).

“This certification is a testament to our unwavering commitment to providing high-quality Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support (DSMES) in accordance with the National Standards,” said MUSC Health – Endocrinologist Dr. Ribal Al Aridi. “The impact of this program goes beyond statistics, influencing lives positively and mitigating the serious complications associated with diabetes.”

The ADA's Education Recognition Certificate assures that educational services meet the National Standards for Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support (DSMES). The DSMES Standards were developed and tested under the auspices of the National Diabetes Advisory Board in 1983 and were revised by the diabetes community in 1994, 2000, 2007, 2012 and 2017. The ERP promotes quality Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support (DSMES) for people with diabetes by certifying that services adhere to the National Standards for DSMES. Services certified by the ADA's ERP program offer a staff of knowledgeable health professionals who can provide participants with comprehensive information about diabetes management. Services apply for recognition voluntarily, and ADA-ERP recognition lasts for four years.

“Daily self-management skills are absolutely essential for people to effectively navigate the 24/7 challenges of living with diabetes, helping to keep them healthy and prevent or delay the serious complications of diabetes,” said Linda Cann, MSED, the ADA's senior vice president of professional services. “We applaud MUSC Health - Endocrinology for its commitment to providing high-quality, evidence-based education and support for people with diabetes by meeting the National Standards for DSME/S and earning the ADA's ERP recognition.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2017 National Diabetes Statistic Report there are 30.3 million people or 9.4 percent of the population in the United States who have diabetes. While an estimated 23.1 million have been diagnosed, unfortunately, 7.2 million people are not aware that they have this disease. Each day, more than 4,110 Americans are diagnosed with diabetes. Many will first learn that they have diabetes when they are treated for one of its life-threatening complications – heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness, nerve disease and amputation. Diabetes continues to be the

seventh leading cause of death in the US—in 2015, it contributed to 252,806 deaths. The ADA's Economic Costs of Diabetes in the U.S. in 2017 confirms diabetes as the nation's most expensive chronic health care condition at \$327 billion.

Picture caption: (From left) MUSC Health Endocrinologist Ribal Al Aridi, Practice Manager Alice Welch, Outpatient Registered Dietitian Anna Rhoads and Registered Nurse Kayla Webster.

About MUSC

Founded in 1824 in Charleston, MUSC is the state's only comprehensive academic health system, with a unique mission to preserve and optimize human life in South Carolina through education, research and patient care. Each year, MUSC educates more than 3,200 students in six colleges – dental medicine, graduate studies, health professions, medicine, nursing and pharmacy – and trains more than 900 residents and fellows in its health system. MUSC brought in more than \$300 million in research funds in fiscal year 2023, leading the state overall in research funding. MUSC also leads the state in federal and National Institutes of Health funding. For information on academic programs, visit muscedu.

As the health care system of the Medical University of South Carolina, MUSC Health is dedicated to delivering the highest-quality and safest patient care while educating and training generations of outstanding health care providers and leaders to serve the people of South Carolina and beyond. Patient care is provided at 16 hospitals (includes owned or governing interest), with approximately 2,700 beds and four additional hospital locations in development, more than 350 telehealth sites and nearly 750 care locations situated in all regions of South Carolina. In 2023, for the ninth consecutive year, U.S. News & World Report named MUSC Health University Medical Center in Charleston the No. 1 hospital in South Carolina. To learn more about clinical patient services, visit muschealth.org.

MUSC has a total enterprise annual operating budget of \$5.9 billion. The nearly 26,000 MUSC family members include world-class faculty, physicians, specialty providers, scientists, students, affiliates and care team members who deliver groundbreaking education, research and patient care.

About the American Diabetes Association

Nearly half of American adults have diabetes or prediabetes; more than 30 million adults and children have diabetes; and every 21 seconds, another individual is diagnosed with diabetes in the U.S. Founded in 1940, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) is the nation's leading voluntary health organization whose mission is to prevent and cure diabetes, and to improve the lives of all people affected by diabetes. The ADA drives discovery by funding research to treat, manage and prevent all types of diabetes, as well as to search for cures; raises voice to the urgency of the diabetes epidemic; and works to safeguard policies and programs that protect people with diabetes. In addition, the ADA supports people living with diabetes, those at risk of developing diabetes, and the health care professionals who serve them through information and programs that can improve health outcomes and quality of life. For more information, please call the ADA at 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383) or visit diabetes.org. Information from both of these sources is available in English and Spanish. Find us on Facebook (American Diabetes Association), Twitter (@AmDiabetesAssn) and Instagram (@AmDiabetesAssn).

GRANT AWARDED FOR COLORECTAL CARE IN MARION

Articles submitted by MUSC

MULLINS— MUSC leadership, local community leaders and Marion County citizens gathered Nov. 21 at MUSC Health Marion Medical Center in celebration of a \$500,000 grant from the Marion County Healthcare Foundation (MCHF). The grant will fund state-of-the-art screening technology and a nurse navigator for the medical center. In recognition of the gift, the medical center's atrium has been renamed in honor of the Marion County Healthcare Foundation.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in South Carolina. It also disproportionately affects the Black community, which makes up 56.6 percent of the population in Marion County. According to the American Cancer Society, African Americans are about 20 percent more likely to get colorectal cancer and about 40 percent more likely to die from it.

MUSC Health will work closely with Health Care Partners of South Carolina, a federally qualified health center, to educate the community on the importance of screenings and early detection.

"Early detection is key. Colorectal cancer is 100 percent preventable when it's caught early," said Shametra Myers, executive director of MUSC Health Marion Medical Center. "Unfortunately, 37.5 percent of all cancers in Marion County are diagnosed in the late stage. That's a huge problem that this grant will help us address."

A nurse navigator will be hired to work directly with patients to resolve issues that might prevent them from keeping an appointment to be screened or treated for colorectal cancer.

"Some patients may not be able to miss work for a doctor's appointment," said Dr. Rami Zebian, chief medical officer for MUSC Health Florence/Marion/Black River Medical Centers. "They may not have insurance or child care or transportation or speak English. These are just a few examples of barriers to care that our new nurse navigator can help patients navigate. We are grateful to the Marion County Healthcare Foundation for this investment, which will allow us to transform care for colorectal cancer patients in Marion County."

The mission of the MCHF is to develop partnerships and fund innovative projects that improve the quality of life for residents of Marion County.

"We are thankful that the Medical University of South Carolina has chosen to focus its outreach and educational efforts in Marion to address this disparity," said Pete Mazzaroni, MCHF's executive director. "The foundation is proud to support MUSC by providing the funding to purchase state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment to screen for colorectal cancer. This technology, paired with new navigation services and educational support, will benefit the citizens of Marion County for years to come."

This is the third MCHF grant the MUSC Foundation has received since 2020.

About the Marion County Healthcare Foundation

Located at 230 South Main Street in Mullins, South Carolina, the foundation was established in 2010 from the proceeds acquired when the Marion County Medical Center was sold to CHS/Community Health Systems, Inc.

The foundation uses its resources to improve the quality of life in Marion County via grants and scholarships to deserving individuals and organizations.

About the MUSC Foundation

The Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) Foundation was chartered in 1966 as a charitable educational foundation to support the education, research, patient care and other programs at the Medical University. The foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, contributions to which are tax-deductible.

MUSC HEALTH FLORENCE MEDICAL CENTER WELCOMES NEW PHYSICIANS

MUSC Health Florence Medical Center is happy to announce the arrival of Urologist, Dr. Barry Bodie, Dr. Bonnie DePaso, OB/GYN and Neurosurgeon, Dr. Curtis Worthington to the division.

MUSC Health - Cardiovascular Surgery welcomes Iva Smolens, MD. She has been a board-certified, fellowship-trained thoracic surgeon for more than 20 years and specializes in adult cardiac and thoracic surgery. Smolens performs coronary artery bypass graft surgery (CABG), aortic, mitral and tricuspid heart valve replacement, pericardial procedures and other thoracoscopic pulmonary procedures. To schedule an appointment, please call (843) 676-2760.



Barry Bodie, MD

Barry Bodie, MD

MUSC Health – Urology would like to welcome Bodie. He is a urologist with a wealth of experience in both academic and clinical urology. He is board-certified in urology and is a fellow of the American College of Surgeons. Bodie's clinical interests include urinary stone disease, female urology and the diagnosis and minimally invasive treatment of prostate cancer. He is also a strong proponent of the Men's Health movement and a dedicated clinical researcher. To make an appointment, please call (843) 673-7525.



Bonnie DePaso, MD

Bonnie DePaso, MD

MUSC Women's Health – Florence Women's Pavilion welcomes DePaso. She received her medical degree from the University of South Carolina School of Medicine. DePaso has extensive experience in providing gynecologic care for women of all ages as well as managing the spectrum of low to high-risk pregnancies. In addition, she is fully trained in robotic-assisted gynecologic surgery, infertility and preventative care. To make an appointment, please call (843) 665-9581.



Curtis Worthington, MD

Curtis Worthington, MD

MUSC Health – Neurosurgery Florence would like to welcome Worthington. He is board-certified in Neurological Surgery and has been in Neurosurgical practice for more than 30 years. He has a special interest in degenerative spine disease and in Neuro-Oncology (brain tumors). His experience in the field of Stereotactic Radiosurgery is certainly one of the most extensive in the state of South Carolina. Worthington specializes in neck and back pain, micro and minimally invasive surgery, brain tumors, sciatica, lumbar nerve pain and trigeminal neuralgia. To make an appointment, please call (843) 413-6835.



TALKING ABOUT OBESITY WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Submitted by Lisa Wright, MD, MUSC Health Primary Care



Lisa Wright, MD

Up to 69 percent of U.S. adults are overweight or obese. If you are overweight or obese you are predisposed to arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease and premature death. No one wants these conditions, and your physician is here to help you not only prevent them but to come up with an individualized plan to assist you to succeed in a healthy weight journey and longer healthier life.

Talking to your doctor about your weight can be awkward or uncomfortable. Perhaps you have had a physician speak to you about your weight already, and it left you feeling sad,

discouraged or even ashamed. I am here to tell you today that you do not have to feel this way any longer. There is no better time to talk with your doctor about your desire to lose weight than today. Combining lifestyle changes with medicines and/or surgery can not only improve your quality of life, but it can add years to your life.

Obesity is defined by a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30.0 kg/m² or higher. This number is determined by comparing weight to height. Why do we even calculate BMI? It's a guideline to determine what stage of overweight or obesity you may be in, and insurance companies use this number to determine if certain treatments will be covered by your plan. It is just a number. What is more important is that being overweight or obese puts you at greater risk of diseases or chronic illness.

Weight Loss Treatments

Weight loss treatment includes not only nutrition and exercise but also medicines and possibly surgery. Once you decide you would like to get healthier, you and your physician can begin discussing what possible

lifestyle changes you can make to reach your goal. You also can discuss what medications are available to help with appetite, digestion, cravings, resetting your metabolic point and mood. No single medicine is best for every person. It is an individualized plan that is needed to help each person succeed with their weight goals. Your physician can help devise a plan and get you the tools needed to achieve them.

Types of medications for weight loss include medicines for appetite control, to prevent absorption of fat in the diet, to help with appetite and mood, and hormones controlling hunger, among other medications. Surgeries for obesity include gastric banding, gastric sleeve and gastric bypass. Not all surgery is the same and you should discuss your situation with your physician, who can help determine if you are a candidate for surgery.

Taking the Next Step

Make an appointment with your Primary Care Provider today to discuss weight loss options. Providers are willing to discuss nutrition, exercise, medications, and surgery with you. Weight loss for the overweight or obese person will decrease joint pain, improve sleeping, decrease diabetes and heart disease. It will also improve your mood and improve your quality of life for years to come. Severe obesity can shorten your life up to 14 years.

Reach out to your Primary Care Provider to help you get to a healthy weight. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Primary Care Providers will encourage you to live your best life and help guide you with the best-individualized treatment. What do you have to lose?

Dr. Lisa Wright is a board-certified family medicine physician at MUSC Health Primary Care – Ron McNair Blvd, in Lake City. She is accepting new patients. For an appointment, call her office at (843) 394-5471, or visit [MUSCHealth.org](https://www.musc.edu).

MUSC HEALTH MARION MEDICAL CENTER AWARDED FALL 2023 'A'

MARION-MUSC Health Marion Medical Center is proud to announce it has received an "A" Hospital Safety Grade from The Leapfrog Group, a national nonprofit upholding the standard of patient safety in hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers. This national distinction celebrates MUSC Health Marion Medical Center's achievements in prioritizing patient safety by protecting patients from preventable harm and errors. The new grades reflect performance primarily during the height of the pandemic.

"In the pursuit of excellence, MUSC Health Marion Medical Center has obtained an 'A' Hospital Safety Grade from The Leapfrog Group. This prestigious distinction symbolizes our unwavering commitment to patient safety," said MUSC Health Pee Dee Division Chief Executive Officer Jay Hinesley. "Today, we proudly embrace The Leapfrog Group's 'A' designation as a testament to our dedication to ensuring the highest standards of care. We are honored to be recognized for our efforts."

The Leapfrog Group, an independent national watchdog organization, assigns an, "A," "B," "C," "D" or "F" grade to general hospitals across the country based on over 30 national performance measures reflecting errors, accidents, injuries and infections, as well as systems hospitals have in place to prevent harm.

"Earning an, 'A', grade means MUSC Health Marion Medical Center made a true commitment to put patients first," said Leah Binder, president and CEO of The Leapfrog Group. "We congratulate the leadership, Board, clinicians, staff, and volunteers that all had a role to play in this achievement."

The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade is the only hospital ratings program based exclusively on hospital prevention of medical errors and harm to patients. The grading system is peer-reviewed, fully transparent and free to the public. Grades are updated twice annually, in the fall and spring.

About MUSC

Founded in 1824 in Charleston, MUSC is the state's only comprehensive academic health system, with a unique mission to preserve and optimize human life in South Carolina through education, research and patient care. Each year, MUSC educates more than 3,200 students in six colleges – Dental Medicine, Graduate Studies, Health Professions, Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy – and trains more than 900 residents and fellows in its health system. MUSC brought in more than \$300 million in research funds in fiscal year 2023, leading the state overall in research funding. MUSC also leads the state in federal and National Institutes of Health funding. For information on academic programs, visit [musc.edu](https://www.musc.edu).

As the health care system of the Medical University of South Carolina, MUSC Health is dedicated to delivering the highest-quality and safest patient care while educating and training generations of outstanding health care providers and leaders to serve the people of South Carolina and beyond. Patient care is provided at 16 hospitals (includes owned or governing interest), with approximately 2,700 beds and four additional hospital locations in development, more than 350 telehealth sites and nearly 750 care locations situated in all regions of South Carolina. In 2023, for the ninth consecutive year, U.S. News & World Report named MUSC Health University Medical Center in Charleston the No. 1 hospital in South Carolina. To learn more about clinical patient services, visit [muschealth.org](https://www.muschealth.org).

MUSC has a total enterprise annual operating budget of \$5.9 billion. The nearly 26,000 MUSC family members include world-class faculty, physicians, specialty providers, scientists, students, affiliates and care team members who deliver groundbreaking education, research, and patient care.

MCLEOD HEALTH FOUNDATION'S CIRCLE OF EXCELLENCE ANNOUNCES GRANT FUNDING

Submitted by McLeod Health

The McLeod Health Foundation's Circle of Excellence recently granted more than \$37,000 to support programs and services at McLeod Regional Medical Center.

The Circle of Excellence is a young giving society organized through the McLeod Health Foundation. It is comprised of individuals and couples 45 years of age and younger, who contribute \$500 or more annually to support the work of the McLeod Foundation.

The group funded the following grant requests:

McLeod Women's and Children's Services

Certified Lactation Counselor Expansion to Excellence: \$10,000

This grant will cover training costs for 12 additional staff and providers to become Certified Lactation Counselors (CLC). Countless new moms and babies will benefit from the services of an even more highly skilled nursing staff.

Safe Kids Program for the Holiday Season: \$10,000

This grant will enhance the Safe Kids Pee Dee/Coastal led by McLeod Health program's ability to reduce preventable injuries to the region's children. The grant will allow the program to purchase 150 car seats, 50 pack-n-plays, 300 home safety kits, 100 home fire alarms, 50 Medicine Safe boxes and educational materials to be distributed to community members. It will also fund an annual Child Passenger Safety Technician Course for approximately 25 participants and a special car seat safety awareness event in December.

Pediatric Crash Cart Training and Education: \$4,036

This award will purchase a pediatric crash cart, providing new staff members a piece of realistic training equipment to further develop their skills in pediatric emergency response, code simulation and pediatric-tailored drug administration. Evidence demonstrates that a hands-on approach in training provides the most thorough and efficient form of education.

Forensic Nurse Examiner Program Education and Training: \$10,000

This grant will fund education and training for the McLeod Forensic Nurse Examiner Team. This team delivers compassionate and holistic care to victims of violence and sexual assault by utilizing the most up-to-date, evidence based, trauma-informed and patient-centered forensic nursing practices.

McLeod Behavioral Health Services

Transportation for Indigent Patients: \$3,400

This award will provide transportation assistance to patients of McLeod Behavioral Health, many of whom are financially challenged. McLeod Behavioral Health arranges transportation across the region, state and sometimes out-of-state for patients to return home following treatment.

"The Circle of Excellence has been instrumental in its support of McLeod Children's Hospital through generous giving and patronage," said Rebecca Vincent, director of McLeod Children's Hospital. "Children and adolescents of our coastal and inland regions have benefited from these generous donations. Contributions have allowed expansion of aspects incorporated into the hospital experience, medical stay and overall care including expansion of pediatric emergency response education and training, cutting-edge medical technology integration through devices focused on procedural trauma reduction and expansion of our family-centered care initiative. We are very grateful and blessed to have such a group in our community."

About McLeod Health Foundation

The McLeod Foundation was established in 1986 as an independent not for profit tax exempt charitable organization whose mission is to generate philanthropic and community support to perpetuate medical excellence at McLeod Health. Thanks to the generosity of donors, the Foundation has raised more than \$100 million and has provided support for numerous programs at McLeod Health. These programs include

support for the McLeod Children's Hospital, The Guest House at McLeod, McLeod Hospice, the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research, McLeod Heart and Vascular Institute and McLeod Diabetes Services, just to name a few. Simply put the Foundation funds better health for thousands of families throughout Northeastern South Carolina and Southeastern North Carolina. Separately chartered, the McLeod Health Foundation is governed by a voluntary Board of Trustees. Gifts to the McLeod Foundation are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law and 100 percent of every gift received goes directly to the area it is designated.

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SIMPLE ITEMS GIVE ESSENTIAL RELIEF AND COMFORT

Submitted By McLeod Health Foundation



McLeod Hospice Volunteer Deby Strickland pictured with the Butterfly Cart.

Your Generosity Touches Families Everyday Through the Butterfly Cart. Sometimes, small items can have a huge impact when and where it is needed most. Families with loved ones at the McLeod Hospice House often arrive with only the items in their purses or pockets. They may have received an urgent call and hurriedly traveled to be with family, focusing solely on getting to their loved one as quickly as possible.

Your gifts to the Butterfly Fund generously funded the Butterfly Cart, a hospitality cart that provides patients and caregivers free items to help make their time at the Hospice House more comfortable.

Volunteers wheel the Butterfly Cart throughout the Hospice House, delivering refreshments -- like candy bars, potato chips and beverages -- and personal care items families may have left at home, such as toiletries or reading glasses.

For caregivers who are reluctant to leave their loved one even for a moment, this cheerful cart and the friendly face of the volunteer guiding it is a welcomed sight.

"Your gifts allow us to meet the patients and their caregivers wherever they are," said Deby Strickland, McLeod Hospice House volunteer. "Donors to the McLeod Health Foundation should know how much respite and comfort this cart brings to everyone. When I make my rounds with the cart, the number one question is, 'How much do the items cost?' Thanks to caring donors of the McLeod Foundation, I can smile and warmly say, 'it costs nothing.'"

Whether providing a toothbrush for a family member who just completed a frantic 300-mile journey, offering a patient comfort with their favorite childhood candy, or bringing joy with a fun activity, the Butterfly Cart impacts patients and caregivers in unimaginable ways. By funding the Butterfly Cart, you are bringing untold comfort to families every day. Your compassion and generosity truly help hospice families enjoy their precious moments together.

Thanks to donors like you, the Butterfly Fund provides funding to meet critical, immediate needs for McLeod Hospice and Palliative Care patients who struggle financially during their time of care.

You can assist the Butterfly Fund with your gift of support or time. As a Hospice volunteer, individuals can choose to work directly with patients and families or help in a hundred other ways -- making a difference in someone's life. To get more information or to volunteer, please call 843-777-2694.

SAVE A LIFE. ACT FAST.

Knowledge is the key to helping someone survive a heart attack. It's important to be able to recognize heart attack symptoms and to act fast by performing CPR.

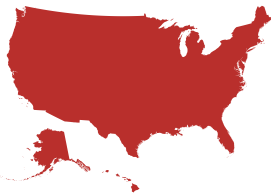
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HEART HEALTH FACTS

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for men
and women
in the U.S.



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36 seconds

Someone has a heart attack every



4 seconds

in the U.S.

Approx. 10% of heart attacks are fatal



The **average age** a person will have a heart attack

**men
is 65**

**women
is 72**



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SYLVIA MCKOY WATTS BIDS FAREWELL AT CARESOUTH CAROLINA

Articles submitted by CareSouth Carolina



Sylvia McKoy Watts

MCCOLL— CareSouth Carolina announces the retirement of Sylvia McKoy Watts, a highly esteemed, family nurse practitioner whose illustrious career has left an indelible mark on the field of healthcare.

Watts' journey in healthcare began at the Medical University of South Carolina, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing, as well as a Master of Science in Nursing, specializing as a family nurse practitioner.

Over the course of her career, Watts dedicated her expertise to various healthcare settings, with a primary focus on Family Medicine. Her impactful contributions were felt at the Chesterfield Clinic Corp in Bennettsville, SC, Maxton Family Practice in Maxton, NC, and notably at CareSouth Carolina in McColl, SC, where she began her tenure in October 2002.

Throughout her time at CareSouth Carolina, Watts' compassionate care and unwavering dedication to improving the health and well-being of her patients earned her a special place in the hearts of the McColl community. Her final day will be December 1, 2023.

"Having a connection with the community and my patients, seeing generations of families and helping in the rural setting have been the highlights of my time here," Watts said. "Educating clients to take care of themselves and their families has been a rewarding experience. I'm officially a great-grandmother, and it's time to go home and enjoy my family, travel and do the things that I have put aside until this point."

In addition to serving at CareSouth Carolina, she also held positions at Clio Medical Center, Carolina Pines Medical Center, Maxton Family Practice and Chesterfield Clinic Corp. She shared that working at CareSouth Carolina for more than 20 years has been a joy to her.

"The company's focus on improving the health of the community we serve and the client-oriented, family-friendly atmosphere in McColl have made it a great pleasure to work here," she said.

Watts' commitment to her profession is underscored by her active membership in the American Nurses Association and the South Carolina Nurses Association. Her contributions were recognized with prestigious awards, including the Ryan White Program Award from CareSouth Carolina in 2011, the Innovators Award in 2005 and the Maternal-Child Health Outstanding Award from the Pee Dee Health District- DHEC in 2000.

In addition to her professional affiliations, Watts's commitment to nursing excellence was acknowledged with her induction into the Sigma Theta Tau International, Omicron Chapter at MUSC. Her accolades include the Employee of the Year by the Marlboro County Health Department in 1998 and her appointment to the Board of the SC Hospital Association's Council of Nurse Managers in 1991. She also received the Dr. Frist Humanitarian Award from Marlboro Park Hospital in 1986 for her humanitarian work.

"Watts has been such a cornerstone to our services in McColl - she will be missed. But we wish her the very best in her retirement," CareSouth Carolina CEO Ann Lewis said.

Watts' retirement marks the conclusion of a remarkable 47-year career in the medical field. Her legacy as a family nurse practitioner, coupled with her dedication to patients and the community, will leave a lasting impact. "Sylvia McKoy Watts is loved and respected by her patients," CareSouth Carolina McColl Site Manager, Pat Graham said. "She will be greatly missed by her patients and co-workers. She always speaks the truth in love. I have had the pleasure of working with her for over 15 years and I know firsthand the care she gives her patients, as I have been one of them. We are happy for her but sad for us. We wish her the best as she moves on but will absolutely miss her."

CareSouth Carolina extends its deepest gratitude to Sylvia McKoy Watts for her exemplary service and wishes her a fulfilling and joyous retirement.

CARESOUTH CAROLINA ANNOUNCES 2023 EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR



Left to right, Levina Brown, FNP and April Davis, LPN

SOCIETY HILL— CareSouth Carolina proudly recognizes the exceptional contributions of its employees by announcing the recipients of the Employees of the Year award, April Davis, LPN (since May 2015), and Levina Brown, FNP (since June 2014), who work together in the Rosa Lee Gerald office in Society Hill.

"I was shocked. Even when Tamara came for Employee of the Month, that was shocking," Davis said. "We just do what we can for our patients. We're not looking for awards or a spotlight. We just want to care for them. We [Brown and herself] have a different patient base than other providers. Our patients are part of the MAT program and may have other conditions, as well, such and they see us quite often. They become a part of our family."

Davis and Brown, as outstanding individuals, form a dynamic team that collaborates seamlessly to provide the highest level of care for their patients. Beyond their professional responsibilities, both

exemplify the core values of CareSouth Carolina and are true embodiments of the organization's vision and mission.

Both recipients consistently go above and beyond the call of duty, showcasing genuine compassion and empathy for their patients. Their commitment extends beyond routine office visits, reflecting the ethos of CareSouth Carolina in delivering holistic and patient-centered healthcare.

Davis and Brown's extraordinary dedication was further highlighted in their compassionate care for a terminally ill hospice patient. The patient, who has since passed away, had only his daughter as a support system. Davis provided the patient with her personal cell phone, ensuring he could maintain contact with Brown, despite the patient residing in Lancaster, SC. Although the patient had a hospice nurse, he had been seeing Brown and Davis for almost 10 years and felt comfort in their care.

CareSouth Carolina congratulates Davis and Brown on this well-deserved recognition. Their exceptional contributions exemplify the organization's commitment to providing compassionate, patient-centered healthcare.

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.

CARESOUTH CAROLINA WELCOMES NEWEST PROVIDER Submitted by CareSouth Carolina



Pamela Jones-Monroe, newest provider in the Chesterfield Office and School-Based Counselor

CHESTERFIELD- CareSouth Carolina proudly announces the addition of Pamela Jones-Monroe to its team, a seasoned licensed professional counselor with over twelve years of experience. Jones-Monroe's extensive background includes roles such as hospital liaison, CCRI Center person staff and lead clinical staff at the South Carolina Department of Mental Health.

Jones-Monroe, who brings a wealth of expertise in evidence-based treatment, is set to enhance

the mental health services provided by CareSouth Carolina in the Chesterfield community. Her dedication to coordinating care between local hospitals, inpatient treatment facilities and external resources aligns seamlessly with the organization's commitment to comprehensive healthcare.

"I was looking for new experiences and the opportunity to treat the whole patient. I like the concept of CareSouth Carolina and treating the whole patient. My biggest thing with CareSouth is that everything comes together for the patient. They can get it all under one roof," says Jones-Monroe about her decision to join CareSouth Carolina.

Having previously worked in school-based counseling, Jones-Monroe will extend her expertise to three Chesterfield County schools while also providing counseling at the CareSouth Carolina Chesterfield office. Her passion for helping patients reach their full potential

resonates with CareSouth Carolina's mission to provide accessible and compassionate healthcare.

She'll be providing both immediate and long-term assistance to individuals who may experience depression, PTSD, anxiety, grief, family issues, substance dependency and many other psychosocial needs.

"Seeing the progress of patients. That's one of the best experiences when you're helping somebody set goals and be able to follow through," she said. "I love people, and I think you have to have a love and passion for people to be able to help them. The most rewarding is being able to help people find their way and helping them with their needs."

CareSouth Carolina's Chesterfield office is located at 204 Perry Wiley Way. To make an appointment with Jones-Monroe, please give the office a call at 843-623-5080.

Outside of her work, Jones-Monroe enjoys spending time with her family and friends, emphasizing the importance of connecting with people.

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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 veterans' choice

Convenient Locations:

Bennettsville Center 999 Cheraw Street Bennettsville, SC 29512 843.479.2341	Dillon Center 1016 Old Latta Highway Dillon, SC 29536 843.774.4337
Bennettsville Pediatric Center 210 W. Main Street Bennettsville, SC 29512 843.479.1200	Hartsville Center 1268 S. Fourth Street Hartsville, SC 29550 843.332.3422 843.339.5520 Chiropractic
Bennettsville Women's Center 1076 Marlboro Way Rd., Suite 1 Bennettsville, SC 29512 843.454.2294	Lake View Center 103 N. Kemper Street Lake View, SC 29563 843.759.2189
Bishopville Center 545 Sumter Highway Bishopville, SC 29010 803.484.5317	Latta Center 122 Latimer Street Latta, SC 29565 843.627.6252
Bishopville Pediatric Dental 101 Harris Street Bishopville, SC 29010 866.815.9845	McColl Health & Wellness Center 3080 Highway 15-401 E McColl, SC 29570 843.523.5751
Cheraw Center 715 S. Doctors Drive Suite E Cheraw, SC 29520 843.537.0961	Society Hill Center 737 S. Main Street Society Hill, SC 29593 843.378.4501
Chesterfield Center 204 Perry Wiley Way Chesterfield, SC 29709 843.623.5080	Public Employee Health Services - Marlboro County 100 Matheson Street Bennettsville, SC 29512 843.456.7752

Pharmacy Locations:

HARTSVILLE 1280 S. Fourth Street 843.339.5530	BISHOPVILLE 545 Sumter Hwy 803.588.7960	BENNETTSVILLE 999 Cheraw Street 843.456.7777
SOCIETY HILL 737 S. Main Street 843.378.4148	CHERAW 715 S. Doctors Drive, Ste. A 843.865.4080	DILLON 1016 Old Latta Highway 843.627.7154
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LATHRAN J. WOODARD RECEIVES CSC AWARD Articles Submitted by CareSouth Carolina



Lathran J. Woodard and CareSouth Carolina CEO Ann Lewis

HARTSVILLE—CareSouth Carolina announced Lathran J. Woodard as the recipient of its prestigious Community Partnership Award. Woodard, chief executive officer (CEO) of the South Carolina Primary Health Care Association (SCPHCA), has dedicated over 36 years to the advancement of health care and social justice in the state of South Carolina.

In her role as CEO of SCPHCA, Woodard has tirelessly worked to strengthen federally funded community health centers (FQHCs), ensuring they provide essential services to medically underserved communities. Her leadership has extended to overseeing critical programs such as the State Agricultural Worker Health Program and the SC Health Center Controlled Network.

CareSouth Carolina is proud to recognize Woodard's unparalleled contributions to the field of health care, and this award is a testament to her outstanding commitment to community well-being.

Reflecting on her career, Woodard shared that she has been, "blessed to walk," in her calling.

"It's the work we have been able to do as Health Centers and other partners," she said. "To be able to look at the fruits of your work and see system changes that have actually occurred and to be around a group of people that says, 'We can change things. It's really been a progression since I first started. I've enjoyed it and have been blessed to walk in my calling, which meant learning about health care. This is just a seasonal change; I still plan to advocate for social justice and social equity.'"

Speaking about her association with CareSouth Carolina, Woodard praised the organization for its patient-centric approach, saying, "I was so impressed with the staff because they didn't look down on our patients, but they looked at them as human beings. I have gone the journey with

CareSouth. Ann Lewis, who has been here since I have been, has really been an encouragement to me."

Woodard expressed her gratitude for the recognition, highlighting the most rewarding part of her career, "The most rewarding part is being able to look back and see the value in what you were able to do and what people have seen. You can't see it so much for yourself, but when you hear it from others, then recognizing things that I have done. The fact that I'm leaving a legacy and just as I was standing on other's shoulders to be a part of this movement, I am going to continue to be around for others to stand on my shoulders and continue this movement to develop champions who are going to do that."

As she embarks on her retirement, Woodard outlined her future plans, sharing she still intends to be involved in the future of health care across the state.

"My plan is to be even more outspoken regarding social justice and health equity," Woodard said. "My plan is to continue to work with health centers in a consultant role to not only help their organization to keep them viable but also to improve their workforce. I have a heart and a passion for staff in health centers. We're always looking at patients, but we also have to take care of our staff and the trauma that they are going through. When they see social injustice, it's impacting them, so that's going to be a major part of my next season."

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CRYSTAL CAMPBELL IS A PATIENT SUCCESS STORY AT CARESOUTH CAROLINA



Crystal Campbell, a CSC patient, who was able to get her A1C under control and achieve several goals.

DILLON—Crystal Campbell embarked on a transformative health journey with CareSouth Carolina. Her objectives were clear: to achieve significant weight loss and improve her A1C levels within a timeframe of one to three months.

A patient of Haley Jones, FNP-BC at the Dillon Medical Office, Campbell was determined to take charge of her health, and she shared her commitment by actively monitoring her food intake and staying physically active. In addition, she remained diligent in taking her routine medications as prescribed.

Over the course of her journey, Campbell demonstrated unwavering dedication to her health and well-being. Her hard work and perseverance paid off, resulting in remarkable progress.

As of today, she has achieved an incredible weight loss of over 12 pounds. Even more impressive, her A1C levels have seen a significant improvement, dropping from a concerning 8.1 to a healthy 5.6.

Her success story serves as a source of inspiration for others, and CareSouth Carolina continues to show unwavering support in its goals to help, "enhance the health and wellbeing of everyone."

CareSouth Carolina recognizes the importance of caring for the "whole patient." The organization provides a comprehensive set of services and looks to come alongside the patient by helping them achieve their goals.

CareSouth Carolina congratulates Campbell on her remarkable achievements and looks forward to sharing more inspiring success stories within the community.

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.



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HOW TO RECOGNIZE LONELINESS IN SENIORS & WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT



(BPT) - Loneliness is a public health epidemic.

It's a condition that doesn't show up on medical tests, yet it can be just as deadly as daily smoking. The growing crisis has an outsized impact on older Americans. According to a recent study from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more than one-

third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered socially isolated.

Social isolation and loneliness take a toll on physical and mental health, leading to chronic disease and higher healthcare costs. [i] Older adults are at especially high risk of social isolation and loneliness due to changes in social connections that can naturally come with aging, as well as hearing, vision, and memory loss, disability, trouble getting around and/or the loss of family and friends.

"A startling number of seniors are lonely and isolated, and it's taking a real toll on their mental and physical health," said Robin Caruso, chief togetherness officer at Elevance Health. "We need to pay attention to this growing crisis so that we can help preserve health and well-being in old age."

Health Impacts of Loneliness

Risk factors for loneliness include living alone, the death of friends and family, mobility issues, discrimination and poverty - especially among seniors. The health effects of loneliness can be quite serious.

Older adults grappling with loneliness are more likely to experience symptoms of depression and cognitive decline. They're also more likely to be admitted to a nursing home.

Loneliness can also lead to cardiovascular problems, including heart disease and stroke. According to a two-decades-long study, social isolation is a better predictor of whether someone will develop high blood pressure in old age than well-known physical risk factors like diabetes. Social isolation also increases the risk of dementia by about 50 percent, which was comparable to the effects of physical inactivity, low education level and depression.

"Loneliness is a vicious cycle," said Caruso. "Many of its causes and effects overlap, which can compound the problem over time."

Spotting the Signs of Loneliness

As we move into the holiday season, family, friends, neighbors and acquaintances have the opportunity to check in on the older adults in their lives and help offer solutions to social isolation.

Signs to spot loneliness in seniors include:

- * Changes in appetite, including eating less
- * Anger, which could manifest in being more argumentative or becoming disengaged in conversation
- * Withdrawal from social events
- * Less regimented personal hygiene
- * Bringing up people in their past who are not currently involved in their lives
- * Changes in their living situation, including friends or long-time neighbors moving away
- * New or worsening mobility issues
- * Differences in how often they are calling or emailing
- * Friends passing away

"Our bodies and minds are inextricably linked," said Caruso. "Spotting signs of loneliness can help family and friends to rally

around their loved ones and provide support for those who are suffering."

Strategies to Combat Loneliness

Whether you are suffering from loneliness yourself or supporting a loved one, there are many resources and tools to help cope.

Elevance Health has a clinical initiative that addresses the social challenges that older adults face daily. Its goal is to improve physical, psychological and social well-being by encouraging participants to re-engage in healthcare, connect with community-based organizations and increase physical activity.

Called Member Connect, offered through Elevance Health-affiliated Medicare Advantage plans, the program engages an Elevance Health community health worker and an Elevance Health employee volunteer, or phone pal, that together build connections with individuals. By establishing these personal connections, the approach aims to empower people to make behavior changes that reduce isolation and loneliness.

Since its inception in 2017, the Member Connect program team has facilitated over 216,833 phone calls. Telephone surveys found that 87 percent of program participants had more meaningful connections with people since joining the program, and more importantly, 79 percent of participants agreed that they had an increase in activities that bring them joy and purpose.

"When dealing with loneliness and isolation, 'going it alone,' is not a viable solution," said Caruso. "Sometimes it just takes a phone call from someone who cares to serve as a catalyst to make meaningful lifestyle changes."

Some additional strategies that older adults can use to cope with loneliness include:

- * Creating a regular schedule
- * Adopting a pet
- * Volunteering
- * Picking up a new hobby
- * Getting outdoors
- * Addressing transportation needs
- * Consulting with a mental health professional
- * Staying on top of hearing issues
- * Considering a senior-specific living environment

"By empowering older adults to acknowledge and find ways to treat loneliness and isolation, we can all be a part of the solution to the loneliness epidemic," said Caruso.

[i] United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2020, April). Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions. Retrieved 1/24/2023 <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>.



TEN WAYS TO THANK A CAREGIVER



(BPT) - Chances are you know a caregiver. It could be the teacher at your child's school, balancing classroom duties and caring for an aging parent after the bell rings. Maybe it's your coworker who also takes care of a chronically ill spouse at home; or your friend who makes time to catch up despite their busy schedule assisting their disabled sibling with everyday tasks.

With caregivers playing such a vital role for loved ones - a spouse, child, parents or even a friend - it is important that caregivers be supported too. Becoming a full-time caregiver is usually not a role anyone is prepared to take on and can often come with challenges and emotional hardships. However, creating connections and building support networks can provide a safety net for caregivers and give them somewhere to turn when navigating new or difficult situations.

Supportive communities and resources are important for caregivers in every season. An easy first step in showing up for the caregivers in your own life is to express

gratitude and establish yourself as a means of support and understanding.

Need help getting started? Consider these 10 ways to say thanks to a caregiver in your life:

1. Write a thank you note.

Whether short and sweet or long and detailed, a simple letter expressing gratitude and recognizing everything caregivers do is an easy way to say thanks and create connections.

2. Send them a personal gift.

Gift cards and other small tokens of gratitude are a great way to express thanks and provide caregivers with something for themselves, encouraging self-care and prioritizing caregiver well-being.

3. The gift of time, so they can do self-care.

Another way to encourage self-care is by stepping in for a caregiver for a few hours, allowing them some free time to take care of themselves and do what they enjoy.

4. Make regular visits.

Caregiving can often be an isolated role, as many of the people receiving care may have limited mobility or spend most of their time at home. In this, it's important to physically show up for the caregiver in your life and spend quality time with them.

5. Gift them a journal or planner.

An important role of caregivers is to keep track of appointments, medication schedules and more. Gifting a journal or planner to help them stay organized can be an easy way to support their everyday life.

6. Express your gratitude with food.

Not only does cooking a meal for a

caregiver help alleviate some of their workload, but it also is an effective way to connect with those around you and spark meaningful conversations.

7. Exercise together.

Many studies suggest that exercising with a caregiver and the person receiving care can improve both mental and physical health, making it an easy way to show thanks and prioritize well-being.

8. Plan a movie night.

Express thanks by arranging a movie night, setting aside time to connect and bond over a favorite movie of theirs.

9. Have a portrait taken.

A powerful way to create connection and meaningful memories is by having a portrait taken of caregiver and care recipient, gifting an image that will always remind them of the vital role they play.

10. Create a team of support.

One of the best ways to support the caregiver in your life and express consistent gratitude for all they do, is by surrounding them with a network of resources and creating a Caregiver Support Team.

Whether it's by saying thanks, helping to establish a caregiver support network or simply spending quality time, showing up for the caregivers in your life can have an immense impact on their well-being, and in turn, can improve the quality of care they provide.

For additional resources and to learn more about how you can ensure the caregiver in your life feels supported at every turn, connect with Careforth.



TIPS FOR STAYING ACTIVE AFTER AGE 65



(BPT) - It's common to hear people say they feel overwhelmed by the idea of being physically active, and that they have no idea where to start. That sense of pressure can be discouraging and cause many people to postpone making positive changes in their behavior.

The unfortunate truth is that physical inactivity takes a significant toll on older adults in America. Rates of inactivity increased six percent to more than 31 percent nationwide among adults aged 65 and older who were in average health between 2018 and 2021. That number has continued to climb in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to America's Health Rankings Senior Report.

Physical inactivity contributes to many chronic conditions, including cardiovascular disease, obesity and diabetes - all of which can reduce a person's mobility, independence and quality of life.

The good news is getting active doesn't have to be difficult, time-consuming or expensive. In fact, almost everyone can take steps to work more activity into their daily lives, even from the comfort of home. The benefits are clear - even as little as five minutes of activity every day can make a difference. Physical activity can help improve your brain health, manage weight, reduce the risk of disease, strengthen bones and muscles and improve your ability to do everyday activities.

Regular exercise can also help you feel better and build relationships. In fact, recent research showed moderate or high physical activity helps reduce severe loneliness and social isolation by 15 percent to 30 percent, and also helps increase feelings of resilience and purpose and improve people's perception of aging.

Here are four tips to help you become more physically active and put yourself on the road to better health and quality of life:

* Start small. Remember the old adage, "Rome wasn't built in a day"? That goes for

starting a new exercise regimen, as well as for building strength and stamina. It's OK to start with just a few minutes at first, and then build gradually - from five, 10 or 15 minutes of movement to eventually 30 or more.

* Make a plan. Most new routines require some level of preparation. Decide what activity you would like to do - whether it's walking, following an exercise video at home or taking a fitness class - and plan a regular routine, so it's easier to follow through.

* Get comfortable. Choose clothing that's easy to move in and is appropriate for the environment. If an activity requires lots of extra gear, equipment or skills, consider choosing something you can do with what you have. The important thing is to get moving!

* Find a buddy. Exercising with a friend can be fun and rewarding. It's a great way to socialize and build friendships and can also be a strong motivator or cause for celebration when you meet your shared goals.

This information is for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for the advice of a doctor. Consult your doctor prior to beginning an exercise program or making changes to your lifestyle or health care routine.

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FOUR TIPS TO HELP YOU BUY YOUR FIRST HOME IN ANY MARKET



(BPT) - Is owning a home on your 2024 vision board? If yes-or even maybe-it's never too early to start preparing for that big milestone.

Buying in the current market can be difficult, but not impossible. Below, are some tips to get you started in the process and help you feel more confident no matter where your homebuying journey takes you.

1. Build your team early

You don't have to go through the homebuying process alone-in fact, it's best to get help early in the process. Check in with a Home Lending Advisor as one of your first tasks because they can help you navigate the homebuying process, everything from considering homeownership to walking through your new front door.

Connecting with a Home Lending Advisor early will also allow you to know what you can afford before you start your home search. They can educate you on product terms, rates, and fees, and help you identify options that work for you throughout your homebuying journey. Once you're ready to shop, your lender may even be able to help connect you to a reputable real estate agent.

2. Get familiar with the ins and outs of homebuying

As a first-time homebuyer, there's a lot to learn. And, while the current economic landscape may be all over the news, there's a lot more to a mortgage than interest rates. You'll want to get to know the lay of the land-understand the mortgage application process, learn how to comparison shop, and avoid hidden costs of getting a mortgage. To shop effectively, you'll need to understand both interest rate and fee options. The good news is there's a wealth of information out there to help between your Home Lending Advisor's expertise and free online educational resources.

Did you know there are several financial assistance programs for first-time homebuyers? These programs are aimed at making homeownership more affordable by reducing the upfront costs. A Home Lending Advisor can help you find those programs and understand what you may be eligible for.

Lastly, as you prepare to apply for a loan, be sure to understand the documentation you'll need to provide to lenders. The more you know, the better equipped you'll be to move quickly and make informed decisions.

3. Determine what you need and what you want

Before you look for a home, you'll need to make a list of what features are "must-haves" versus "nice-to-haves." This can be a fun process but make sure you're differentiating between your must-haves, or nonnegotiable, and nice-to-haves... the luxuries or non-essentials. Every homebuyer has different priorities, but remember to be flexible, as that can unlock more possibilities in your budget.

After you're feeling good about your list, research the current state of the real estate market in your desired location to understand how

much your ideal home costs and determine your price range. You may need to consider alternative neighborhoods with more inventory or that better fit your budget.

It's important to keep in mind that this will be your first home. Even if it lacks some bells and whistles, you can still add more features in the future or use the property as a steppingstone for your dream home.

4. Lock in your rate at the time that's right for you

Mortgage rates fluctuate over time. The rate you could get today may not be the rate you'd get tomorrow. That's why it's important to shop for the best rate and lock it in once ready.

Locking in a rate can help streamline the homebuying process and give you some peace of mind. You'll also be able to use the one-time float-down option if rates go down before your closing.

The bottom line

Your goal of homeownership is attainable. Even if you're waiting for rates to improve, start now and give these tips a shot so you'll be better prepared for when you do decide to buy your home.

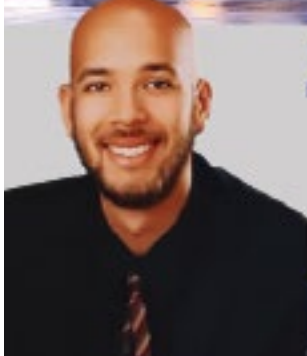


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ARTFIELDS VOLUNTEER PROMISE

Submitted by ArtFields Presents



Longtime volunteer Marge Ern stands outside of an ArtFields Jr student art competition venue.

LAKE CITY-If getting more involved in your community or trying something new are items on your New Year's resolutions list, ArtFields is the perfect place to start.

ArtFields is an arts organization located in Lake City, SC. We were founded in 2013 with a mission to celebrate Southern art, revitalize a small town and create access to the arts for an underserved area. Our flagship festival turns what was once one of South Carolina's most prosperous agricultural communities into a living art gallery as hundreds of artworks are displayed

downtown. The success of this event has led to three year-round galleries, ArtFields Jr. youth art programs, a growing public art collection, artist in residence program and much more.

Our 12th festival is April 26 - May 4, and will transform Lake City as art is displayed everywhere from boutiques and restaurants to traditional galleries and renovated warehouses. Interested artists submit their work September 1 through November 1 in the fall preceding the event and then a selection panel rates each artwork and the highest rated are displayed in

person through downtown Lake City. In addition to the competition and exhibition, the festival features artist talks, a portrait contest, plein air day and the visitor favorite youth art competition.

The annual festival features nine days of art-filled fun that wouldn't be possible without a small army of volunteers. Volunteering during the festival means everything from event set-up to monitoring art venues to helping visitors vote for our \$12,500 People's Choice Awards to being a docent for field trips. We have ways for everyone to be a part of the art!

Volunteers of all ages rally together to pull off this art event and give back to the community—and we invite you to join us!

The Volunteer Kick-Off will be held this year on Thursday, March 7 from 6 - 7:30 p.m. at The Bean Market. First time and veteran volunteers alike come together to share a meal and participate in the volunteer training for 2024.

To volunteer, register via the ArtFields website starting on January first and RSVP for our Volunteer Kick-Off to carla@artfieldssc.org.

ArtFields creates programs that are a mutual celebration of art and community, and we invite you to join in with us not only for the 12th year of our festival, but also during our year-round programming.

To learn more about all that ArtFields has to offer throughout the year, follow our social media pages @artfieldssc and visit our website, artfieldssc.org, for more information. You can also explore recent art exhibitions via the ArtFields Guide on the Bloomberg Connects App on your mobile device.



Starting January 1st, be one of the first to get registered to volunteer to win prizes.



If you have questions, our volunteers always have the answer.



Find a friend and come volunteer with us.



The Volunteer Kick Off this year is on March 7th.



Volunteers of all ages help make the ArtFields Festival possible.



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Frosted Pine Martini

1 Serving | 5 minutes



INGREDIENTS:

- 2 oz. Beefeater Gin
- 1 oz. Dry Vermouth
- 1/4 oz. Rosemary Simple Syrup
- 1/8 tsp. White Luster Cocktail Dust
- Rosemary Sprig & Cocktail Onions to garnish

Directions:

1. Chill martini glass by filling glass with ice and water.
2. Combine Gin, Vermouth, Simple Syrup and Cocktail Dust in a cocktail shaker.
3. Shake vigorously for about 20 seconds.
4. Discard water and ice from martini glass.
5. Strain into martini glass, garnish and enjoy!



MAX OUT YOUR CHILL: FOUR TYPES OF ICE TO ELEVATE YOUR COCKTAILS



(BPT) - If you enjoy hosting friends and family for dinners or the occasional happy hour especially during the winter season, one way to impress your guests is to plan and prepare various drinks for each occasion.

While you likely prioritize getting the best spirits, mixers and glasses, it's essential not to overlook the significance of ice. Different ice shapes serve distinct purposes, and incorporating the right ones into your beverages will wow your guests

and let you flex your skills as a home barkeep. Check out the four main types of ice and how to use them when crafting drinks.

1. Cubed

Classic and versatile, cubed ice is your all-purpose companion. Whether you're crafting a classic Long Island iced tea or a refreshing gin and tonic, cubed ice will swiftly chill your spirits. It's also perfect for serving iced teas, rum and cola or mojitos in a highball glass.

2. Crushed

Recognizable by its pebble-like texture, crushed ice brings a unique element to your drinks. The pebble-like ice melts faster than your typical cubed ice. While not all cocktails benefit from dilution, certain creations like the Mint Julep thrive on it, according to Vine Pair. Crushed ice's ability to thin out syrup and juices is its secret weapon, especially for dessert options like a homemade take on shaved ice.

3. Mini cubed

A generous supply of mini-cubed ice is the perfect answer for filling water bottles or delivering a quick chill. Like crushed ice, mini-cubed ice

is fantastic at quickly cooling drinks, making iced coffee or chilling soda and water.

If your plans involve blended drinks or frozen cocktails, mini-cubed ice is the way to go. The small cubes blend smoothly, so every drink you make has a consistent texture.

4. Round

Round ice (also known as sphere or ball ice) isn't just aesthetically pleasing. It melts slowly, gradually chilling your drink without diluting it. For those who enjoy sipping on whiskey, bourbon or craft cocktails, opt for round ice in a lowball glass. It's also helpful to keep any cocktail or non-alcoholic drink chilled during long parties.

You can get round ice trays to make them at home, but if you have an LG refrigerator, some make slow-melt LG Craft Ice™, so you can have round ice on demand.

All the ice you need at home

While your fridge may make cubed and crushed ice, you'll likely have to buy specialty trays to make others, like mini-cubed and round shapes. Even for cubed and crushed ice, your fridge may not make enough to serve drinks to your guests all night.

You can effortlessly enjoy these four ice options at your convenience with the LG Smart Mirror InstaView® Counter-Depth MAX French Door Refrigerator. This large-capacity fridge makes these four types of ice to suit any get-together or occasion, including LG's exclusive slow-melting, round Craft Ice™.

In addition to its spacious interior, the refrigerator offers a sleek, counter-depth design that blends seamlessly with surrounding cabinets and also features LG's latest Mirror InstaView® window. With just two quick knocks on the glass panel, you can illuminate the contents inside your refrigerator.



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FEELING BURNT OUT? WATCH OUT FOR THESE SYMPTOMS!



(BPT) - If long workdays leave you wondering if you're burnt out, take a closer look. While typical signs of work-related burnout can mean you're overdue for serious PTO, other symptoms may indicate psychological, emotional and/or physical issues that need to be addressed for your well-being.

Listing your symptoms may provide a clearer picture of what you need for self-care. While some symptoms may lead you to seek a visit with your physician or consult a mental health professional, others may indicate a common source of discomfort in today's digital environment: your eyes.

Frequently experienced eye-related issues

These symptoms and others can be due to - or worsened by - excessive screen time, including work, gaming, watching TV or interacting on social media for more than two hours consecutively each day.

Eyestrain is very common in today's visually demanding world, especially if your workday involves extensive reading and staring at a computer. Sore, dry or watery eyes, itching or burning sensations, sensitivity to light, headaches and difficulty focusing can develop.

Headaches accompanied by visual symptoms like flashing or sparkling lights and darkening of vision could indicate you're experiencing migraine with aura. However, it's critical to rule out other potential causes like damage inside your eye, a retinal tear or retinal detachment, which can only be determined through an in-person comprehensive eye exam by an optometrist. Headaches can be exacerbated by both stress and excessive screen time.

Blurred vision when looking quickly from near to far could be a sign of accommodative dysfunction, a condition frequently found in anyone who works up close for long periods of time, such as those who work on screens. Blurring and inability to focus can occur without proper lighting and posture, or if you're not taking enough breaks.

Dry eye is a medical condition in which someone doesn't create enough of a quality tear film to lubricate and nourish the eye. Tears are necessary for maintaining the health of the front surface of the eye and providing clear vision. Dry eye may be caused or worsened when reading or staring at a screen for long periods of time.

Neck and shoulder pain can result from tilting your head at odd angles because your glasses aren't designed for looking at a computer, or if you bend toward the screen to see more clearly. Poor lighting, a glare on your screen, improper viewing distances, poor seating posture or uncorrected vision problems could all contribute to neck and shoulder pain.

If you're experiencing symptoms, visit an optometrist for a comprehensive in-person eye exam. Optometrists can test for a wide variety of conditions to understand the causes of your discomfort. Only by examining your eyes in-office can an optometrist determine how to help relieve your symptoms.

"Unfortunately, eye health is not the first thing people think of when they're experiencing workplace discomfort, but a well-functioning visual system is crucial for everyday wellness," said American Optometric Association (AOA) President Dr. Ronald Benner. "Eye health impacts

your overall health - and also provides important early indicators of numerous diseases. An annual comprehensive eye exam with a doctor of optometry is vital to ensure everyone's eye health, whether they wear glasses or not."

Better work habits

In addition to seeing your optometrist for a comprehensive eye exam, here are tips to help safeguard your eyes:

The 20/20/20 rule. It's important to rest your eyes while on your computer, gaming or using any device for long periods. For every 20 minutes on a digital device, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds. This gives your eyes a chance to refocus.

Blink! Blinking keeps the front surface of the eye moist, but it's common for people to blink less often when doing tasks on electronic devices. Blink rate can actually slow by up to 40 percent when you're looking at a screen. To minimize the chances of developing dry eye, try to blink more frequently. Setting reminders on your devices can help you remember to do so.

Digital device distance. Your computer screen should be 15-20 degrees below eye level (about 4-5") as measured from the center of the screen, and 20 inches from your eyes. Smaller devices should be a minimum of 13 inches away to give the visual system a break, and make sure to use the zoom feature to increase small print and details instead of bringing the device closer to your eyes.

The right glasses for the job. Whether your corrective lenses are worn for distance, reading or both, they may not provide the best vision for viewing computer screens. Tell your optometrist about your daily job tasks and hobbies. You may benefit from wearing glasses specifically made for computer work.

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DUKE ENERGY AWARDS \$225,000 IN GRANTS TO ORGANIZATIONS MAKING CRITICAL HOME IMPROVEMENTS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA'S SENIORS

Submitted by Ryan Mosier, Corporate Communications



Helping Florence Flourish

GREENVILLE—Duke Energy has awarded \$225,000 to South Carolina organizations that help seniors make needed home repairs to enable senior citizens to continue to enjoy life in their current homes.

Duke Energy's Senior Home Repair

Program provided 15 qualifying nonprofits, grants of up to \$20,000 through a request for proposals announced in September.

"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."

Each organization will administer the funds based on the nonprofit's mission, some addressing long waiting lists for such repairs. Grant uses 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.

Grants were awarded to the following organizations:

- Academic Technology and Wellness Academy (Cherokee County) – \$10,000
- AIM – \$20,000
- Caring and Sharing Inc. (Georgetown, Florence and Williamsburg counties) – \$20,000
- Citizens United for Redevelopment and Economic Stability of Chester – \$10,000
- Darlington Long-Term Recovery Group – \$10,000
- Habitat for Humanity Greenville County – \$20,000
- Habitat for Humanity Spartanburg – \$20,000
- Habitat for Humanity of York County – \$20,000
- Helping Florence Flourish – \$15,000
- Home Works of America, Inc. (Greenwood County) – \$10,000
- Marion Dillon Habitat for Humanity – \$15,000
- Marlboro County Coordinating Council Inc. – \$10,000
- Rebuild Upstate (Oconee and Pickens Counties) – \$10,000
- Sumter United Ministries – \$20,000



Marlboro County Coordinating Council Inc.



Caring and Sharing Inc.

• United Way of Sumter, Clarendon and Lee Counties – \$15,000

"For Florence to flourish, it takes generous neighbors and businesses who are able and willing to invest in the lives of those who find themselves in need," said Chris Handley,

executive director of Helping Florence Flourish. "I'm thankful for the Duke Energy Foundation's gift of \$15,000, which will help us help a homeowner on a fixed income with much needed home repairs."

"Home preservation and repair are core components of Habitat's mission because these efforts help ensure the wellbeing of home occupants, contribute to safe home environments and foster thriving communities," said Jennifer Faner, chief operating officer of Habitat for Humanity of Greenville County. "Our aging in place strategies focus on ensuring that our neighbors will have the ability to live in their own home and community safely, independently and comfortably, regardless of their age, income or ability level. We are so grateful to the Duke Energy Foundation for their continued support of Habitat, and their commitment to the Greenville community."

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](https://www.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.



Happy New Year!

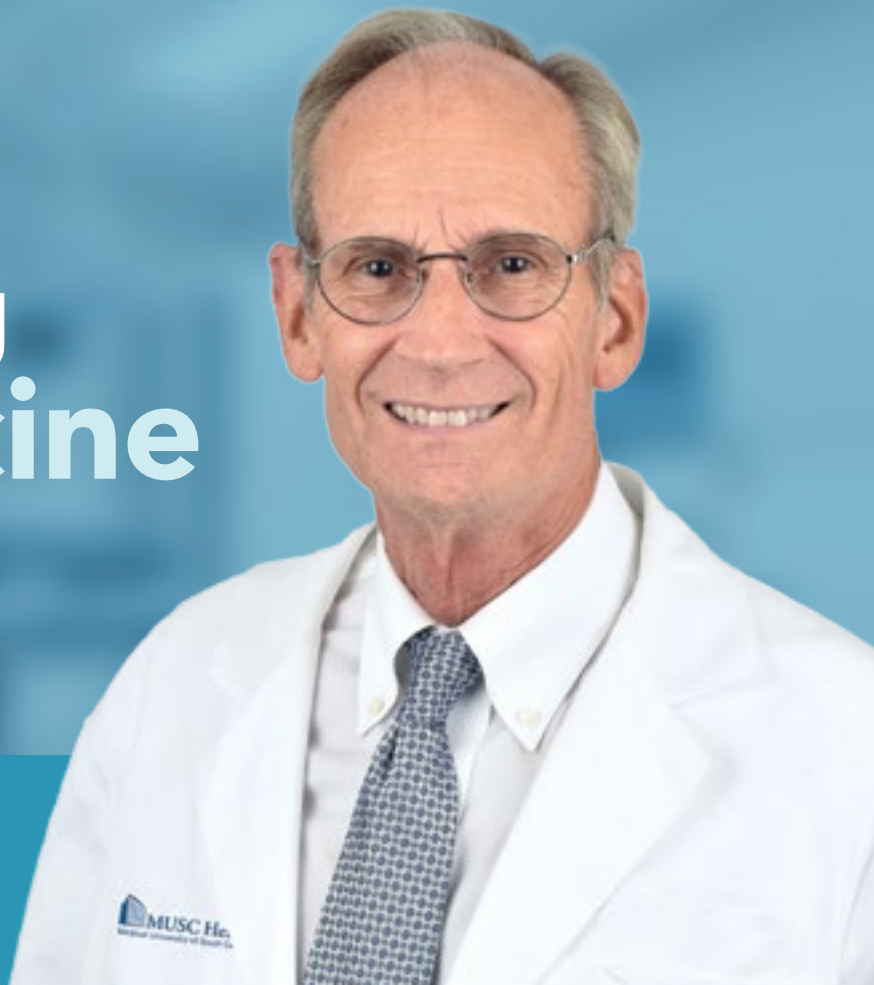
2024

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