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DIVERSITY WORKS

JULY 2025 VOLUME 15 ISSUE 3

"For All of Us"



COVER STORY: PG 44

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MISSION AND VISION

OUR MISSION

Diversity Works© is a magazine for the socially conscious and responsible worker at any level. The magazine has a commitment to be a showcase for organizations and their employees that represent best practices in workforce diversity and supplier choices. We feature articles on those displaying inclusionary vision in and for the marketplace and who encourage and provide role models for others.

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

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

OUR VISION

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

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FROM THE EDITOR'S HEART



Glacia Brown Mason
Editor

Greetings Diversity Works Readers!

With the beginning of summer occurring on June 20, the recent southern heatwave, already feels like the dog days of summer. We encourage you to stay hydrated, protect yourselves from the sun, warm temperatures and be sure to check on children, the elderly and pets. What a perfect opportunity to stay cool, pick up the latest issue of Diversity Works Magazine and be, in-the-know. If you're a regular reader or if this is your very first time, we hope you find the plethora of news and information a welcome alternative as you beat the summer heat.

You already know that inside this third quarter edition, our recurring sections featuring the latest news and information the Pee Dee area contributes to business, diversity in spirituality, education, financial, health and lifestyle, awaits you.

Be among the first to read featured stories in our business section, where we congratulate Brandon Carter of Lake City on his election and induction into the young professional network with GFOA. Read about the United Way's work in Florence County, as well as how McCall Farms, another staple in the community, prioritizes not only business but giving back by volunteering to help those in need. Important to the fabric and success of the Pee Dee is Ruiz Foods and their efforts to combat adult illiteracy in the community. Don't miss the exciting article about Downtown Florence's Main Street Program and its collaboration with the Main Street America Division and NuMarket! Learn how the Florence Downtown Development Corporation's \$100k award will bring a new retail business incubator to the area to grow business in spring 2026.

Business entrepreneurs, HR professionals and interested community leaders, are encouraged to register, sponsor employees and attend the 2025 Biennial Diversity Focus Training, on Thursday, November 6, at SIMT

where dynamic speakers, interesting and thought-provoking breakout sessions will provide the opportunity to network, learn and share best practices on workplace fairness and inclusivity. We look forward to welcoming you! At Diversity Works, we appreciate and thank our advertising partners for their continued support! Readers are encouraged to support local businesses to increase economic growth and empowerment. Throughout this edition, pay close attention and make note of exciting and interesting advertisements from ad sponsors on upcoming events and opportunities.

Mark your calendars to attend the Downtown Florence Restaurant Week, happening September 6-14. Heads up, McDonald's and Performance Food Services is hiring.

Let Spherion Staffing & Recruiting assist you in your next employment placement. Don't be left out, sign up for text alerts from the City of Florence to stay informed! Just text, "Hey CY," to 855-964-3929.

Medical oncology professionals, advocates and more, be sure not to miss the SC Cancer Alliance's Annual meeting on September 18.

All educators, be reminded that the Santee Electric Cooperative, Inc. Bright Ideas Grant Program deadline is approaching, September 22. Entrepreneur Starlee Alexander and State Farm can assist you with your insurance needs. Call today to find out more. The FMU PAC shares its 2025-2026 schedule. Read the article to find the incredible line up and get your tickets early!

Get ready for the fifth year of elegance in white as preparations for Le' Diner en Blanc are underway. Golf enthusiasts, be sure to register yourself or team for the Pee Dee Medical Professional Association's 5th Annual Golf Tournament Fundraiser at Traces Golf Course on Saturday, August 23. Need a lawyer? Diversity Works' ad partners provide a plethora of options from Finklea Law Firm, Jebaily Law Firm, The Law Offices of Linward C. Evans II and more. They know you have choices, see their ads, they are happy to help.

As informed Diversity Works readers, don't sleep on the great work being done at Thermo Fisher Scientific! Read their ad and learn of their efforts to fight ALS – Lou Gehrig's disease.

Plan on celebrating the grand opening of the MUSC Health Jean and Hugh K. Leatherman Behavioral Care Pavilion! As the first of its kind in SC, its intentional design with the patient in mind, this 100,000 square ft mental health treatment facility is slated for a Fall 2025 opening. Kudos to all those dedicated to making this a reality.

Read further as our education section features the wonderful story on how Trisha Caulder, Debbie Hyler and The School Foundation team has worked tirelessly to

distribute over \$165k in grants to Florence 1 Schools for the 2025-2026 school year. High praise for the steadfast grants team and their efforts to enhance learning!

Congratulations to all of the 2025 graduates! Well wishes in their future pursuits. We also congratulate the Girls STEM team at GSSM, Dr. Matthew Ferguson as the new DCSD superintendent and all of our collegiate educational institutions including Central Carolina Technical College, Francis Marion University, Horry Georgetown Technical College, Claflin University, Florence Darlington Technical College and more for their exemplary work in education.

Included in our special section, find the cover story as we congratulate Executive Director Spencer Scott and the Florence and Marion County First Steps in its 25th year. Read their story and meet the knowledgeable, dedicated and professional staff who ensure service delivery to the community.

In addition, find articles in celebration of the 40th anniversary of National Parks and Recreation Month. Learn the vital role they play in the promotion of family wellness and community connectivity. You'll enjoy learning about Kalmia Gardens, Martha Law Park and more. Newsflash...the new Darlington Splash Pad is now open! Read the article about how the outdoors is good for you, says a Stanford study. Take to heart information shared on how nature uplifts the mood and supports well-being. Get some fresh air and improve your family's overall well-being with the best places for families to enjoy the beauty of nature in our area.

In this section, you'll also find good and important information on summer tips for children, useful to parents, grandparents and caregivers alike.

If you're a lover of the arts, find interesting articles in celebration of American Artists Appreciation Month, where we spotlight local American artists in varying genres. See the works of the top winners in the annual ArtFields competition as they share its 2025 winners.

We all know that the Big C sucks! You're lucky if your life hasn't been touched by cancer but the reality is, many have been. You'll read articles on childhood cancer awareness and prostate cancer. As the nation observes National Prostate Cancer Awareness, Recovery and National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, read with empathy the personal stories shared and of the brave women and men affected. These and more interesting and important stories can be found in this third quarter edition of Diversity Works. Remember, diversity works for all of us!

Happy Reading and Stay Cool!

Glacia Brown Mason
Editor

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EXPERT TIPS FOR SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS IN THE AI ERA



(BPT) - Did you know small businesses comprise 99.9 percent of all businesses nationwide? Today's small businesses are entering a new era, with smart, accessible technology helping to level the playing field, making it easier than ever to compete, grow and thrive. From AI-powered PCs and generative AI tools like ChatGPT and Gemini, to intuitive platforms like Canva, Square, Shopify, Mailchimp and QuickBooks Online, there's technology available to support almost any business need today - no IT team required.

The result? Modern technology is opening doors to give small business owners powerful, affordable resources right at their fingertips. Technology helps entrepreneurs and small businesses automate everyday tasks, tackle challenges, streamline operations and scale smarter - proving that small really can be mighty.

This Small Business Month, business owners can celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit fueling economic growth and vibrant communities. Whether you're just starting out or looking to take your business to the next level, here are practical insights to help your business thrive in today's digital-first world.

Accessible resources drive impact

It's vital to recognize that any size business needs to optimize today's technological advances. In its third annual global CIO report, Lenovo found a whopping 96 percent of chief information officers expect to increase AI investments over the coming year. Additionally, 81 percent of CIOs say they're leveraging third-party AI tools or deploying a mix of third-party and proprietary AI. Notably, 39 percent of CIOs are already seeing a positive return on their organization's investment in AI.

Are most small businesses embracing new technologies? The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Teneo found that almost all small businesses (98 percent) are using AI-enabled tools,

and more than half (51 percent) use financial management tools like Intuit QuickBooks. In addition, nearly half of small businesses (47 percent) use four or more technology platforms and 40 percent use GenAI tools like chatbots and AI-powered image creation. In other words, adoption of new technologies is widespread, highlighting their importance in today's business environment.

To get started, begin by identifying one key area of your business that could benefit from automation - whether it's managing finances, improving customer service or streamlining marketing. From there, explore budget-friendly tools tailored to your business goals and tap into resources like mentorship programs and funding opportunities that can help you make informed decisions and implement tech with confidence. With the right support, small, strategic changes can unlock major efficiencies, setting the stage for long-term growth.

From underdog to top dog: Harness AI for big wins

AI isn't just for large enterprises; in fact, Vena FP&A reports that 80 percent of staff who use AI and automation tools say they have become more productive. Interestingly, less experienced workers experienced a 35 percent productivity jump, proving AI can make a positive impact for organizations and individuals, regardless of skill level.

A McKinsey report from March 2025 found 21 percent of organizations using generative AI say their businesses have fundamentally redesigned at least some of their workflows, resulting in cost savings. Lenovo's global 2025 CIO Playbook reports that AI spending expectations by IT decision-makers will nearly triple in 2025 compared with last year. The bottom line: Nearly half of organizations (42 percent) believe AI-powered devices boost employee productivity and experience. That's why an overwhelming 90 percent are piloting, planning or exploring AI-powered PC rollouts in the mid-to-long term.

The takeaway for small business owners? You don't need to overhaul everything, but focusing on one area of your business to leverage AI can drive meaningful results.

Resources to help businesses grow

When seeking resources to optimize technology for your business, start by identifying top technology priorities. Key places to start including improving cybersecurity, using project

management tools to streamline workflows and automating tasks like email marketing and inventory management. You can find information and resources on the U.S. Small Business Administration website.

In addition, programs like Lenovo's Evolve Small are dedicated to championing North American small businesses. This year, Evolve Small is introducing the AI Grant, designed to demystify AI for small businesses and help integrate AI into their everyday operations. The grant, which will be awarded to eligible businesses, includes \$25K in grant funding, a comprehensive, customized Lenovo technology package valued at \$10K, AI training, plus access to mentorship, mental health and leadership coaching and community support.

There are also free resources available for any small business to leverage through the Lenovo Pro Community site, such as on-demand workshops and courses on AI PCs, informational guides on building your tech stack, data security, emotional intelligence and more.

By investing in key resources and embracing AI, Lenovo aims to empower small businesses to compete effectively with larger companies, ensuring they remain the beating heart of local communities.



Small biz, big impact

Small businesses are crucial to local economies, serving as cultural cornerstones by creating jobs and fostering innovation. In today's AI-driven landscape, technology isn't a luxury, it's a lifeline. When harnessed thoughtfully, even the leanest operations can unlock smarter workflows, sharper marketing and stronger customer relationships.

Fortunately, adopting newer and better technology does not have to break the bank or be overly complicated. The key is finding what suits your unique business needs and budget. With the right tools, support and mindset, small business owners can compete at a higher level than ever before - and win. Whether you're looking to simplify operations, better connect with customers or scale sustainably, now's the time to act.

MAKE YOUR JOB WORK FOR YOU



Photo courtesy of Unsplash

(Family Features) For some people, job dissatisfaction is the result of a crummy boss or stifling work environment. For others, the problem lies much deeper; it's a need to reevaluate your career path and find a more suitable fit.

If you're considering a career change but not sure which direction you're headed, consider these words of wisdom:

Do some self-reflecting. Take time to give your current work situation a thorough analysis. Determine which elements you enjoy, what rubs you the wrong way and what you'd change if you could. Think about practical solutions to the problems you identify whether it's changing to a different role in the same field or exploring a new industry entirely. Avoid the temptation to focus on the negative. Rather, take plenty of time to consider the positive aspects of your current job, since that insight can help inform your next step. For example, if you enjoy the limited contact you have with customers, a job with more customer-facing interaction might not be a good fit.

Ask for input. Sometimes loved ones hold the key to a happier career path because they can point out details you don't recognize. They might recall a time when you were most relaxed and happy, or they might point out talents or skills you take for granted. Often, these natural abilities are an excellent foundation for a career because you're well-equipped to be successful.

Consider your personal interests. Keeping your personal

life and professional life separate isn't necessarily a bad idea but finding a way to merge the two can be useful. This is especially true if you're able to combine training or skills with something you're passionate about. For example, if you're an avid outdoorsman, you might find great satisfaction in applying your business management background to work for a company that specializes in camping gear.

Understand what motivates you. Landing in the right job isn't just about having the right qualifications for a position that interests you. At the end of the day, you'll feel most content when your job offers meaningful rewards. Motivators can be financial, or they might have more to do with the ability to learn and grow. Some people are willing to sacrifice a bigger paycheck to know they're making a meaningful contribution in a field they care about. Knowing what outcomes resonate best can help you find a more rewarding career.

Do your research. Changing your career path is a big move, and one you shouldn't take lightly. Before diving in, spend time looking into the field you're considering so you have a better sense of factors like growth opportunities, job availability, qualifications, compensation and more. If you find you aren't quite qualified for the job you think you want, explore what it will take to get there whether it's training, education or putting in your time to gain experience and work your way into the role you desire.

A career change may be just what you need to shift your life in the direction you want. Find more career advice at eLivingtoday.com.



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AND FLORENCE COUNTIES**



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Bright Ideas grants are intended to fund projects outside normal school funding parameters and are available to all disciplines in grades K-12. Grants are awarded for up to \$1,000 each. The Bright Ideas Grant is a fantastic opportunity to bring creative and engaging projects to your school, take advantage of it!



For more information about the Bright Ideas Grant program and the application, visit santee.org/bright-ideas. Completed applications are due by **Monday, September 22, 2025.**



TURNING DEI INSIGHTS INTO ACTION Contributed by Diversity.com

Employers face significant challenges in this critical moment for DEI in the workplace. Leadership commitment, accountability gaps, persistent discrimination, psychological safety concerns and uncertainty about AI hiring—make it clear that genuine progress depends on decisive action.

These insights are noteworthy and represent important moments that could influence long-term outcomes.

1. Scaling Back DEI Efforts Puts Workplace Culture at Risk

81 percent of employers recognize DEI importance for long-term retention and organizational health. Reducing DEI commitment risks, eroding trust, employee engagement and employer brand, results in higher turnover and weaker recruitment outcomes.

Action Step: Embed DEI into your business strategy. Communicate an ongoing commitment, especially during uncertain times, to reinforce trust among current and prospective employees.

2. Commitment and Accountability are Crucial

62 percent of employers identify lack of leadership commitment, and 57 percent highlight accountability as barriers. Clear leadership accountability and consistency, prevent DEI efforts from stalling. Initiatives without measurable

outcomes harm credibility and discourage buy-in.

Action Step: Create accountability by linking DEI goals to leadership evaluations, compensation and performance metrics. Transparent reporting on



progress reinforces organizational authenticity and credibility.

3. Employers Must Address Discrimination

Ignoring discrimination puts organizations at risk—legally, reputationally and operationally. 59 percent of professionals report workplace discrimination. Unchecked discrimination harms morale, productivity and reputation, making organizations vulnerable to attrition and potential lawsuits.

Action Step: Regularly audit hiring, promotion and compensation practices. Implement training and enforce anti-discrimination protocols, at every level.

4. Psychological Safety: Employees Are Hesitant to Speak Up

One in four employees feels uncomfortable speaking openly. When employees don't feel safe to speak up, innovation, engagement and productivity suffer, impacting competitiveness.

Action Step: Foster open and honest dialogue. Train managers in active listening, proactive bias management and conflict resolution for inclusivity and collaboration.

5. AI in Hiring: Uncertainty Could Undermine DEI

55 percent of employers are uncertain about the impact of AI-driven hiring tools on diversity. AI can amplify or mitigate hiring biases depending on oversight and implementation. Failure to monitor these risks undermine diversity initiatives.

Action Step: Evaluate AI-driven hiring tools. Establish transparent hiring standards and ensure human oversight to eliminate unintended bias. Prioritize solutions that support fairness and inclusivity.

In 2025, the true measure of DEI commitment will be in consistent actions taken. For lasting change, position your organization for inclusivity and prosperity.

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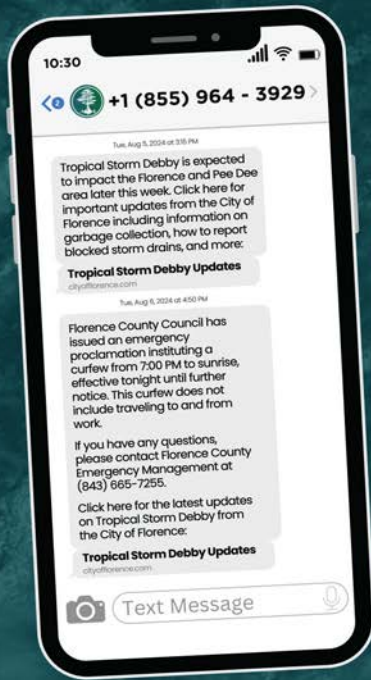
More information to come. If any questions call (843) 413-2743 / (843) 669-5929 or email: dmmadworks@aol.com

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PREPARED TOGETHER, CLEANER TOGETHER: FLORENCE TAKES ACTION Submitted by City of Florence



Mayor Barnes and KFB Press Conference

With hurricane season underway, staying proactive, informed and ready is essential for every Florence resident. Hurricanes can be unpredictable and strike with little notice, bringing heavy rain, damaging winds, flooding, and power outages. Preparation is key, and one of the simplest, yet effective steps you can take today is to sign up for text alerts through the City of Florence's AI-powered chatbot, "Ask Cy." By texting the phrase "Hey Cy" to (855) 964-3929, residents can opt in to receive critical updates from the City of Florence, including weather alerts, road closures and service disruptions.

While Ask Cy provides convenient access to emergency preparedness information, it's essential to remember it should **NOT** be used to report emergencies, as incoming messages are not monitored 24/7. For emergencies, always call 9-1-1.

For non-emergency matters, the Florence Police Department is available 24/7 at (843) 665-3191. For water or sewer issues, please call Public Works at (843) 665-3236. After-hours calls—including evenings, weekends and holidays—are forwarded to the Police Department and relayed to the on-call personnel from the Public Works & Utilities Department.

Beyond signing up for alerts, there are several steps every household in Florence should take to prepare for a storm:

Create an Emergency Kit: Include items such as water, non-perishable food, flashlights, batteries, a first aid kit, necessary medications, hygiene supplies, and copies of important documents.

Know Your Evacuation Zone: Stay aware of local evacuation routes and shelter locations. Plan where you'll go if you need to evacuate and make sure

everyone in your household knows the plan.

Prepare Your Home: Trim trees, secure outdoor furniture, and make sure gutters and drains are clear. If a storm is approaching, check that windows and doors are properly sealed to keep out water and wind.

Stay Informed: In addition to signing up for City of Florence text alerts, make sure you are also staying up to date with local news stations, South Carolina Emergency Management Division and Florence County Emergency Management to ensure you never miss crucial information.

Check on Your Neighbors: Don't wait until after the storm—check on neighbors beforehand, especially the elderly, those with disabilities or anyone living alone. A quick check-in can make a big difference in keeping everyone safe and informed.

Preparedness isn't just about gathering supplies—it's about coming together as a community, staying informed and taking meaningful action. That same spirit of shared responsibility is also fueling another important effort in Florence: the ongoing fight against litter.

As we close the chapter on June and

PREPARED TOGETHER, CLEANER TOGETHER CONT'D



Keep Florence Beautiful and McLeod Regional Medical Center Cleanup

wrap up Zero Tolerance for Litter Month, the City of Florence, in partnership with Keep Florence Beautiful (KFB), Florence County, the Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce and the Florence County Economic Development Partnership, remains fully committed to tackling litter year-round.

This multi-organization partnership marks a significant step forward in uniting local government, business leaders and community organizations under a shared

mission: to prevent litter and promote a cleaner, healthier environment throughout all of Florence County. Through continued collaboration, the group will focus on long-term, county-wide solutions, including education, enforcement and public engagement. One of the most exciting developments to emerge from this initiative is the launch of the KFB Trash Tracker—a powerful new digital tool designed to let residents report litter in real time using interactive maps and location-

based features.

Backed by Florence County GIS and accessible on both desktop and mobile devices, the Trash Tracker empowers every resident to take part in the solution. Residents are encouraged to explore the Trash Tracker platform at <https://arcg.is/4G11m0> and bookmark it for quick access. Together, with continued public participation and strong partnerships, Florence is taking bold strides toward a greener, more beautiful future.

Whether it's helping keep the streets clean or providing timely alerts during a storm, Florence is showing that through innovation and collaboration, it's possible to build a safer, cleaner and more connected community.

Full Life. Full Forward. Stronger Together.

UNITED WAY KICKS OFF COLLECTIVE IMPACT FUNDING CYCLE *Submitted by Staff*

United Way of Florence County has reached a major milestone in its decades-long mission to improve the lives of individuals and families across Florence County. After over 70 years of meaningful work supporting a wide network of nonprofit programs, the organization has now completed its first season of funding decisions based on the Collective Impact model—a strategic, data-driven approach to community investment.

This shift marks a fundamental change in how United Way of Florence County directs resources. Rather than broadly distributing funds across a large number of agencies, the organization has adopted a more focused strategy, investing deeply in a select group of high-impact organizations whose work aligns directly with the highest-ranked community-identified needs.

This year's funding cycle reflects that transformation. For the first time, the entire community investment process was conducted online, creating a more efficient and transparent experience for applicants and reviewers alike. In total, United Way of Florence County's Community Investment Committee selected eight organizations to receive funding, each contributing to one of four focus areas: activities for youth, mental health, basic needs and home rehabilitation. Next year, United Way of Florence County plans to expand its Collective Impact funding opportunities to include early childhood education programs serving children ages zero to four—a vital stage of development with lifelong implications.

Meet United Way of Florence County's 2025 Collective Impact Partner Agencies

Activities for Youth

- Boys & Girls Clubs of the Pee Dee
- The CARE House of the Pee Dee – Strong Foundations Program

Mental Health

- Circle Park Behavioral Health Services
- Tenacious Grace Ministries
- The CARE House of the Pee Dee – Hope & Healing Counseling Program

Basic Needs

- Lighthouse Ministries – Basic Needs Program

- Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Assault – Emergency Safe Shelter for Domestic Violence Victims and Their Children
- The Salvation Army – LifNav Program & Homeless Shelter

Home Rehabilitation

- Lighthouse Ministries – Ramp Program
- Senior Citizens Association – Home Improvements Program

These priorities were identified through a series of community conversations, surveys and data analysis that helped shape United Way of Florence County's Community Game Plan—a long-range strategic roadmap introduced last year that outlines the organization's vision for driving measurable, sustainable change.

"The Collective Impact model allows us to move from managing symptoms to addressing root causes," said United Way of Florence County President Cameron Campbell. "We recognized that if we truly want to make a difference in Florence County, we can't just do what we've always done. We needed a more thoughtful, focused approach. The Collective Impact model gives us the structure to do just that. We're proud to be part of a model that's not just funding programs but helping change lives."

Collective Impact is more than a funding strategy—it is a framework that brings together nonprofit, civic, business and government leaders to work toward shared goals. It emphasizes consistent measurements, coordinated action and a commitment to continuous improvement.

By concentrating on investments where they are most needed and supporting programs with proven effectiveness, United Way of Florence County is building a stronger foundation for long-term progress.

As this new chapter continues, United Way of Florence County remains deeply grateful to the donors, volunteers and community advocates who make this work possible. Whether through financial support, time or simply spreading the word, each contribution plays a role in creating a healthier, more stable future for all.

To learn more or to get involved, visit www.uwflorence.org or call 843-662-2407.



Mallory Wojciechowski

MYRTLE BEACH - The first thing that comes to mind for the average person when they hear a business is cutting costs is that workers will be laid off. In reality, however, there are many ways that small businesses can continue expanding while still lowering expenses.

Consider new ways to raise capital

One significant expense for business owners is the interest on their debts. At some point, businesses will need to raise capital to expand by opening a new location, securing new inventory or meeting new challenges. Rather than getting into more debt in these scenarios, [Business.com](#) suggests a new approach via crowdfunding, which is a public way of seeking financing from the people who support your business.

Reduce overhead

Reducing overhead is a great way to cut costs without sacrificing growth. One way to reduce overhead is by [going hybrid or remote](#). Downsizing office space or moving to a coworking model can save on rent and utilities. Another way to reduce overhead is to [conserve energy](#) in your office space. Switching to energy-efficient lighting and equipment can lower utility bills. Lastly, buy used or lease office equipment. Consider refurbished items or leasing instead of buying brand new.

Work with new vendors

As a business owner, you should constantly evaluate your vendor relationships to ensure you receive a good deal. If you want to cut wasteful spending, try looking around for vendors who offer the same supplies for a discount. Some business owners stick with their vendors because they have rapport, despite paying more than needed. You can reduce costs with your current vendor by renegotiating your contract to see if they match a competitor's pricing.

Use more streamlined marketing methods

Take the time to analyze the effectiveness of your [marketing strategy](#). Is it driving new sales, or are you simply throwing money at advertising campaigns that fail to deliver? If so, you can save money by eliminating advertising methods that aren't working for your business. Every time you invest in advertising, you should set clear expectations for your return on investment. If your advertisers are not delivering, consider different and less expensive types of campaigns or work with other advertising companies.

Join a trade association

Trade associations allow businesses to contribute to the local economy and reap the benefits of working together. [Entrepreneur](#) points out that although these organizations have dues, you often save more money than you contribute. They allow you to lower your insurance bills, receive cheap phone service, reduce travel costs and enjoy discounts on recreational activities.

Schedule your payments for maximum efficiency

You might think paying your bills early is the responsible decision to get the task out of the way and prove that you are a reliable debtor. However, [Entrepreneur](#) suggests that you are leaving money on the table when you do this. Unless you receive discounts for early payment, you should hold onto your money in an account that receives interest instead and then pay your bills

when they are due, no sooner. Alternatively, you can negotiate with your lenders to give you a slight discount if you pay early. In this scenario, you would benefit from paying your bills before they are due.

Use outsourcing effectively

There are many tasks that business owners can outsource instead of hiring new staff members for roles that are small in scope. There is a robust [freelance market](#) of graphic designers, writers, and advertisers for hire who you can pay for individual tasks as you need them. You can also outsource functions such as accounting, human resources and more. Consider whether you would benefit from outsourcing a project or role before onboarding another employee for whom you must provide salary and benefits.

Save money on your credit cards and bank accounts

Business credit cards and bank accounts offer attractive rates and benefits for business owners. These perks may include cash back, airline miles, reduced interest rates and rewards for maintaining a balance or meeting spending criteria. Smart business owners should regularly evaluate whether they have the best deals on their accounts and be willing to change things up if they can save money by moving their accounts to another company.

Get creative and learn from other businesses

The strategies above are only the tip of the iceberg when finding new ways to cut expenses. Collaborating with other businesses in your trade organization is a great way to learn what they are doing to reduce their overhead. You can [implement some of their strategies](#) if they fit your business well. Remember that you can continue to grow and expand while employing your entire team and providing them with benefits and incentives. [For more information](#)

Visit [BBB.org/get-accredited](#) to learn how to trust, honesty and integrity can be integral to your business's success.

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Better Business Bureau serving Eastern Carolinas is a 501(c)(6) not-for-profit corporation serving 48 counties in North and South Carolina. The organization is funded primarily by BBB Accredited Business fees from over 5,200 local businesses and professional firms. BBB promotes integrity, consumer confidence and business ethics through business self-regulation in the local marketplace. Services provided by BBB include reports on companies and charitable organizations, general monitoring of advertising in the marketplace, consumer/business education programs and dispute resolution services. All services are provided at no cost to the public, with the occasional exception of mediation and arbitration. Visit [BBB.org](#).





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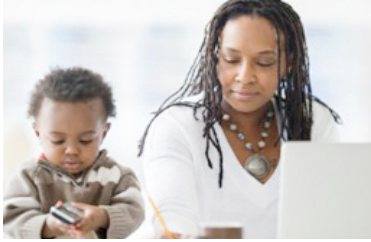
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WHY 'MOMPREENEURS' ARE ESSENTIAL TO THEIR COMMUNITIES



(BPT) - The number of business-savvy mothers blazing the trail as entrepreneurs is at a record high. "Mompreneurs" are transforming the business landscape, not just for themselves, but also for

future generations. The growth in the number of female business owners has outpaced the market in recent years, with women-owned companies representing 39 percent of all businesses.

What could be a driver of this shift? Legacy. One-third of female business owners surveyed in recent Kiddie Academy® research cite their primary motivation for starting a business as a desire to leave a lasting impact for their children and grandchildren. For these women, entrepreneurship isn't just a path to work-life balance - it's an act of generational empowerment that's essential to their communities.

Mompreneurs fill unique gaps in the market because they often start businesses based on personal experiences. This results in the creation of products and services that effectively solve problems for families and local communities. They're showing their children what's possible when you take a personal passion or value and turn it into a business.

According to the same Kiddie Academy survey, 90 percent of respondents believe it's important for children to see more female business owners in their communities. Female

representation can change what children believe is achievable as they form ideas about their own potential.

Children raised in "mompreneurial" households grow up with firsthand exposure to the highs and lows of business, the dedication it takes to launch and grow an idea and the courage it takes to follow one's dreams. For daughters, it can plant the seeds of self-confidence. For sons, it can shape respect for women as leaders and equals in the workforce.

"I know that when my children see me going to work each day, I'm making a profound impact on their perception of women business owners," said Emily Zaghi, franchise owner of three Kiddie Academy locations in New York and mother of three young children. "Beyond the legacy I'm building for my family, I also have so much more freedom to be part of my children's lives."

Nearly 70 percent of mothers say flexibility to spend more time with family is a major reason for starting their business. With that, mompreneurs have created support ecosystems for themselves and each other, redefining what work-life balance looks like. More and more, moms are designing businesses that prioritize flexibility and purpose.

When a mother becomes an entrepreneur, she's not just building a business, she's building a legacy - the ripple effects of which can last for generations.



Mr. Hua

There are no gaps in commodities, only gaps in value. The market is not short of goods, nor is it short of services; it is short of people who create new value.

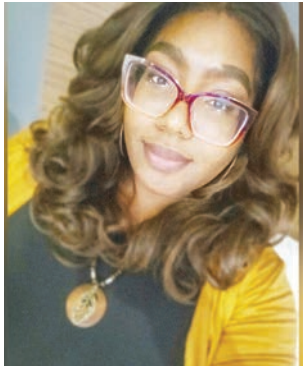
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REDEFINING LEADERSHIP AT ADP By Kionnie Epps



Kimberly Daniels

Kimberly Daniels is a living testament to what it means to grow where you're planted. What began as a job at the ADP Call Center in 2001 has evolved into a remarkable 24-year journey, one that now sees her serving as operations manager at one of the most recognized payroll and HR companies in the world. But Daniels' story isn't just about climbing the corporate ladder; it's about breaking barriers, serving

others and showing up authentically every single day.

When Daniels stepped into her leadership role, she had one big goal in mind, to bridge the gap between associates and management. "I've had excellent role models," she said. "I wanted to break up the mindset of 'us vs. them' and be someone who pushes others to greatness.

A Leadership Style Rooted in Service

While the corporate world isn't always easy to navigate, Daniels has turned every challenge into a lesson and a reason to lead differently. She believes her identity as a woman in leadership has actually created more space for her voice to be heard. She credits her positive experience to both strong mentorship and her commitment to excellence. "Being a woman has made them listen more in my branch of ADP," she explained. "It's been a great asset for me. I have a great work ethic, and I lead with honesty."

To Daniels, leadership isn't about recognition or having all the answers. "It's a position of service," she said firmly. "Challenge yourself to think outside of yourself, help people see their potential, work your way up, set personal goals, stay learning and above all don't forget where you came from."

Daniels also emphasized how the COVID-19 pandemic created an even greater need for meaningful connection and how she has had to address post-pandemic challenges. "I like to have fun at work and don't talk over people's heads," she said. "You may not reach everyone, but when leadership comes from an honest place: when you ask for suggestions, break up the monotony and boost morale, it makes a difference." Under her leadership, her team operates on a flexible hybrid schedule, with three days in-office and two days remote, reflecting a people-first approach to productivity and well-being.

Leaving a Legacy That Lasts

When asked about the legacy she wants to leave behind, Daniels didn't hesitate: "We are in a position of service for others. I want to help people see themselves so that they can help others do the same."

She believes the workplace should be more than just a space to clock in, it should be a community where everyone feels like they belong. "ADP drives home that we are family and that's the energy I want to lead with."

In a world where leadership can often feel cold and disconnected, Daniels is rewriting the script. From her beginnings at a call center to her influential role today, she leads with heart, humility and the unwavering belief that when people feel seen, they rise. Thanks to her, a new generation of leaders in the Pee Dee is learning to do just that.



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Chris Goss
Head of Pharmaceutical
Development Services,
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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.

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MIRACLE LEAGUE GIVES EVERYONE A CHANCE TO PLAY BALL Story and photos by MPD Staff

On a warm spring evening, baseball players arrive at Florence's Greenwood Athletic Park wearing their uniforms, gloves and bats in hand. Nearby, families unload their cars, carrying water bottles and snacks toward the field. It's Thursday night at the ball field, and excitement is in the air.

But this evening looks a little different than games at other ball fields. Some players are wheeled onto the field, while others are led hand-in-hand by a family member. Some players chat with one another, while others are completely silent. These are the players of the Miracle League of Florence County's baseball teams.

Batter Up!



Miracle League of Florence County

Miracle League of Florence County gives special-needs individuals of all ages the opportunity to play baseball in a safe and encouraging environment. For seven weeks each spring and fall, Miracle League players take the field for three-inning, one-hour games. Everyone gets a chance to bat in each inning, and

everyone crosses home plate.

Volunteers from local organizations help players bat and run the bases while cheering them on. The volunteers also offer family members a chance to rest and just enjoy watching the game. These organizations also sponsor a postgame hot dog dinner. Over the years, many local businesses, schools, clubs and sports teams have gotten to know these families.

The first official Miracle League season in 2014 featured four teams totaling 44 participants. The 2025 season has nearly 300 athletes divided into 16 teams. To accommodate the growing number of players, games are spread across two nights each week, with four games played each night.

Making the Field



When the league first began, teams played at Florence's Greenwood and Delmae baseball fields. But after a rain, those fields were often unsuitable for players who use wheelchairs.

Using funds provided by the Drs. Bruce and Lee Foundation and the Betty S. Campbell Foundation, the Miracle League

built its first rubberized field at Greenwood Athletic Park in 2017. Funds collected through the Florence County sales tax built the second field, which opened in fall 2024.

Through other fundraisers— including an annual oyster roast and the Miracle Masters golf tournament organized by

MIRACLE LEAGUE CONT'D

Kirby Anderson of Raldex Hospitality—the field now has its own concession stand, press box and accessible bathrooms.

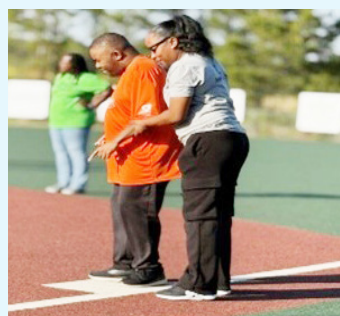
Currently, the Miracle League is selling engravable bricks to pave the path to the facility. The playground next to the field is also accessible, with a rubber floor and specialized swings with seatbelts.

'This Is Our Happy Place'

Vickie Elliott—who serves on the Miracle League of Florence County Board along with her husband, Kevin, a former West Florence High School baseball coach—recalls the league's early days.

"My husband and I played ball our whole lives," she says. "But we had a son who we believed would never get to play."

When the Elliotts were asked if their son, Matthew, would be interested in playing on a new "buddy ball" team the Florence County Parks and Recreation Department was organizing, they eagerly agreed. Matthew, now 29, has epilepsy and has had multiple surgeries. He has been donning his Miracle League uniform for more than a decade.



MPD Employee Siedah Narcisso joins Miracle League Team Member Alex Kelly on first base during the first game of the night.

"This is our passion, and it has been a dream come true for Matthew to get to play baseball, the game we love so much," Vickie says. "This is our happy place."

Vickie and Kevin's involvement

with that county program helped launch the Miracle League. Other board members are Christy Evans, Billy Hunt, Meagan Johnson, Jennifer Maxey, Ronnie Pridgen, Kande Shelor and Donna Sullivan.

Pridgen serves as an announcer for the games. He calls up each player to the plate, playing walk-up music and encouraging players to have a dance-off when a popular song plays.

"If you're having a bad day, you come here, and you forget about all of your problems," he says.

Each year the Miracle League chooses a volunteer of the year, and the 2024 winners are board member Kande Shelor and her husband, Chris. The Shelors and their two sons, who both played baseball at West Florence High School, have volunteered for many years encouraging and assisting players.

Recently MPD Electric employees served as buddies for four Miracle League teams and provided the traditional postgame hot dogs. Thanks to donations collected through Operation Round-Up, MPD was also able to give the Miracle League a \$2,500 check to help with its plans to build another concession stand and more accessible bathrooms.

"It was an honor to play alongside these resilient heroes of the Miracle League," MPD Electric President and CEO William Fleming Jr. says. "I saw so many smiles coming from the players, families and our own team. A glimpse of true joy in this life can come from serving others, and we were all blessed to experience that on this special night."

For more information about the Miracle League, visit miracleleagueofflorencecounty.org.

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LAKE CITY'S EXECUTIVE JOINS NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Submitted by Public Information Officer Donna Tracy



Brandon Carter

LAKE CITY– Lake City is proud to announce that Executive Finance Director Brandon Carter has been elected to the Leadership Committee of the Government Finance Officers Association's (GFOA) Young Professionals Network (YPN), a prestigious national role within the public finance community.

A Charleston native, Carter holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and has rapidly distinguished himself in local government finance. He joined the city of Lake City in 2023, and despite being relatively new to the public sector, he has demonstrated exceptional commitment to professional growth, joining multiple respected organizations such as GFOA, the Government Finance Officers Association of South Carolina (GFOASC), the National League of Cities (NLC), the Municipal Association of South Carolina (MASC) and others. He currently serves as president-elect of the GFOASC Board of Directors and holds a Certified Public Funds Investment Manager (CPFIM) designation.

"It's an honor and privilege to be elected and inducted onto the leadership committee for the Young Professionals Network with the GFOA," said Carter. "I am looking forward to serving with a fantastic team to aid and support municipalities across

the nation by encouraging and motivating young government professionals and giving them the tools they will need for the future."

In a congratulatory letter, GFOA leadership said Carter's commitment and vision resonated with their members and called his enthusiasm and fresh perspectives invaluable.

"We look forward to collaborating with you to further our mission and make a positive impact in the public finance community," the letter stated.

City leadership believes Carter's election is not just a personal achievement, but a reflection of Lake City's commitment to excellence and innovation in public service. His growing influence on a national level helps spotlight Lake City as a forward-thinking community investing in strong, knowledgeable leadership.

"We are extremely proud of Brandon and this remarkable accomplishment," said Mayor Yamekia Robinson. "His energy, insight and dedication are helping move Lake City forward and now his leadership will benefit communities across the country."

For more about Lake City and its community, follow the City of Lake City Facebook page or sign up for city email, text or voice mail notifications at [LakeCitySC.gov](https://www.lakecitysc.gov). Lake City is a community of 6,000-plus residents who invite you live – work – play – and visit in the southern part of Florence County.



TOGETHER WE CAN!

FAMILY OWNED  USA GROWN

McCall Farms, is a family-owned company in Effingham, SC. We have been harvesting a wide range of fresh vegetables for over 180 years. Most of our produce is locally grown by generations of proud South Carolina farmers. But the flavor of our Real Southern Style cooking is savored beyond the south, to every region of the country. And our offerings continue to grow. Our brands include Margaret Holmes, Glory, Peanut Patch, Allens, Veg-All, Popeye Spinach and Bruce's.

Come Grow With Us! **Now Hiring for All Shifts** – Laborers – Machine Operators – Forklift Drivers – Clerks - Mechanics & more. For employment opportunities visit McCallFarms.com, or call us at 843.662.2223. We offer benefits including: paid time off, medical insurance, healthcare savings or reimbursement accounts, 401-K, education assistance and flexible schedules in some areas.

MCCALL FARMS IS TAKING ACTION. ARE YOU? Submitted by Cortney Huggins, HR specialist



Picture from left to right Amelia Whitehead, Janette Ignacio and Cortney Huggins

EFFINGHAM-McCall Farms was established in 1954 as a family-owned and operated farm. Since then, we have flourished into one of Americas leading producers of farm-fresh canned vegetables and fruit. With over 177 years dedicated to producing only the best, McCall Farms has become a southern-style

staple. A few of the best-known brands are Glory, Margaret Holmes, Peanut Patch and many more that are sold nationwide. This once small family farm is now a 1.1 million square foot food canning and frozen manufacturing facility. We currently have over 1000 employees who are all considered a part of the McCall Farms family. In one day, McCall Farms produces enough product to feed each person in South Carolina with one serving.

We take pride in being able to give back to the community as we measure our success by more than business performance. Each month we work as a team to prioritize community events. In May, three of our HR team members spent the day at Harvest Hope Food Bank taking action to prevent hunger in our communities. During our time at the food bank, we were able to help sort boxes and check dates for the products. By the end of the day the team organized several boxes that will go across the region. As one of the largest food manufacturing facilities in our area this was a cause that hit close to home.

One in eight South Carolinians will struggle with hunger. Food insecurity represents a pressing issue that may not impact everyone but is a reality for many. It is important to raise awareness and volunteer, even if it's just for a few hours. Employers like McCall Farms are conscious about prioritizing this.

Janette Ignacio has been with the company for many years and loves volunteering. She is one of the friendly faces you will see in our onsite hiring office. When asked how she felt about her time at Harvest Hope Food Bank, she stated "It was an honor to represent the company in giving back and supporting those who need it most. We learned a lot about the shelf life of canned goods. My favorite part was organizing the smaller boxes for pickup. We can't wait to go back." This is the mutual feeling of those who were present at this event. We are all very blessed to be employed by a company that places so much value in their community and employees.



Janette Ignacio and Amelia Whitehead sorting boxed goods

Volunteering opportunities like this not only help those in need but also strengthen our team's bond while reinforcing our company's values in compassion, service, and community engagement. Our employees go above and beyond in many ways. We are working to create a lasting and positive change for our community as they have always supported us.

AT RUIZ FOODS, WE HAVE A LEGACY OF
MAKING GREAT FOOD AND A PASSION
FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE.



Ruiz 4 Kids®

Ruiz 4 Kids awarded \$14,573 in Mini Grants to 18 local teachers and \$73,000 in scholarships were awarded to 73 high school seniors from 15 local high schools in 2024!



CALIFORNIA • TEXAS • SOUTH CAROLINA

SINGING, SPELLING, SPONSORSHIP: RUIZ FOODS FUELS LITERACY Submitted by Ruiz Foods Florence



Executive Director, Christina Lawson, Florence Area Literacy Council

The old saying goes “put your money where your mouth is.” When it comes to supporting the Florence Area Literacy Council, the Ruiz Foods team does both.

The Ruiz Foods Florence team has partnered financially with the Florence Area Literacy Council for nearly a decade through more than \$35,000 in contributions and sponsorships. In addition, team members have literally contributed their vocal talents as participants in the organization’s two highly popular fundraising events – an annual lip sync competition and The Great Grown-up Spelling Bee.



Ruiz Foods 2025 Lip Sync Battle Team

“Our partnership with the Florence Literacy Council is a great example of how Ruiz Foods and our committed team members go all-in to support an important effort to change lives and make our community even stronger,” says Krista Meekins who serves as community relations coordinator for the Ruiz Foods Florence facility. “It’s a great chance to not only provide financial support but to personally demonstrate our commitment. We also have a lot of fun participating.”

For more than 45 years, the Florence Area Literacy Council has helped adult learners gain literacy skills critical to opportunity and success. According to the organization, 33 percent of adults in Florence County are functionally illiterate and do not read above a fifth-grade level, with many unable to read at all. The impact of illiteracy goes deep. Reading prescription dosage instructions, understanding and completing a job application, reading a bedtime story or helping their children with homework assignments all can

become difficult and embarrassing tasks. Low literacy is at the heart of many social problems and conquering illiteracy opens doors to opportunity and success for adult learners and their families.

Through support from dedicated organizations like Ruiz Foods, the council provides educational services delivered by trained volunteer tutors that include one-on-one sessions and programs designed to prepare these adult learners for taking the General Educational Development (GED) test. These classes feature special focuses on workplace skills, health literacy, financial literacy and parenting skills.

“Ruiz Foods has been dedicated to our organization’s cause and has supported our mission to help fight adult illiteracy in our community for many years,” said Christina Lawson, executive director of the Florence Area Literacy Council (FALC). “Their team is so amazing to work with, and they truly give their all each and every time. The FALC depends on the support of local companies and Ruiz Foods has always been a dependable partner that stands with us and consistently contributes to the success of our organization.”

The organization awarded Ruiz Foods its Margie Strand Light of Literacy award in 2022, in recognition of the company’s ongoing commitment to literacy programs.

The long-standing relationship with the FALC aligns with Ruiz Foods’ long-term focus on education that includes the Ruiz 4 Kids program, which has provided \$610,000 in scholarships to students in the Florence area since 2015.

Long-term partnerships like that with the Literacy Council and other Florence-area organizations are especially meaningful, Meekins says. “We get the opportunity to understand their mission, to build a strong base of team member volunteers and to see the impact of what we’ve contributed over the years.”

Giving back also makes the Ruiz Foods team stronger as team members help make their community better, says team member Brian Harrelson, associate operations manager. In fact, the company’s commitment to the community is one of the reasons people love working at Ruiz Foods. Harrelson has been with the company for nine years and has volunteered with the Literacy Council for the past four or five years. “I grew up in Florence County, and just being a part of Ruiz Foods’ work with the Literacy Council is so fulfilling. Seeing where our money goes and the impact



Ruiz Foods Spelling Bee Team

our contributions make in the community is very heartwarming. In fact, it makes me hungry to do more for my community.”

Volunteers also come away with memories and smiles. Ruiz Foods first participated in the popular Novel Event: Lip Sync Battle in 2016. In 2023, their entry earned runner-up status with, “The Macarena.” The team bested that performance in 2024 with first place for lip-synced rendition of Dolly Parton’s performance with Pitbull of “Powerful Women.” On June 5, the Ruiz Foods team of Brian Harrelson, Aneta Eaddy, Brittney Alich, Kendell Page, Kristasia Benjamin, Bobbie Crawford, Joesett Solis and Samantha Robinson performed the 803Fresh hit, “Boots on the Ground,” and while they didn’t win, they definitely won smiles and cheers and had a great time. Harrelson, who was part of last year’s winning team and also headlined this year’s performance said, “It’s a win-win situation – we are having fun for a great cause and building team camaraderie in the process.”

Ruiz Foods team members have also performed well in the Great Grown-up Spelling Bee fundraiser, winning the inaugural event in 2022 and participating in 2023 and 2024. The Spelling Bee, typically held in November, is an event for adults where teams of three dress up and compete for the title of Florence’s Best Spellers (and best dressers!). The words are sometimes unusual, adding to the fun and the challenge, but at the end of the day it’s all about supporting the Florence community.



Ruiz Foods 2024 Lip Sync Battle champions



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WOMEN ON THE RISE ABWA CHAPTER CELEBRATES FIRST ANNIVERSARY

Submitted by Rachelle Jamerson-Holmes, Chapter Public Relations director



Women on the RISE ABWA Chapter with Rene Street

The Women on the RISE Chapter of the American Business Women's Association (ABWA), Florence, SC proudly celebrated its one-year anniversary on Monday, June 9, 2025, marking a year of empowering women through personal and professional growth.

The chapter was first envisioned by Rachelle Jamerson-Holmes of Orangeburg, SC—founder and 2023-2024 ABWA national president—who led the first interest meeting in March 2024. Just two months later, on May 30, 2024, the chapter was officially chartered in Florence, SC with over 50 charter members, becoming the city's first ABWA chapter.

"This is the first ABWA chapter in Florence, and I am thankful for the charter members who stepped up and said yes to forming it," said Jamerson-Holmes. "I am

incredibly proud of our inaugural executive board, led by Chapter President Kendrea Robinson, and of our members for building a strong foundation with monthly events that feature relevant topics and quality speakers."

Chapter President Kendrea Robinson shared, "I believe in the power of collaboration, empowerment and resilience. Through Women on the RISE American Business Women's Association, we are able to meet that through our pillars of education, networking, leadership and national recognition. Through this, we are breaking barriers and creating opportunities, inspiring each other to reach new heights. Every woman has the potential to lead, innovate and succeed. We will continue to lift each other up and build a better future. Together, we rise!"

The anniversary celebration, themed "Reflections & Impact," was held at LilJazzi's Restaurant and featured an evening of reflection, recognition and celebration. Members shared personal stories about how the chapter has influenced their lives over the past year, while enjoying a festive evening of paint-and-sip, line dancing, prizes, awards and member recognition.

In addition to local monthly

programming, the chapter eagerly participates in statewide events such as the annual South Carolina ABWA Day at the State House and the "Celebrating HERstory" Luncheon in Columbia, SC and ABWA National Leadership Conferences—opportunities that expand the chapter's reach, enhance professional growth and deepen their statewide network of support.

The mission of the American Business Women's Association is to bring together businesswomen of diverse occupations and provide opportunities for them to help themselves and others grow personally and professionally through leadership, education, networking support and national recognition.

This celebration also coincides with ABWA's 75th Anniversary (2024), marking decades of commitment to helping women connect, learn and grow at the local, regional and national levels. Each year, September 22, is recognized as American Businesswomen's Day, honoring the contributions of women in the workforce.

For more information about the Women on the RISE ABWA Chapter, visit: www.WomenRiseABWA.org or call (803) 630-5284.

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BUSINESS INNOVATION TAKES ROOT IN DOWNTOWN FLORENCE

Submitted by the Florence Downtown Development Office Staff



Downtown Florence Retail Accelerator Site

Downtown Florence's Main Street Program has been hard at work in the first quarter of 2025, delivering a suite of innovative programs and services to entrepreneurs and existing small business owners within the district.

In partnership with Main Street America's Innovation Division and NuMarket, a crowdfunding platform focused on growing food-based businesses and other high-frequency ventures, the Downtown Florence team was selected to pilot NuMarket's platform in Florence as a test for market viability. Cru Wine and Tap, downtown's favorite little wine bar, was selected for the pilot based on their criteria and growth readiness. During the crowdfunding campaign, in which local contributors receive 120 percent of their funds back as store credit, Cru was able to raise over \$13,000 over a 45-day period to support the growth of their small business. Cru will use the funds to expand their current service offerings, grow their menu and even launch into a larger space downtown. This innovative platform leverages local relationships of the small

business and helps them gain access to non-traditional capital to grow their business with great returns for the local community.

Florence Downtown Development Corp.(FDDC) was also awarded a \$100,000 Small Business Accelerator Grant from The Hartford, in partnership with Main Street America, to establish a two-storefront retail incubator space to offer affordable retail space and complimentary wraparound services to emerging retail business owners who already own a pop-up, home-based or online only retail business.

Located at 349 and 351 W. Evans Street in Downtown Florence, this accelerator space will revamp 1,900 sq. ft. of first floor retail space to two businesses. Its supportive environment will allow selected businesses to explore market opportunities with lower barriers to entry and assistance from local partners. FDDC expects to announce application availability for the space in the fall, and the space will be open by spring 2026.

Florence's grant is part of The Hartford's multi-year, \$2 million Small Business Accelerator Grant program benefiting 15 communities and approximately 1,500 small businesses across the country in partnership with Main Street America.

Downtown Florence was also approved to be a Grow with Google partner in 2024. Since earning the designation, which allows the team to provide Google platform-based training for small businesses, over 50 businesses have benefited from programs such as getting a business listed on Google to cybersecurity and AI for small businesses. Courses are offered throughout the year, all free of charge, and all existing and prospective small business owners are eligible to participate in the Grow with Google workshops.

To learn more about upcoming small business events, programs and resources, visit our website, www.florencedowntown.com.



DOWNTOWN FLORENCE

RESTAURANT WEEK

SEPTEMBER 6-14, 2025

FLORENCEDOWNTOWN.COM/DTRW

Save the date!

LESSONS FROM MY TOMATO PLANTS AND JESUS By Robin Lewis

HEMINGWAY—This year, I did something new—I planted seedlings. Not the pre-grown, already-flourishing kind I usually buy, but actual seeds. It felt exciting to nurture something and imagine eating vegetables grown with my hands.

I sliced a tomato I liked (important detail!), scooped out the seeds, and planted them in some Miracle-Gro potting mix. I also planted basil, radishes and, “touch-me-not,” flowers. And they sprouted! I was like, “Yes! I made that happen!” Go me! 🌱

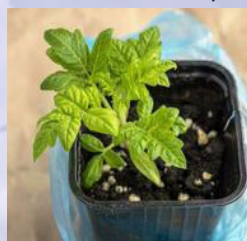
That moment made me think of Jesus’ parable of the four soils (Matthew 13:3–9). The condition of the soil determines whether a seed takes root and thrives—or doesn’t.

I remember a time when my soul felt like dry, cracked soil—nothing seemed to grow. I was showing up for life, but I was exhausted and stuck. After a discouraging experience, I whispered, “God, only you can help me go forward from here. I need your healing, but don’t know how to get it.”

My prayer was answered. A friend pointed out that I buried my emotions from several traumatic experiences. That had formed strongholds I hadn’t acknowledged. It was like she handed me a mirror. Buried beneath my, “I’m fine,” mask were rocks of deep hurt, resentment and fear I hadn’t dealt with.

The next morning, I told Jesus everything—no filters, no hiding – I poured out my heart! In that quiet space, I felt His love and healing soften my heart. That was the start of a slow transformation. All the hurt and pain began to lift. Hope and wholeness returned.

Just like seeds, new life was sprouting—and this time, it was rooted in love, not performance.



Tomato seedling soil growth.

It made me wonder:

What kind of *soul soil* are we living in?

Are our hearts and homes like Miracle-Gro for the seeds of a good life, or are they rocky, shallow or dry?

Maybe you have had some trauma, long-term abuse or have experienced being rejected and overlooked. No matter how your pain began, with Jesus’ love you can close the chapter on the wounds!

Here’s what I know: Love is the richest soil for growth. It’s the atmosphere where healing, hope and purpose can flourish.

Love that’s patient with our mistakes.

Love that cheers us on to become all we’re created to be.

Love that sets safe boundaries so we can grow strong roots.

But let’s be real...

We’ve all got rocks in our soil.

Rocks like unforgiveness, fear, insecurity, resentment, laziness or apathy. They choke out growth—not just in us, but in the lives of those around us. Sometimes, our rocks even



God is my rock, lead me to the rock.

cause others to develop rocks of their own.

But here’s the good news:

We can take our rocks to the Rock.

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer.”

– 2 Samuel 22:2

“Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

– Psalm 61:2

God’s promise will never change. That promise is there – all we need to do is become willing to exchange our rocks for His wholeness.

So how do we get free?

Step 1: Take an honest look at the rocks in your life. If you can’t see them easily, ask God to reveal them.

Step 2: Let yourself imagine and desire something better—healing, growth, peace.

Step 3: Become willing, like I did, to bring those rocks to Jesus, your safe place and healer.

When we come to him, he doesn’t scold or shame us.

He brings clarity, comfort and healing.

He wants you to be whole.

I used to carry layers of self-protection—thinking they were helping me. In reality, they were hiding my inner pain and blocking the very love and hope I desperately needed. But when I brought my rocks to Jesus, He gently began removing them

And in their place?

Restoration.

Hope.

New life.

Seeds of truth from his word began to grow in me, and I started to flourish from the inside out.

What God did for me; he will do for you.

God is the Master Gardener. He created you to receive his love, to thrive in his care and to experience abundant life.

ACTION STEP:

Invite the Lord into your heart’s garden. Ask him to identify and remove the rocks. Spend time daily reading his word, listening, just being with him. Let his living water nourish your soul. You were made for this kind of growth. 🌱

🌿 Soul Gardening Tip #1: Water with the Word Daily

Just like a garden, your soul needs the nourishment of God’s word. Even five to 10 minutes a day in scripture can refresh your spirit and realign your perspective.

“He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His name’s sake.” – Psalm 23:3

🌿 Soul Gardening Tip #2: Pull the Weeds of Negative Thinking

Catch and replace thoughts of fear, shame or unworthiness with truth. Speak God’s promises over yourself. You can’t grow in soil full of lies.

“We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” – 2 Corinthians 10:5

🌿 Soul Gardening Tip #3: Create Space for Stillness

Growth doesn’t happen in chaos. Make intentional space for quiet with God—no agenda, just presence. Stillness is where roots grow deep.

“Be still and know that I am God.” – Psalm 46:10

Let me know if you need some prayer... or tomatoes! My email is robin@robinlewislife.com. Blessings!

SCHOOL FOUNDATION'S HITS \$2.4M+ IN GRANTS TO FLORENCE 1

Submitted by Executive Director, Debbie Hyler



Trisha Caulder, chair of The School Foundation's (TSF) grants committee announced the foundation will distribute a total of \$168,478.92 in grants to Florence 1 Schools (F1S) for the 2025-2026 school year.

The grants committee funded six grants submitted by F1S educators. Thirty-five thousand dollars was awarded to Wilson High School (WHS) for their, "Ledger Line Initiative," grant, designed to enhance the musical proficiency of WHS's band students through master classes and private lessons, and also fosters mentorship with high school, middle and elementary school musicians (feeder schools); \$17,510.00 was awarded to Brockington Elementary School for their, "Rhythms of the Palmetto: Grooving Through SC's Dance History" grant, designed to immerse Brockington's students in the rich, diverse, and vibrant dance tradition that is woven into

the fabric of SC's cultural history; \$50,000.00 was awarded to Royall Elementary and occupational therapists district-wide for their, "Making SENSE of the School Day," grant, which includes setting up a sensory room at Royall Elementary for students that have difficulty with sensory regulation and sensory processing. Sensory items will also be purchased for occupational therapists throughout the district; \$25,468.92 was awarded to F1S Child Development programs (RN Beck, Woods Roads, Brockington and Dewey L. Carter Elementary Schools) for their, "Sensory Sparks" grant, designed to strengthen early literacy instruction in F1S by equipping the child development programs with high quality, multi-sensory phonics materials; \$30,500.00 was awarded to F1S for their district-wide, "Blue Zones Initiative," which will support a three-year transformative well-being journey to improve the health and well-being of district employees and students; \$10,000.00 was awarded to Advantage Academy for their, "Empowering Students: Life Skills Development Through Laundromat Experience," grant which will provide students who will be receiving a credential in lieu of a diploma with practical skills using washers and dryers. F1S has a

partnership with local hotels to hire these students after graduation.

"We continue to be amazed with the caliber of applications submitted by F1S educators," Caulder stated. "Writing a grant takes tremendous time, effort and research and our students benefit from the innovation and creativity displayed by these educators." Executive Director, Debbie Hyler of TSF stated, "We are thrilled by the passion and excitement shown by these educators. F1S is very fortunate to have such dedicated and caring professionals who go the extra mile to enhance the learning experiences of their students."

To date, TSF has awarded \$2,434,841.89 in grants to F1S. This funding would not be possible without the support of the community and their donors.

For additional information, please contact Executive Director Hyler at dhyler@theschoolfoundation.org or call (843) 662-9996.



Ledger Line Initiative Grant - Wilson High School-pictured Judy Kammer, Jarrod Deas, Dr. Eric Robinson, Debbie Hyler, Melissa Scott



Rhythms of the Palmetto: Grooving Through SC's Dance History - Brockington Elementary School-pictured Judy Kammer, Wanda Williams-Parrott, Debbie Hyler, Elizabeth Shoener, Trisha Caulder, Melissa Scott



Sensory Sparks (1 of 2)-pictured Alison Haselden, Danielle O'Neal, Stacie Windham



F1S Blue Zone Initiative-pictured Debbie Hyler, Dr. Cathy Lee, Judy Kammer



Making SENSE of the School Day - Royall Elementary and F1S district-wide- pictured Judy Kammer, Brittany Bennett, Debbie Hyler, Dr. Rebecca Campbell, Melissa Scott, Trisha Caulder



Sensory Sparks (2 of 2) - F1S Child Development (Brockington Elementary, RN Beck, CDC at Woods Road, Dewey L. Carter Elementary) -pictured Trisha Caulder, Debbie Hyler, Danielle O'Neal, Holly Hill, Judy Kammer, Mindy Taylor



Empowering Students: Life Skills Development Through Laundromat Experience-pictured Kitty Carpenter, Debbie Hyler, Melissa Heiden, Judy Kammer

GSSM'S ALL-GIRLS ROBOTICS TEAM IS REWIRING STEM By Jennifer Furlong, director of public relations



The Lobotomists (FTC Team 327) gather with their robot, "Cheryl" at the South Carolina State Championship, where they earned the Connect Award for their outreach efforts. Earlier in the season, the team also received the Motivate Award at the Midlands Qualifier. Pictured from left to right: Phoenix Zhao, Aishwarya Prabhakaran, Reagan Mitton, Jharna Patel, Samantha Freeman, Miriam Morales, Teagan Mann, Priya Raj, Neha Vakkaleri, Gianna Sparks.

HARTSVILLE—At the South Carolina Governor's School for Science & Mathematics (GSSM), the all-girls robotics team known as the Lobotomists (FTC Team 327) is redefining what it means to lead in STEM. In a space where women remain significantly underrepresented, this team of juniors and seniors is not just building competitive robots. They are building community, confidence and a pathway for future generations of girls in science and engineering.

A Team with Purpose

The Lobotomists were founded on the belief that the STEM gender gap isn't due to a lack of interest, but a lack of support. Their mission, clearly outlined in their team portfolio, is to create an engaging and positive learning environment where girls from all backgrounds can grow together. "We believe there's not a lack of women interested in STEM. There's simply a lack of support," the team writes.

With members spread across South Carolina, they bring together a range of perspectives, skills and goals. Their strength lies not only in their technical abilities, but in the culture they've created. It is one rooted in trust, collaboration and mutual respect.

"Being on a team of mature, emotionally intelligent women gave me a safe space to grow," one student shared. "We lift each other up. That makes our team strong and creative, even in tough situations."

Even their team name, The Lobotomists, reflects that spirit of creative defiance. While the name references a controversial medical procedure, the team explains that it is meant to symbolize their commitment to unconventional thinking. Their motto, "Think outside the skull, have the nerve to win," captures their bold approach to problem-solving and their willingness to challenge traditional expectations of who belongs in STEM.

Mentorship That Shapes the Mission

The success of the Lobotomists is rooted not only in their own vision and dedication, but also in the support of educators who create environments where girls can thrive in

STEM. One of those educators is Dr. Elaine Parshall, GSSM's award-winning engineering instructor and the driving force behind the school's thriving robotics program.

Parshall has coached robotics teams since 2008 and joined GSSM in 2014. Since then, she has increased the school's engineering curriculum from two courses to ten and expanded robotics participation from 25 to more than 80 students. Under her mentorship, GSSM teams have earned state championships and represented South Carolina on the world stage.

This is her first time mentoring an all-girls team. When then-seniors Ellio Zhu and Ashley Lian approached her last year about forming one, she didn't hesitate. "Over the 20 years that I've been mentoring robotics teams, there have typically only been a couple girls on a team, and they would decline my offers to help them start a team," she said. "So, I was quietly enthusiastic when they came to me."

The Lobotomists took on the team number and the name from an all-male group of seniors. From the start, Parshall understood the power of what was taking shape. "An all-girl robotics team is akin to finding a four-leaf clover or seeing a shooting star. Hard to find or spot, but they do exist."

She also brought her own experience competing nationally and internationally on an all-women's sailing team to the table. "Working with a group of women is a much different experience than working with men, and it brings different challenges," she said. "Most women like to work collaboratively, which the Lobotomists have used to their advantage."

Engineering with Empathy

The Lobotomists' robot, affectionately named Cheryl, was the product of intense iteration, problem-solving and teamwork. Their engineering process began with a basic starter bot design, which they reworked across multiple versions using CAD, 3D-printed components and mechanical redesigns to improve performance and efficiency. They faced challenges with weight distribution, torque limitations, and size constraints, all of which they addressed through creative thinking and technical adaptability.

To meet competition goals, they developed a bucket intake system for collecting samples, added a linear slide to extend reach and engineered a hanging mechanism with curved, load-distributing hooks. They tackled issues like friction in belt drives and shifting centers of gravity by moving motors, hubs and the arm assembly to more strategic positions. Even their coding



Niquee Agina, Aishwarya Prabhakaran, Sami Freeman, Miriam Morales, Phoenix Zhao and Lavanthi Narasimman put in late-night work sessions in the student lounge as they prepared for the South Carolina State Championships.

strategy evolved mid-season, shifting from block programming to Java to accommodate more complex control logic, including PID controllers for arm stabilization.

Throughout the process, the team

GSSM'S ALL-GIRLS ROBOTICS CONT'D

prioritized not just efficiency but accessibility. Several members had never built or coded before joining. By organizing into mechanical, coding and outreach sub-teams and mentoring one another, they made space for everyone to contribute meaningfully.

"Before joining, I was afraid of wasting other people's time or making a fool of myself," one team member shared. "Now, I feel confident enough to try, even if things don't work out."

Outreach That Moves the Needle

In addition to their technical work, the Lobotomists have made



Lobotomists team members Aishwarya Prabhakaran, Sami Freeman and Miriam Morales make adjustments to their robot during their first scrimmage of the season.

community outreach a core part of their mission. They hosted neighborhood STEM events across the state, reaching more than 100 students through marshmallow-and-noodle engineering challenges and robotics

demonstrations. They also founded WOMP-SCI, a computer science club for middle school girls, where they taught coding using the PICO-8 platform and the Lua programming language.

The team also connected globally. In January, they held a virtual exchange with Bil Barbie, an all-girls FTC team from Kazakhstan, discussing the shared challenges women face in STEM and how to create more inclusive spaces. They also partnered with PyGirls, a nonprofit that supports girls in coding and interviewed a female software engineer from Meta to learn more about real-world career paths.

"Despite our differences, we shared the same experiences with misogyny and being underestimated," one member said. "It was comforting to know we weren't alone. It motivated us to keep going."

Their dedication to outreach was recognized with the Motivate Award at the Midlands Qualifier and the Connect Award at the South Carolina State Championship. These honors reflect the team's commitment to inspiring others and building meaningful connections within the STEM community.

Rising Above Stereotypes

Throughout their season, the Lobotomists faced bias head-on. "Some teams would ignore us or talk down to us, even when we were in the same alliance," one student recalled. "But we stayed focused on our work and supported each other."

Their experience reflects a broader truth for women in STEM. Representation isn't just about being present. It's about being seen and respected.

"You didn't get the position or win the award because you're a girl," one teammate said. "You succeeded because you're you. And you are amazing."

Parshall has spent her engineering career navigating male-dominated spaces, from graduate school to Lockheed Missiles and Space, she knows firsthand how important visibility and

support are. "We tend to overlook this in the GSSM cocoon, as the school strives to admit an equal number of boys and girls," she said. "But what happens to these girls between ninth grade and college graduation? We need to cultivate these all-girl efforts like we would a rare flower in a greenhouse."

Paving the Way Forward

Participation on the Lobotomists has inspired many team members to pursue STEM degrees and careers. Several are planning to major in engineering or computer science and want to carry forward the values they've built, including leadership and advocacy.

"I want to be part of building spaces where everyone feels like they can succeed," said one team member. "This team showed me that's possible."

Their advice to younger girls interested in robotics is bold and encouraging:

"You belong here. Your voice matters."

"Don't be scared of failing. Be excited about what you'll learn."

"STEM should change to welcome you, not the other way around."

"FIRST has created a promising environment for all-girls teams to flourish," Parshall added. "Gracious professionalism is emphasized, and the Lobotomists naturally incorporate its principles of respect, inclusion and leadership. We need more of this type of approach if we hope to have more female engineers."

The Lobotomists may have started as a robotics team, but what they've created goes far beyond the competition field. They've built a sisterhood of future scientists, engineers, coders and leaders, and they're leaving the door open for others to follow.

"STEM fields need strong female leaders, and the Lobotomists are showing they're exactly that," said Danny Dorsel, president of the South Carolina Governor's School for Science & Mathematics. "At GSSM, this all-girls team isn't just competing. They're inspiring other young women to enter robotics with confidence. Our robotics teams form organically, and the tradition of an all-girls team is one we're proud to support. The Lobotomists have set a powerful precedent, and we look forward to seeing who will carry their torch in the years ahead."

To learn more about the Lobotomists and GSSM's robotics program, visit www.scgssm.org/robotics.



During a weekend outreach event in Fort Mill, team members Aishwarya Prabhakaran, Lavanthi Narasim-man and Phoenix Zhao present to a group of younger students and families about robotics and careers in STEM.

DARLINGTON COUNTY NAMES NEW SUPERINTENDENT Submitted by DCSD Director of Communications, Audrey Childers



Dr. Matthew Ferguson

DARLINGTON— At a special-called meeting, the Darlington County Board of Education named Dr. Matthew Ferguson as the new superintendent of the Darlington County School District (DCSD). Ferguson, currently the deputy superintendent of the South Carolina Department of Education, will assume the role on July 1, from outgoing superintendent Dr. Tim Newman and will serve as superintendent-elect during the transition.

“The Board recognized that we have an unusual opportunity with perfect timing.

This was our chance to fill the superintendent’s role with a highly qualified Darlington County native with extensive education and leadership experience at both DCSD and the state levels,” said Wanda Hassler, chair of the Darlington County Board of Education. “Dr. Ferguson’s personal and professional roots lie deep within the Darlington County community. He knows our people, our schools, our community and our goals. He also has leadership experience at the state level, shaping the conversation and policy for our schools. We are confident in his ability to build on the progress we’ve made. We believe this appointment is the best step forward for the district.”

Ferguson began his education career in Darlington County, where he taught high school English and later served in district-level roles, including director of personnel and curriculum coordinator. His leadership helped expand early learning programs, strengthen literacy instruction and launch summer learning initiatives that continue to serve students today.

At the South Carolina Department of Education, Ferguson led efforts to strengthen instruction statewide: rolling out the Science of Reading to more than 19,000 educators, expanding

math support through the Palmetto Math Project, delivering high-quality instructional materials to classrooms and supporting HOPE Network districts in accelerating student learning.

“I believe every child deserves access to an excellent education—no matter their background, neighborhood or circumstance. That belief was born right here in Darlington County, where I began my journey as an educator,” said Ferguson. “It’s an incredible honor to return home and serve the community that shaped me. I’m excited to listen, to learn and to build on the great work already happening—so that every school in Darlington County is a place where every student is prepared to reach their full potential.”

The board’s decision to appoint a new superintendent rather than launch a months-long search process was driven by several considerations. The board prioritized a smooth leadership transition with adequate time for collaboration between outgoing and incoming superintendents—something a prolonged search would not have allowed. The board also recognized that the 14 ongoing superintendent searches across South Carolina may significantly narrow the pool of qualified candidates.

“Our priority has always been to ensure stability and continuity for our schools, staff students and families,” Hassler added. “By appointing Dr. Ferguson, we are securing experienced leadership with immediate knowledge of our community and educational landscape. This decision allows us to move forward without delay, as Dr. Ferguson will begin working with Dr. Newman in the coming weeks to ensure a seamless transition.”

Ferguson and his wife, Kylie, have four children and look forward to them attending and thriving in Darlington County Schools.

The district will host a series of community meet-and-greet events in the coming weeks to give families, staff, and community members the opportunity to connect with the new superintendent.

DCSD RECOGNIZES STAND AWARD WINNERS Submitted by Communications Manager, Christopher McKagen



2025 STAND Award Winners

DARLINGTON – The Darlington County School District and all of its schools celebrated in April the winners of the 2025 STAND Awards. The ceremony, held in the Jean B. Taylor Auditorium at St. John’s Elementary School, recognized students for displaying exemplary character and taking a, “STAND,” against drug use.

The awards, an acronym for “Students Taking Action, Not Drugs,” are presented to a student from each school who displays positive character, encourages others to live drug-free lifestyles and seeks to improve in academics and behavior.

The ceremony is the culmination of the district’s Drug-Free Schools and Character Education program. Winners are selected by their schools after completing the program. Principals, school counselors and teachers spoke about each student during the event.

The 2025 STAND Award winners are:

• Bay Road Elementary - Antonia Baker

- Brockington Elementary Magnet - Colton Reid Carter
- Carolina Elementary - Scarlet Horton
- DCSD Digital 360 - Mariah McTillman
- Darlington County Institute of Technology - Shadreek Holmes
- Darlington County Intervention School - Jackson Yarborough
- Darlington High - Zakiyah McClain
- Darlington Middle - Alston Singletary
- Hartsville High - Lilly Bralowski
- Hartsville Middle - Emoni Brown
- J.L. Cain Elementary - Ryker Barone
- Lamar-Spaulling Elementary - Quincy Maple
- Lamar High - Nicolas Alejos
- Mayo High for MST - Haylee Huggins
- North Hartsville Elementary - Tahiri Bacote
- Pate Elementary - Kylee Godfrey
- Rosenwald Elementary - Nevaeh McClain
- Southside Early Childhood Center - Nevaeh O’Neal
- Spaulling Middle – Jeleshia Milo
- St. John’s Elementary - Skylar Johnson
- Thornwell School for the Arts - Morgan Patterson

Savannah Beasley served as the keynote speaker for the event. Beasley, currently a student at Francis Marion University, graduated from Hartsville High and is a two-time winner of a STAND Award.

The ceremony also featured three outstanding performances by student groups. The Lamar High Black Ice Drumline kicked the morning off, followed by the Hartsville High IB Dance Company and the Pate Local Vocals.

Congratulations

CLASS OF 2025



SOUTH FLORENCE HIGH SCHOOL



WEST FLORENCE HIGH SCHOOL



WILSON HIGH SCHOOL

1191 Graduates

513 HOPE Scholarship
Recipients

***251** LIFE Scholarship
Recipients

***56** Palmetto Fellows

***210** Board of Trustees
Scholars

***162** Double-Cord Graduates

***345** Single Cord Graduates

***41** Military Cord Graduates

***14** SC Achievement Honors

***47** International
Baccalaureate Graduates

***8** STEM Graduates

***25** Florence 1 Center for the
Arts Graduates

**TOTAL AMOUNT RECEIVED IN
SCHOLARSHIPS: \$18,375,403**

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Sondra McCauley

SUMTER - At Central Carolina Technical College (CCTC), it's never too late to learn. In fact, adult learners—students older than 25—are a prominent demographic at the college, which currently enrolls over 3,000 students across its Sumter, Clarendon, Kershaw and Lee campuses.

The school's strong adult learner population reflects national statistics revealing that adult college students comprise almost one-third of the post-secondary student population, or approximately 6.3 million students. It also highlights how Central Carolina has positioned itself as an ideal institution for adult students, providing them with rigorous coursework, flexible course formats, affordability and hands-on learning opportunities.

The third factor initially drew 46-year-old Sondra McCauley, who graduated from Central Carolina with an associate's degree in human services in May, to the college. McCauley had previously worked at a day program for seniors after earning her bachelor's degree from Morris College in 2017. She spent the next couple of years building on her education and ultimately decided to return to Central Carolina—where she originally matriculated shortly after high school—because it offered free tuition.

The college also provided a flexible, high-quality human services program, which aligned with McCauley's experience working with senior citizens. "I love working with the seniors, so with the human services degree, I could get more into working [in a senior center]," she said.

CCTC helped her pursue this goal

by offering strong financial support. In addition to benefiting from the school's free tuition, McCauley received a foundation scholarship to help cover education-related costs. The scholarship, which provides \$500 to \$2,500 to awarded students, is funded by private donors and—although available to students of all ages—has helped many adult learners pursue their education without worrying about financial burdens.

As a person with Crohn's disease, McCauley also praised the school for providing support for her disability. "There was more help with my disability, and not only [from] the faculty and staff [but also] the students. Everybody was just willing to help," she said. "It really helped me be where I'm at now because I graduated, and I made all A's straight through."

McCauley is now seeking online programs in psychology and social work to complement her human services degree. This way, she'll have a comprehensive understanding of the field in addition to having the practical skills she's gained from her previous day center job and an internship with SC Works that she completed as part of her program. She hopes this combination of skills and credentials will help her open a senior center, where seniors will, "get breakfast, play games and go on field trips."



McCauley pictured in her cap and gown.

Forty-nine-year-old Christy Pinho-Perdigao, who will receive her associate degree in human services in 2026, plans to do similar work by using her CCTC degree to help elders in the community.

Before moving to South Carolina, Pinho-Perdigao had lived in Massachusetts, where she worked as a personal care assistant while also raising kids. Upon moving to Sumter, she had trouble finding a job, so she decided to re-enroll in college.

Pinho-Perdigao described her experience returning to school as largely positive. "The staff are very enthusiastic and helpful, and professors will walk you through any problems you have," she said.

Pinho-Perdigao added that having such supportive professors has been critical to her success as an online student. "Online is not easy, so having someone to support you in that environment makes all the difference," said Pinho-Perdigao.

Indeed, research shows that adult learners—who are more likely to be online students than their younger counterparts—face different challenges while continuing their education online. This includes managing conflicting responsibilities, maintaining focus during study sessions and navigating rigid course structures and requirements. However, high-quality student-instructor interactions like the kind Pinho-Perdigao has experienced at CCTC can strongly influence student success and satisfaction in online settings.

Despite the challenges adult learners sometimes face, Pinho-Perdigao doesn't regret coming back to school. In fact, she's gratified by the numerous benefits of continuing her education, including receiving praise from family members and making the president's list. She believes the biggest benefit, though, is the indescribable satisfaction of working toward a personal goal.

"It feels good to [continue my education]," said Pinho-Perdigao. "My friend is thinking about going back to school, too, and I said, 'Do it.' I'd tell other people the same thing. It's worth it personally."

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Lee County School District Congratulations Class of 2025

Lee Central High School
Mr. Kevin Wilson, Principal



Valedictorian
Miss Jayonna Hickmon

Our Valedictorian is the daughter of Eric and Windy Hickmon. She was named President of the National Beta Club, a member of the Ross McKenzie's Emerging Leaders Program, SCSU Hype Club, Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), Lee County Chamber of Commerce Board, and this year's Cate Center Directors Award winner. In the fall, she will be attending the University of South Carolina Columbia majoring in Nursing.



Salutatorian
Miss Majailia Rouse

Our Salutatorian is the daughter of Tenia Rouse and Melvin Benbow. She is the Command Sergeant Major in the JROTC Program, a member of the Criminal Justice Club, a dedicated member of the Student Athletic Trainer Program, a member of the SCSU HYPE Program, a Graduate of the Ross McKenzie Emerging Leaders Program, participated in AHEC participated Prisma Health Hospital Program, in the Army JCLC Camp at Fort Jackson, played softball for LCHS for two years and an Associate Degree Graduate of the Central Carolina Early College Program. In the fall, she will be attending the University of South Carolina majoring in Exercise Science.

Top Five Honor Graduates



**Carmen Bates, Jayonna Hickmon-Val, Majailia Rouse-Sal, Mauriana Rufus, Johnnae Alston
and Mr. Bernard McDaniel, Sr., Superintendent**

105 Lee Central High Graduates **6** Central Carolina Early College Graduates

Total Earned in Scholarships: **\$11,000,000**

68 CATE completers **14** Dual CATE Completers **30** Life Scholarship Recipients



Lee County School District Board of Trustees

Nathaniel Brunson-Chair, Dr. Mattie Mack-Vice Chair,
Lucretia Mack-Secretary, Reggitt James, Echo Belvin, Jaicovielle Fortune and Bernard Simon

Lee County School District Superintendent

Mr. Bernard McDaniel, Sr.

Lee County School District 310 Roland Street Bishopville, SC 29010 (803) 484-5327

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- LIFE Scholarship
- S.C. Hope Scholarship
- Lottery Tuition Assistance
- S.C. National Guard College Assistance Program
- S.C. Need-based Grants
- S.C. Tuition Grants



K-12 PROGRAMS

**More than
\$1.1 BILLION**
To K-12 programs

2,400+
School buses have
been purchased with
lottery proceeds



COMMUNITY EDUCATION

**More than
\$53 MILLION**

Has supported Community Education
Programs in the Palmetto State



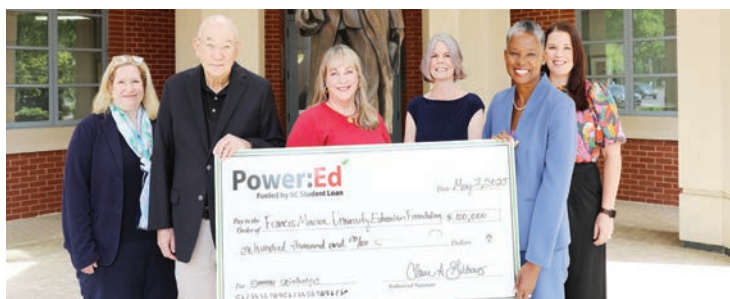
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Each year the General Assembly appropriates lottery
net proceeds for educational purposes.



FMU EDUCATION FOUNDATION RECEIVES GRANT FROM POWER:ED Submitted by FMU



Pictured L to R: Dr. Jennifer Kunka, FMU President Fred Carter, Claire A. Gibbons, Jennifer Taylor, Octavia Williams-Blake and Lauren Stanton

Francis Marion University Education Foundation (FMUEF), has been awarded a \$100,000 grant from Power:Ed, the philanthropy of SC Student Loan Corporation, to support the expansion of FMU's Summer Success program to help SC students retain their merit scholarships. Funding will allow selected in-state students, who are on the verge of losing their state merit scholarship, to take up to seven credit hours during the summer with help covering tuition/fees, textbooks/materials, housing and dining.

Initially created to support freshmen students struggling during the COVID pandemic, this initiative can have a broader impact on our low-income, underrepresented and first-generation students. Power:Ed funding will allow FMU to expand student eligibility and continue to provide this invaluable program that supports South Carolina students, many of whom are from the Pee Dee area and rely on state scholarships to fund their education.

State merit scholarships require first-year students to earn

30 credits and a 3.0 LIFE GPA before the next academic year. If students struggle in their classes and need to withdraw from a course, it is very difficult for them to earn the required credits and GPA during the academic year. Students who fall short need to take summer courses to maintain their scholarship. However, many students find the cost of summer courses to be restrictive. Consequently, students who lose their state-merit scholarship are at the greatest risk of discontinuing their college education.

FMU's pilot project has shown success over the past few years with the help of federal funding. Seventy-seven percent of students assisted kept their scholarships. As a result, FMU's Fall 2024 first-year student retention rate was the highest it has been in the previous 15 years.

"We are deeply appreciative of this support from Power:Ed," said FMU President Fred Carter. "This grant supports our Summer Success Program and helps to minimize the financial stress faced by students working to maintain state merit scholarships."

"Power:Ed and SC Student Loan are proud to support this incredible program from Francis Marion to help more students retain their merit scholarships and persist to graduation. We hope it will become a model that can be replicated by higher education institutions across South Carolina," said Power:Ed Executive Director Claire Gibbons.

In FY2024-25 Power:Ed has awarded \$1,000,000 in grants to South Carolina education and career readiness organizations. In this fourth quarter, Power:Ed has awarded five grants (including this grant to FMU) totaling \$212,000. Grants are administered quarterly, and the next grant funding deadline is July 1, 2025.

LE'LANDRA JARVIS: A CHAMPION ON AND OFF THE FIELD

Submitted by FMU



Le'Landra Jarvis

When Le'Landra Jarvis, a native of Jackson, South Carolina, first visited FMU, she knew she had found the place she would call home the next four years. As a soccer recruit, she would be able to continue her athletic career while receiving a superb education in her chosen fields – psychology and Spanish. Now, four years later, she's leaving FMU well-equipped for her future, both on and off the pitch.

Jarvis has always been drawn to psychology and how the human mind works. She enjoyed learning about every concept she encountered and how that knowledge could be applied to make a positive impact on others, helping them reach their full potential.

"FMU's psychology program has a great reputation," said Jarvis. "I had heard so many good things about the quality of the program before I even started, and I can now attest to that. The professors here really care about you. They want to see you reach your potential and involve you in their research early on. Being able to learn concepts in class and then apply them in research projects was extremely useful."

The Modern Language Award winner initially pursued Spanish in hopes it would help her on the soccer field as she aspires to play internationally. As her studies progressed, she realized she could combine her language skills with her psychology background to serve Spanish-speaking communities in the

future.

A natural leader and motivating voice, it is easy to see why Jarvis was named captain of the women's soccer team for both the 2023 and 2024 seasons. The right-winger brought her classroom knowledge to the field, enhancing her role as a leader and teammate.

Before the start of her senior season, she led a team-building initiative by asking her teammates to reflect on what being a champion meant to them. She placed a corkboard in the locker room and invited each player to write their thoughts on sticky notes and post them on the board – a tangible reminder of their shared goals. The motivation – combined with plenty of talent – propelled the team to win the 2024 Conference Carolinas Championship. Of all her memories at FMU, this one tops the list.

"It was a huge privilege to be a member of the Patriots Women's Soccer Team and to win the championship my senior year," says Jarvis. "We were looked at as underdogs, but we fought to the very end in all of our games and won the conference title in the last 10 seconds. That was pretty special."

Jarvis just so happened to make the game-winning assist.

Outside the classroom and off the field, Jarvis filled her time at FMU with a myriad of other activities. The entire experience, she says, shaped her into the person she is today.

She served as a mentor to underclassmen student-athletes and as president of the Modern Languages Club. She was also a member of Psi Chi, Sigma Delta Pi, the National Society for Leadership and Success and Alive in Christ. In addition, she worked as a tutor in the Writing Center and as a registered behavior technician (RBT) in the university's autism clinic, a role she's held since her junior year.

After taking courses in advanced behavioral analysis, Jarvis became eager to apply her skills in everyday settings. She credits Dr. Christopher Bullock for encouraging her to pursue certification as an RBT at that time. The rigorous process included 180 hours of training and exams – which she completed on top of her classes and demands that come with being a student-athlete – and

culminated in a certificate that allows her to work with individuals on social and communication skills, as well as daily living tasks. The hands-on experience she gained while still a full-time student-athlete has been invaluable.

"Working as an RBT has been one of the most rewarding things I've ever experienced," says Jarvis. "Being able to see how I can help kids improve in this area brings me so much joy."

Beginning next week, she'll join the roster of the Tormenta FC, a pre-professional soccer club based out of Statesboro, Georgia, for the next few months. In January, she will move to Italy to begin playing at the Rome City Institute while pursuing a graduate degree in Sports Management. As part of her move to Italy, she will also work with the Serie A Elite Program, a partnership offered through the Rome City Institute, with hopes of playing professionally in Europe.

Though her time at FMU has ended, the education and experiences she received over the last four years will stay with her forever.

"FMU has helped mold me into the person I am today. I am forever indebted to my professors, coaches, teammates and friends for the impacts they have had on my life."

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PASSPORT TO
THE FUTURE.
FOR TOMORROW
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PEOPLE WHO
PREPARE IT TODAY.**

Malcolm X



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HGTC BREAKS FUNDRAISING RECORD FOR MAKE-A-WISH SC Submitted by HGTC



HGTC Sets New Fundraising Record During Blue Jeans Week for Make-A-Wish South Carolina. Pictured from left to right: Chris Lovorn, MAW-SC Board of Directors; Maggie Yorski, Make-A-Wish Corporate & community engagement coordinator – Coastal Region; Kristen Robinson, HGTC biology professor and long-time Make-A-Wish volunteer; Chomp, HGTC Mascot; Kari Royals, HGTC administrative assistant for Academic & Workforce Development; and Dr. Jennifer Wilbanks, HGTC executive vice president for Academic & Workforce Development.

CONWAY— Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) proudly announces the results of its Spring 2025, Blue Jeans Week fundraiser, which raised an incredible \$2,915 in support of Make-A-Wish South Carolina—a new record for the biannual event! This total surpasses the previous record of \$1,800 and reflects the tremendous generosity and spirit of the HGTC community.

Sponsored by the college's Academic and Workforce Development Division, Blue Jeans Week is held each fall and spring, offering employees the opportunity to make a donation in exchange for wearing jeans to work throughout the week. This spring, proceeds were dedicated to Make-A-Wish South Carolina, which grants wishes to children with critical illnesses across all 46 counties in the state.

Since its incorporation in 1984, Make-A-Wish South Carolina has granted more than 4,500 wishes with the help of donors, volunteers and community supporters. These wishes provide hope, strength and joy to children and families during some

of their most difficult times. Currently, there are 27 medically qualified children in the Myrtle Beach region who are waiting for their wishes to be granted.

"Each wish granted is a life-changing experience—not just for the child but for the entire community that comes together to make it happen," said Kristin Robinson, HGTC biology professor and long-time Make-A-Wish volunteer. "Since 2008, I've been honored to volunteer with this incredible organization. Seeing a child's joy as they experience a wish fulfilled is absolutely priceless. Your support really does make a lasting impact."

The average cost to fully fund a wish in South Carolina is approximately \$7,500. While the needs are great, so too is the potential for making dreams come true, with the continued support of the HGTC family and broader community.

"When a community like HGTC comes together with purpose, amazing things happen. Their record-setting support shows the power of collective generosity to spark joy and create lasting memories for children when they need it most," said Maggie Yorski, corporate and community relations coordinator for Make-A-Wish South Carolina.

"We are immensely proud of our faculty and staff for rallying around this cause and setting a new record," said HGTC President Fore. "This accomplishment not only demonstrates our college's deep commitment to service but also our power to inspire hope in the lives of children and families in need."

To learn more about Make-A-Wish South Carolina or to get involved, visit wish.org/sc.

To learn more about HGTC and apply, visit hgtc.edu/admissions or call 843-349-5277. For a complete list of academic programs, visit the website.



*Devauna Osborne and
Devonique Osborne*

CONWAY - Every commencement ceremony tells a story of strength—but at Horry - Georgetown Technical College (HGTC), the journey of twin sisters Devauna and Devonique Osborne stands as a profound testament to perseverance, faith and the power of community.

The Osborne sisters arrived in the United States from Jamaica in 2022, filled with hope and determination. After earning their GEDs in 2023, they took a bold step forward by enrolling at HGTC in Fall 2023. The transition was not easy—far from home, adjusting to a new culture and leaving behind their father, one sibling and friends, the twins faced uncertainty and anxiety. But they remained focused, leaning on each other for strength.

Just days after their birthday in June 2023, tragedy struck. Their beloved mother, who had long dreamed of a better future for her daughters, passed away unexpectedly. The heartbreak nearly derailed their plans, and for a time, they considered returning home.

With encouragement from their stepfather—who helped guide them through the admissions, financial aid and residency processes—and the unwavering support they found at HGTC, the sisters pressed on.

“Meeting the staff at Tech Central made us feel like we belonged,” said Devonique Osborne, a graduate in computer technology. “They didn’t just help us with college—they gave us

a community.”

Both sisters took on work study positions in HGTC’s Tech Central, helping fellow students navigate campus resources and financial aid. It was more than a job; it was a confidence-building experience that allowed them to embrace their new home and grow professionally.

“I was working two jobs and thought it was going to be impossible,” shared Devauna Osborne, who graduated with a degree in business administration. “But with God by our side, we are okay.”

“We had to motivate each other through everything,” added Devonique.

Their impact has already extended beyond the classroom. The sisters encouraged friends to pursue their GEDs and inspired others to consider college. Now, with their associate degrees in hand, they have their eyes on the future. Their dream? To open a hair salon in their mother’s honor—combining Devauna’s business acumen with Devonique’s tech skills to build a legacy rooted in love.

HGTC President Fore shared her admiration for the twins’ journey, “Graduates like Devauna and Devonique remind us why we’re here. Their resilience, leadership and heart exemplify the very best of the HGTC spirit. We are proud to have played a part in their journey.”

The Osborne sisters crossed the graduation stage with their stepfather and visiting family cheering them on—a celebration of triumph, unity and a future filled with promise.

Devauna is returning to HGTC in the fall to complete her accounting degree. For more information about HGTC and its student success stories, visit www.hgtc.edu.

AGRU AMERICA DONATES \$5K TO HGTC FOUNDATION



AGRU America Presents \$5,000 check to HGTC Foundation During Palmetto Giving Day. Pictured from left to right: Jeff Ball, HGTC Chair & Professor Brandon Haselden, HGTC Assistant Vice President and Dean Shannon Detzler, HGTC Foundation President & CEO Robert L. Johnson, CEO & President for AGRU America Yuse Lajiminmuhip, Marketing Business Unit Manager for AGRU America, Tim Tilley, HGTC Foundation Board of Directors Daniel Siau, HGTC Foundation Board of Directors

MYRTLE BEACH— The Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) Foundation is proud to announce a generous \$5,000 donation from AGRU America, presented during the Palmetto Giving Day celebration in Georgetown. This contribution underscores AGRU’s commitment to strengthening local communities and investing in the region’s future workforce.

“We are grateful for AGRU America’s continued partnership and investment in education,” said President of HGTC, Dr. Marilyn “Murph” Fore. “This support helps expand educational opportunities, build a skilled talent pipeline and fuel economic development throughout our region.”

AGRU America, headquartered in Georgetown, is a global

leader in engineering plastics and an active supporter of local workforce development. With five manufacturing facilities across the U.S., including four in South Carolina, AGRU recognizes the critical role that strong community institutions and educational partners play in sustaining business growth and industry leadership.

“We must continue to develop our outreach program in tandem with business growth,” said Robert L. Johnson, CEO and president of AGRU America. “Our ability to deliver industry-leading products relies on everyone at AGRU. Maintaining a healthy community and talent pool around our facilities is one of the first steps in ensuring we can keep up with customer expectations regarding quality, service and reliability.”

This donation represents more than just financial support. It reflects AGRU America’s mission to create innovative engineering plastics solutions for a safer and more sustainable future. The company’s long-standing commitment to giving back to the communities where it operates is evident in its support for regional educational institutions, including HGTC.

The purpose of the HGTC Foundation is to raise funds to support the programs, services and activities of Horry-Georgetown Technical College, its students and employees, and to create and strengthen positive relations between the college and the community.

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



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CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES THEATER REBRAND Submitted by J. Craig Cotton, director of public relations



From Left: Clafin President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack and Nissan of Orangeburg CEO Marcus Johnson at the announcement of the Nissan of Orangeburg Movie Theater at Clafin University.

ORANGEBURG-What is in a name? The question was asked centuries ago by Juliet in Shakespeare's revered literary classic *Romeo and Juliet*. Some might say the answer is a matter of perspective. Like beauty – it is in the eye of the beholder.

When Clafin President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack announced recently that the theater would be renamed the Nissan of Orangeburg Movie Theater -- the news was greeted with enthusiastic applause and jubilant cheers by the students, faculty, alumni, and area residents who attended the campus/community unveiling celebration. The event was held near the movie theater entrance on the first floor of the Center for Student Life – the 80,000-square-foot ultra-modern facility that opened in March 2024. The movie theater offers moviegoers stadium-style seating with 172 cozy high-back rockers, Dolby surround sound and futuristic laser projection on a visually captivating 30-foot screen.

"I just want to begin by thanking Nissan of Orangeburg, specifically Marcus Johnson and the Johnson Automotive Group," Warmack said. "This is my sixth year at Clafin and collectively, we've raised significant funds during this time. But when no one else believed in me, Marcus gave me my first gift. My first quarter of a million dollars came from you and Nissan of Orangeburg.

Thank you for believing before anyone else believed."

Warmack was referencing Johnson's \$250,000 gift in 2022 to fund upgrades to athletic facilities, including a new video scoreboard in the Jonas T. Kennedy Health and Wellness Complex. As president and CEO of The Johnson Automotive Group, Johnson also offers internships and management training programs to prepare Clafin students for executive leadership in the global workforce of the 21st century.

"I pitched Marcus the idea of naming the movie theater for the Johnson Automotive Group," Warmack said. "But that's not what he wanted."

Instead, Johnson chose his dealership -- Nissan of Orangeburg for the naming opportunity because the dealership is committed to the community and believes in the work happening throughout Orangeburg.

"We absolutely are a partnership," Johnson said. "When we bought Nissan of Orangeburg four or five years ago, to be honest, we didn't know Clafin was here. When I rode down the

street and saw the campus, I returned to the store and asked the guys if they knew an HBCU (Historically Black College/University) was right up the street. They responded,

"Yes, Clafin -- but we are not doing anything with them." I asked why not and scheduled a meeting with Dr. Warmack and his leadership team. I was blown away – excellence. Many people believe excellence can't come out of Orangeburg – but we are proving them wrong."

The optics of the naming announcement and the Clafin University - Nissan of Orangeburg partnership achieved greater definition when Johnson presented Warmack with a \$500,000 check to support the Center for Student Life. The gift amplifies a partnership that unites two widely respected brands that share a commitment to providing educational opportunities and a passion for authentic and impactful community engagement.

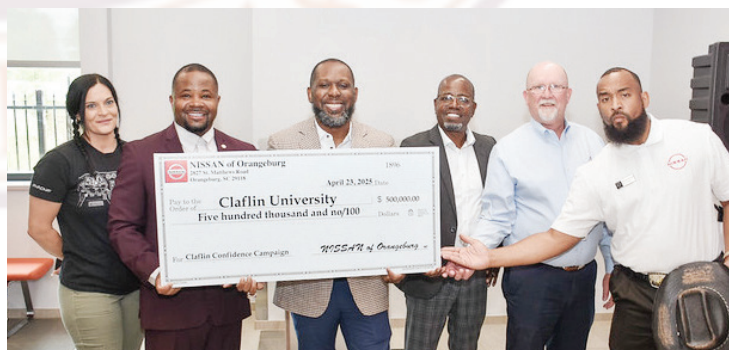
Clafin is the number one HBCU in South Carolina, and U.S. News and World Report has ranked Clafin among the Top 12 Best HBCUs for 14 consecutive years. Clafin is also the number one National Liberal Arts College/University in South Carolina, number seven among all private HBCUs and number seven in four-year graduation rates for HBCUs.

The Nissan brand is a global leader in the automotive industry. Johnson has cultivated a successful career as a prolific philanthropist and prominent business leader. As chief executive officer of the Johnson Automotive Group, he has leveraged his education and business acumen to propel the organization to become one of the country's largest Black-owned franchised dealer groups, spanning several states.

"We launched a successful partnership after my initial meeting with Dr. Warmack, and we've loved every bit of it," Johnson said. "When I called him again, truthfully, it was more about the fried chicken on Wednesdays. Dr. Warmack told me about this vision, and it sounded nice. But I know him well enough -- as a friend -- to know if he sees it, he's going to see it."

In addition to its investment in Clafin and higher education, Nissan of Orangeburg provides substantial support for the Orangeburg County School District (OCS D). The dealership has donated vehicles to outstanding OCS D teachers and staff, and local youth from the school district, attended a showing of the movie, "Cars," during the celebration.

What is in a name? The Nissan of Orangeburg Movie Theater symbolizes the rebranding of what has become a cultural hub. It also reflects the, "Elevation and Transformation," the region is experiencing, and the expansion of educational, economic and career opportunities for residents of Orangeburg and neighboring communities.



Nissan Check Presentation- Nissan of Orangeburg associates join Clafin President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack and Marcus Johnson, Nissan of Orangeburg CEO, for \$500,000 check presentation to support Clafin's Center for Student Life.

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CELEBRATING A CHAMPION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Submitted by Dr. Kandace Bethea, superintendent



Dr. Kandace Bethea

MARION - In every successful community, certain organizations work silently yet significantly to shape the future. In Marion County, the Marion County Healthcare Foundation stands as a beacon of that transformative leadership. It is with deep pride and gratitude that I celebrate the foundation's recent selection as a recipient of the South Carolina School Boards Association's (SCSBA) Champions for Public Education Award—an honor richly deserved.

The Marion County Healthcare Foundation has been an extraordinary partner to Marion County School District, continuously demonstrating its unwavering commitment to the success of our schools, our students and our broader community. Through a remarkable \$500,000 grant, distributed over four years, the foundation has created a ripple effect of innovation and opportunity across our classrooms. This funding supports teacher-driven mini-grants that empower educators to bring dynamic, creative and engaging lessons to life. These are not just enhancements to the curriculum—they are transformative tools that foster curiosity, boost achievement and expand what's possible for our students.

The foundation's efforts go far beyond the financial. It has emerged as a leader in supporting strategic, forward-thinking education initiatives that align with our district's goals and SCSBA's vision. Whether it's providing tools for STEM education, investing in career exploration programs or supporting sensory-friendly learning spaces, the foundation continually seeks ways to improve the educational experience for every child in Marion County. Its support for professional development, technology access and outdoor learning spaces ensures our educators and students are well-equipped for a rapidly evolving world.

What makes the Marion County Healthcare Foundation truly

exceptional is its understanding that the success of public education is inextricably tied to the well-being of the community. Their work reflects an understanding that education is more than academics—it's about preparing future leaders, fostering civic engagement and ensuring equitable access to opportunity. Through initiatives like financial literacy classes, nursing and technical skills programs and workforce readiness projects, the foundation is not only supporting schools but also strengthening the economic and social fabric of Marion County.

This award also recognizes how the foundation inspires others to rally behind public education. Its actions speak clearly: quality education is a shared responsibility and a cornerstone of a healthy democracy. Their dedication energizes our teachers, uplifts our families and reminds our entire community of the powerful impact that comes from investing in our schools.

As superintendent, I have witnessed firsthand the incredible difference the Marion County Healthcare Foundation has made in the lives of our students and staff. Their belief in our mission, their generosity and their vision for a stronger, more educated Marion County serve as an inspiration to us all.

On behalf of the Marion County School District, our board of trustees, and the many lives touched by this partnership, I offer heartfelt congratulations and sincere thanks. The Marion County Healthcare Foundation is not only a champion for public education—it is a champion for our community's future.



Champions of Public Education

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Photo by Steve Roos

FDTC CELEBRATES REMARKABLE 2025 GRADUATING CLASS Submitted by FDTC



*President and Chief Executive Officer
of McLeod Health, Donna Isgett*

Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) was proud to celebrate another milestone, marking one of the highest graduation totals in the college's history. The 2024-2025 Commencement Ceremony will honor the achievements of 981 graduating students.

"We are thrilled to recognize yet another record-breaking graduating class at FDTC," said FDTC President Dr. Jermaine Ford. "Our students have worked tirelessly to finish what they started. Class of 2025—your moment is here. On behalf of our entire team, we hope your time at FDTC has been a steppingstone toward continued success, wherever your journey leads."

The ceremony took place on May 15, at the Florence Center, beginning at 6:00 p.m. This annual event brings together all graduates from across the academic year to celebrate their dedication and accomplishments. Among the 981 graduates, 487 students will earn associate degrees, 106 students will receive diplomas, and 388 students will be awarded certificates.

This year's commencement speaker was Donna Isgett, president and chief executive officer of McLeod Health. A native of the Atlanta area, Isgett earned her Associate Degree in Nursing from Georgia Highlands College (formerly Floyd Junior College), her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Georgia State University and her master's degree in Critical Care Nursing from the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. With a clinical background as an emergency flight nurse, Isgett joined

McLeod Health in 1997 and has since served in numerous leadership roles, including senior vice president of Corporate Quality and Safety and chief operating officer. She is committed to fostering system-wide excellence in clinical care, physician and staff engagement and patient services across the McLeod Health system.

For the second year, the college also recognized graduates from FDTC's Corporate and Workforce Development (CWD) programs. A total of 179 CWD students will complete certifications in fields such as certified nursing assistant, pharmacy technician, medical surgical technician and emergency medical technician—and will proudly walk the stage as FDTC graduates.

Additionally, FDTC will celebrate the outstanding achievements of local high school students who have earned college credentials through dual enrollment and Early College programs. These graduates reflect the strong partnerships FDTC maintains with area school districts and the growing opportunities for students to jump-start their higher education and career pathways. This year's class includes students from Darlington High School, Grace Home Association, Hannah-Pamplico High School, Marion High School, Mullins High School, Johnsonville High School, JP Truluck Magnet School and Lake City High School.

As FDTC continues to grow and serve the Pee Dee region, the 2025 graduating class embodies the college's mission to provide accessible, high-quality education and workforce training. Whether entering the workforce, continuing their education or advancing in their current careers, these graduates exemplify the spirit of student success that defines FDTC.



GET REAL ABOUT YOUR CAREER



No frills, no fuss, no nonsense. Just a real education. Real skills for the real world. Whether you're in the workforce, or still figuring things out, enhance your abilities—and your income—with our flexible, affordable degrees and certificates. **Get real-world ready with FDTC.**



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SiMT Manufacturing and FDTC Facilities, who worked together to produce this innovative solution, pose for a photograph.

Florence-Darlington Technical College's (FDTC) Facilities and SiMT Manufacturing teams, as well as collaborative partner Stratasys were recently honored as nominees for the prestigious A. Wade Martin Innovation Team of the Year Award at the SC Technical Education Association (SCTEA) annual conference.

The recognition stemmed from the SiMT Manufacturing team's creative problem-solving approach to replacing an aging in-floor electrical receptacle box in one of the college's buildings. When the Facilities department sought a replacement, an electrical contractor informed them that the part was obsolete and would require extensive and costly renovations, estimated between \$16,000 and \$30,000, to replace.

Rather than accept the high costs and disruption, the facilities and SiMT Manufacturing teams collaborated to find an innovative solution. After assessing the issue, they devised a way to 3D-print a custom replacement part, eliminating the need for

major construction work.

"3D printing allows for highly customized parts tailored to specific needs, whether for medical devices, consumer goods, or industrial components," SiMT Director of Manufacturing Operations Jonathan Melton said. "In this case, our team's creativity and technical expertise enabled us to replace a discontinued part and save the college from costly renovations." By leveraging advanced manufacturing technology, the SiMT team successfully designed and printed a new electrical receptacle box, which facilities installed. This cost-effective, practical solution provided a long-term fix while significantly reducing expenses.

Adding to the savings, Stratasys, provided the materials for the project at no cost. A Stratasys representative highlighted the value of collaboration:

"We are honored to support educational partners such as Florence-Darlington throughout the country," Jesse Roitenberg, North American education manager for Stratasys, said. "Our exceptional relationship with SiMT Manufacturing and the college also provides us with an opportunity to help grow the next generation of 3D printing technicians."



This is the final version of the 3D printed electrical box that the SiMT Manufacturing team was able to fabricate.

Through innovation and creative problem-solving, the group demonstrated how innovative technology can be used to tackle real-world challenges—earning them well-deserved recognition.

FDTC AUTO PROGRAM EARNS ASE MASTER ACCREDITATION



FDTC Automotive students work together to tear down a motor during class. The program trains automotive technicians to diagnose, service and repair automobiles and light trucks.

Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) is proud to announce that its Automotive Technician Training Program has once again received Master Automobile Service Technology Accreditation – the highest level of program accreditation recognized by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE).

"Receiving this accreditation is a testament to the hard work and commitment of our faculty, staff and students," said Keith McKenzie, FDTC department head of Manufacturing and Mechanical Technology. "At FDTC, we're dedicated to aligning our training with industry demands, and this recognition shows that our graduates are well-equipped to succeed in today's high-tech automotive world."

The ASE accreditation process evaluates programs based on nationally accepted standards in areas such as instruction,

facilities and equipment. Following a rigorous on-site evaluation conducted by the ASE Education Foundation, the program was found to continue meeting the strict standards required for Master Accreditation. This recognition confirms FDTC's commitment to providing top-tier education that keeps pace with the rapidly evolving automotive industry.

"This is great news for automotive-minded young people and their parents," said Michael Coley, ASE Education Foundation president. "Because this program increases cooperation between local education and industry leaders, it gives added assurance that Florence-Darlington Technical College's graduates will be employable entry-level technicians. As a result of the quality education provided by FDTC, the motoring public will benefit since better repair technicians will join the workforce."

McKenzie expressed pride in the achievement:

"Over the past several months, our team has collaborated closely with the ASE Education Foundation to make sure our program aligns with the industry's highest standards. We're proud to receive this recognition once again—it reflects our ongoing commitment to providing students with a top-quality education that prepares them for rewarding, in-demand careers."

As the automotive industry continues to advance at a rapid pace, high-quality technician training has never been more essential. With this renewed accreditation, FDTC reaffirms its role as a leader in preparing the next generation of skilled automotive professionals.

FIRST STEPS: "25" YEARS OF IMPACT IN COUNTY COMMUNITIES By Glaciera Brown Mason

The Pee Dee has witnessed extraordinary strides in the well-being of children. At the heart of this progress stands First Steps, dedicated to ensuring every child enters school ready to succeed. By connecting families with critical early education resources, First Steps has laid a foundation for lifelong learning, growth and achievement.

Under the leadership of Spencer R. Scott, MBA, executive director of Florence County First Steps for 25 years and Marion County First Steps for 23 years, the organization continues to support families across the region. As First Steps celebrates a quarter-century, its legacy is defined by an unwavering commitment to children from prenatal to age five.

Serving a diverse population, First Steps focuses on families experiencing financial hardship. Services include parenting support, early childhood education, developmental screenings and child care training to create nurturing home environments and strong school readiness outcomes. Services are offered free of charge, and made possible through state allocations, federal support and competitive grant funding.

A team of compassionate, culturally competent paraprofessionals and degreed professionals drives its success. These individuals are mentors, educators and advocates who embody empathy, excellence and equity. Their dedication reinforces First Steps' role as a trusted community partner.

Florence and Marion County First Steps remains committed to expanding opportunities, supporting families and ensuring every child has the chance to thrive.

"Great things in business are never done by one person; they are done by a team of people." Steve Jobs

Let's get to know them.



Parenting Director FCFS
Dr. Gloria Bracey

As Parenting Director for FCFS Parent Child+ Program, **Dr. Gloria Q. Bracey** oversees the development, implementation and management of initiatives designed to support and educate parents and children. Serving 75 clients, she supports the mission by ensuring children and families receive essential resources during early development years.

With 27 years in education, she earned a degree from Limestone College/Capella University. She is no stranger to, pedagogy, which refers to the method of how educators teach and communicate in educational settings.

"The opportunity to empower families and collaborate with such dedicated and supportive administration and staff," inspires Bracey. In addition, she has served in a pastoral role for over 30 years. She holds memberships and positions in private, civic and social groups, and resides in Florence County with her family.

Bracey says, "Balancing the diverse needs and expectations of parents, children and staff," can be challenging however, the best part of her day is, "... knowing I've made someone's day easier or brighter."



Program Coordinator FCFS
Lana Hopkins

Program Coordinator, **Lana Hopkins** has worked with FCFS for 18 years. She began her career as a centers of excellence coordinator. In 2009 her focus shifted to supporting family child care providers in Florence and Marion.

Hopkins came to FCFS from teaching and coaching in Greenville and Lamar, SC. She earned her undergraduate degree in elementary education with a minor in English. Hopkins holds a graduate degree in education from

North Greenville University.

She balances work and family life, dedicating her free time to her six-year-old.



Program Coordinator FCFS
Anastasia Spann

Anastasia Spann serves as the program coordinator for FCFS. Since 2017, Spann provides technical assistance, leading training and collaborating with stakeholders.

A Clemson graduate, she earned a bachelor's in early childhood education and a Master of Education degree in School Counseling. Spann is also a certified trainer and technical assistance provider through SC Endeavors.

She is active in the National Association for the Education of Young Children, South Carolina Association for the Education of Young Children, South Carolina Early Childhood Association to name a few.

Spann enjoys staying active, reading and crocheting.



Literacy Coordinator MCFS
Beryl Collington

Literacy is a fundamental part of First Steps, which prepares children for school. Literacy Coordinator, **Beryl Collington** serves 500 children and 141 in the Raising A Reader Program. This requires her to plan, coordinate and travel to read to children. In education for 43 years, she attended Benedict College and USC and stays abreast of continuing education requirements.

Collington says, "I love being part of a child's literacy journey. I try to make sure that I read age-appropriate books that have high frequency words and covers early learning standards." Collington shared, the best day is, "When I'm reading a book, and I can see that the children are enjoying it. When they ask me if I can read it again, that's icing on the cake."

She enjoys reading and time with family and friends.



Parenting Coordinator MCFS
La'Keithia Collins

Parenting Coordinator **La'Keithia Collins** is a compassionate, community-focused professional. With a 19-year history in early childhood/family services, she supports families through education, home visits and screenings. Collins facilitates parenting classes, coordinates community outreach and collaborates to strengthen parent-child relationships and supports early childhood development.

Collins attended Horry Georgetown Technical College earning an associate degree in early childhood education and a Bachelor of Science in Sociology from Coker College. She maintains certifications to provide quality support to families. Her focus has been helping families thrive. A believer in the power of connection, resilience and lifelong learning, Collins says, building trust is a continuous process. She is inspired by the resilience of families and the impact of early intervention. Helping parents feel empowered and supported is deeply fulfilling for Collins, although she says, "it is challenging seeing families who need support but are hesitant to engage due to stigma or past experiences with systems."

The best part of her day is, "when I see a parent have a breakthrough—whether it's understanding a child's behavior or celebrating a developmental milestone."

Collins has been married for 15 years to Jimmy J. Collins, and they are parents to Abigail and London. She enjoys family time, church, singing and vacationing.

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FOR FAMILIES

We assist families in creating home environments that are safe and supportive of children's physical, emotional, and cognitive growth.

Parenting - First Steps provides support in the home for children and their caregivers through proven evidenced-based home programs such as the Parent Child+ or Nurturing Parenting Program. Parent Early Learning Specialists/Parent educators, with these initiatives partner with parents to develop healthy practices that will encourage children to be successful at home, school, and beyond.

HIPPY - Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is a home visiting program that supports parents in their role as a child's first and most important teacher. a program that works to increase your child's skills in many areas while providing

you, as a parent/caregiver, with additional knowledge of early childhood development.

Raising A Reader – An evidence-based Classic Red Book Bag Program fosters family bonding moments and develops critical literacy and social emotional skills through shared reading.



FOR COMMUNITIES

We bring together members of the community, including businesses, faith-based groups, health care providers, social services, community associations, and local governments to support families and advocate for children's educational opportunities and achievements.

Countdown to Kindergarten/4K - A summer school transition strategy designed to support smooth transitions into kindergarten by connecting rising kindergartners, their families, and their teachers in a series of six sessions during the summer.

Child Care Scholarships - For qualified families, First Steps awards scholarships to increase children's access to quality child care programs, as well as make valued child care affordable for parents looking to return to school or work.

FOR EDUCATORS

We provide quality education in an environment conducive to learning, meet individual learning and developmental needs, and appreciate individual uniqueness and cultural values.

Child Care Training - First Steps assists child care providers with staff development opportunities and consultation to ensure compliance with DSS training requirements, expand the knowledge and skillset of child care educators, and improve the overall quality of curriculums offered in partnered child care programs.

Child Care Quality Enhancement - Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers need quality care to grow healthy and succeed in school. While providers want the best for their children in terms of care, they often lack the same access to resources readily available to publicly funded early childhood programs, including learning materials, training opportunities, technology, and more.

With First Steps' Quality Enhancement initiative, participating programs are assisted with funding for educational supplies and equipment, skills training and professional development, Technical Assistance (TA), and other support.

With your donation, 100% of funds go back to programs. Help support programs dedicated to the healthy development of children in our community with your donation! You can also become a volunteer and help provide our youth with opportunities that will serve them for a lifetime.

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BUILDING & THRIVING: MULLINS' FUTURE THROUGH PARKS By Cynthia O. Ford



Taurus Gilchrist, Ronda Bain, Ogleretta White and DeAndra Cooper

MULLINS—As the nation celebrates the 40th anniversary of National Park and Recreation Month, the theme, “Build Together, Play Together,” holds special meaning in Mullins, SC. A bold vision is coming to life—one that connects recreation, wellness, walkability and commerce through a project that is reimagining what a park can be.

At the center of this transformation is Ogleretta White, a strategic leader helping guide the Old Brick Square (OBS) Park and Marketplace from concept to construction. The idea began under former Mayor Wayne George, who envisioned repurposing the old brick warehouse into an indoor park. That idea evolved under Mayor Robert Woodbury, who introduced the concept of a splash pad and larger outdoor amenities. Current Mayor, Miko Pickett has taken up the vision and is leading its realization.

When White joined the City of Mullins in 2022, she was tasked with moving the vision forward. “By October 2022, we had our first conceptual drawing. In 2023, we brought in an architect and began securing funding,” she said.

The project includes two key spaces: a vibrant park with a splash pad and fitness zones, and a downtown marketplace for farmers, vendors and events. “This is more than beautification. It’s about economic development, health and creating a place where everyone feels welcome,” White explained.

Funding such a project in a rural area required teamwork. “We involved elected officials, business owners, former mayors and residents through surveys and town halls,” she said. That collaboration paid off. The local delegation secured a \$500,000 investment to build the splash pad and fitness court. Additional grants from the SC Parks, Recreation and

Tourism Department supported trail development.

Support from Wholespire and the Department of Public Health brought in national Walkability Expert Mark Fenton, who led a community workshop and helped design connected trails between neighborhoods, schools and downtown. Clemson Extension’s Healthy Options Program (HOP), funded by the CDC, further boosted engagement and helped create a multidisciplinary team of city leaders including White, City Administrator Holly Jackson, Public Works Director Tarus Gilchrist, SC Tobacco Museum Curator Ronda Bain, Mayor Pickett and resident DeAndra Cooper.

Their efforts led to a key win: a \$1.2 million grant for a walking trail connecting O’Neal Street to Mullins High School. “It will benefit students and the entire community. The long-term vision is for every school to be connected to downtown,” White said.

OBS Park will feature an ADA-accessible splash pad, outdoor fitness areas, a rubberized walking trail and a planned amphitheater with professional lighting and sound. Future additions may include shaded yoga zones and seating along trails for rest and socializing. Sustainability is also central, with timed water systems, energy-efficient lighting and eco-friendly design features.

“This is about creating a space for movement, rest and community,” White said. “Whether someone is walking alone, playing with family or selling at the market—they’ll feel safe and supported.”

Public input remains key. The city is involving churches and civic groups in pop-up events and inviting businesses to activate the marketplace through seasonal markets and vendor days. “We want this to reflect the people of Mullins,” she said. “That means listening, adapting and honoring the full diversity of our community.”

White acknowledged the complexity of managing such a large initiative. “You wear every hat. But the impact is bigger than a splash pad. We’re building opportunity, access and joy.”

Her hope is that OBS becomes a launchpad for local dreams and a model for other small towns. “Start by identifying a space and writing a clear concept,” she advised. “Hold public meetings, collect input and reach out to funders early. Their feedback is invaluable.”

The work in Mullins is still unfolding. “We’re still building, still inviting people in,” White said. “Our city wants to be your partner—in your business, your health and your joy.”

A SANCTUARY OF NATURE, EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVITY By Ronette Genwright



Daniel Hill

July marks the 40th anniversary of National Park and Recreation Month, a time to celebrate the vital role that parks play in promoting wellness, environmental stewardship and community connection. One shining example is Kalmia Gardens, a 38-acre gem in Hartsville, SC, which blends natural beauty with education, accessibility and sustainability.

Kalmia Garden’s success is driven by Daniel Hill, whose leadership

stems from a lifelong bond with nature. Hill, originally from Homestead, Florida, grew up as an, “army brat,” and later relocated to Florence, SC, where he assisted his father in running a heating and air conditioning business. It was during these formative years exploring plants and insects that his love for ecology began to take root.

Hill initially studied psychology at Francis Marion University before pivoting into ecology, driven by a desire to understand and protect the natural world amid growing environmental threats. As a contract biologist, he contributed to important research on swallow-tailed kite migration and land conservation, sharpening his scientific and conservation

A SANCTUARY OF NATURE CONT'D

skills. His relationship with Kalmia Garden began during college, when he walked the trails to study for botany exams.

That personal connection led him back years later as assistant director, and as director. In his leadership role, Hill has guided projects that promote both habitat preservation and community education. A standout initiative is the garden's regenerative stormwater conveyance system, funded through a North Carolina Community Foundation grant. This system helps protect Black Creek by naturally filtering pollutants from stormwater runoff, reinforcing the garden's commitment to ecological sustainability.

For Hill, Kalmia Garden is more than a nature preserve—it is a place of transformation. He recalls guiding a hesitant young girl on a nature tour. Initially afraid to enter the woods, she ended the visit running ahead, filled with curiosity. "That's what this garden is about—helping people connect with nature in ways that are meaningful and lasting," he said.

Hill is also enthusiastic about accessibility and inclusivity. Under his direction, the garden has expanded programs for children and adults with sensory sensitivities, created volunteer opportunities for community members and adapted facilities to ensure all visitors feel welcome. "Simple adjustments like adding sound buffers on restroom doors can make a world of difference," he noted.

Kalmia Garden is also home to educational programs that spark a lifelong love of nature. Hill leads school tours, university

labs and environmental camps, using a mix of storytelling and the Socratic method to engage learners. Whether it is explaining the life cycle of an oak tree or pausing to explore a frog on the trail, he encourages observation and curiosity over memorization.

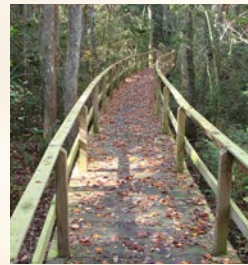
Hill envisions parks being acknowledged as essential infrastructure, on par with the importance of roads and hospitals. He emphasizes the wide-ranging benefits of green spaces, from carbon sequestration and flood control to mental health and community connection. The Patrick Sawyer Memorial Bicycle Path, dedicated to a former director, demonstrates the impact of well-planned and well-funded parks.

Looking ahead, he hopes to expand Kalmia Garden's model to underserved areas across the state. "But we work with foundations to offer scholarships and keep our programs accessible." As communities face the pressures of development, climate change

and disconnection from nature, Hill offers this reminder:

"We are part of the natural world, and we would be in a really bad spot without it."

Kalmia Garden stands as a powerful example of what's possible when passion, science and inclusion come together in service of the environment—and the people who depend on it.



Bridge at Kalmia Gardens walking trail.

DUKE ENERGY GRANT ADVANCES LAKE CITY PARK REVITALIZATION

Submitted by Public Information Officer Donna Tracy



Mindy Taylor of Duke Energy Foundation presents a \$2,500 grant check to Lake City officials at Martha Law Park as part of the foundation's Trees, Trails & Trash initiative supporting community green-spaces. From left: Lake City Councilmember Wilhelmena Scott, Grayson Boyington, deputy recreation director, La'Quantia Goodman, grants accountant, Mindy Taylor, Duke Energy director of government and community relations, Lake City Mayor Yamekia Robinson and Lisa Jones, grant writer. PHOTO: City of Lake City/ Donna Tracy

LAKE CITY—Children's laughter is one of the sweetest sounds of summer. Neighborhood parks provide a place for children and families to play and connect with nature. They also improve neighboring property values, increase the quality of life for residents, help promote the health of families and youth and contribute to Lake City's environmental well-being.

Lake City's ongoing revitalization of Martha Law Park received a boost with a \$2,500 grant from the Duke Energy Foundation's Trees, Trails & Trash Initiative. The funds will help enhance the park's natural features, improve safety and support capital upgrades for a more welcoming community space. For Grayson Boyington, the city's deputy recreation director, the additional funds are an exciting addition for the park's ongoing revitalization.

"This \$2,500 grant from Duke Energy, awarded through the Trees, Trails & Trash Initiative, will allow us to enhance the park's natural features and invest in key capital improvements," said Boyington. "Our goal is to create a cleaner, safer and more welcoming environment for the community. We're grateful for

Duke Energy's support and proud to take this important step toward restoring and improving this valued neighborhood space."

Mindy Taylor, director of government and community relations for Duke Energy, presented the check to city representatives at Martha Law Park, Thursday, May 8. The Martha Law Neighborhood Park Revitalization funds will be used toward improving the area for residents.

"We look at our grants as an investment in the communities we serve," said Taylor. "For the month of April, the Duke Energy Foundation had a focus on 'trees, trails, and trash,' and our grants and volunteer opportunities lined up to allow us to present this check for \$2,500 to Lake City to help beautify Martha Law Park."

Mayor Yamekia Robinson expressed her thanks on behalf of the city for the grant for this, "vital grant supporting the revitalization of Martha Law Park."

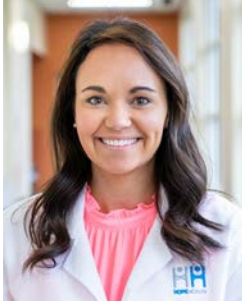
"Our parks are the heart of our community to relax, have fun and connect with others," said Robinson. "This investment will allow us to ensure that it remains a cherished place for families and individuals of all ages. Thank you, Duke Energy, for recognizing the value of our parks!"

The funds will be used to clean up existing facilities at the park and help supply the mulch, gravel and other equipment needed to maintain a safe and inviting space for Lake City's community. Future plans include efforts to create a walking trail in the space, according to Lisa Jones, grant writer for the city.

"This Duke Energy grant will help continue the revitalization begun through the SC Forestry Commission Trees4SC program that provided trees for the park earlier this year, and with our other grant partners, Green Infrastructure Center and Moore Farms Botanical Gardens."

For more details about Lake City parks, visit LakeCitySC.org. Lake City, home to 6,000 residents, invites you live, work, play and visit the heart of southern Florence County.

WATER SAFETY FOR KIDS Submitted by Haley Jackson, CPNP



Haley Jackson, CPNP

Water safety is something I am incredibly passionate about as a pediatric nurse practitioner and mother to young children. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drowning is the number one cause of accidental death for infants and young children between the ages of one and four.

Drowning is 100 percent preventable. To lower a child's risk of drowning and other water-related injuries, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends

using, "layers of protection." The biggest drowning threat facing families with toddlers is unexpected, unsupervised access to water: swimming pools, hot tubs and spas, bathtubs, natural bodies of water like lakes and ponds and standing water in homes. For example, 69 percent of all drownings among children aged four and younger happen during non-swim times.

Below are some steps you can take to create layers of protection:

Fence and secure swimming pools. Have a self-closing latch that opens away from the pool. Keep the gate locked at ALL times. Keep toys away from the pool area when not in use so that children are not tempted to try to get through the fence during non-swim times. Cover hot tubs and whirlpools when not in use.

Prevent children from going outside unnoticed. Use safety gates, door locks and door alarms to prevent toddlers and children from going outside unnoticed. Make sure siblings and other family members know to close the door behind them so young children don't follow them out.

Provide constant supervision in and around water. Give the children your UNDIVIDED attention. It's important someone is watching the child swim without distractions like a cell phone, doing yard work, drinking alcohol or reading a book. AAP recommends, "touch supervision," whether it's bath time or swim time, defined

as being within arm's reach. During swim time, get in with your child, even if lifeguards are present. Lifeguards can provide a false sense of security, and parental supervision should still be given to children at all times while in water. Puddle jumpers and flotation devices do not exempt parent supervision. If a flotation device is used, I recommend a U.S. Coast Guard-approved device. For an online list of these approved devices, visit dco.uscg.mil.

Assign a water watcher. A water watcher is a responsible adult who agrees to watch the kids in the water without distractions and wears a water watcher card. This is especially important if you are at a party or a picnic at a public pool or lake where it's easy to get distracted. Take turns passing along the water watcher card after a set time (such as 15 minutes). For more information on water watchers, visit safekids.org.

Start swim lessons! It is a good idea to start swimming lessons as soon as possible. Parent-child swim lessons are great to allow your child to gain exposure to the water.

Get CPR certified. If an emergency happens, it is essential that parents and families are prepared. Learn to perform CPR on children and adults. The American Red Cross offers in-person and online CPR certification options, and there are usually in-person offerings at wellness organizations like the YMCA.

Summer can be a hectic time – make sure water safety is part of your plans to ensure your children stay safe and healthy!

Here are a couple of options available for swim lessons in the area:



Florence YMCA: Ages six months and up
Swim Lessons – Florence Family YMCA
(florenceymca.org).

McLeod Health & Fitness Center: Ages six months and up + swim club
The McLeod Health and Fitness Center – Florence, SC.

SUMMER SAFETY TIPS FOR KIDS Submitted by Alden McCants, MD HopeHealth



Alden McCants, MD

The long days of summer are here, and with kids and adults enjoying the great outdoors, it is an important time to review summer safety tips.

Sun Smarts

Sunscreen and protective clothing are vital to help prevent sunburn and sun damage. Children and adolescents ages 18 and under are at an increased risk for sun damage. Babies who are six months and younger have very tender skin and

eyes and need to stay out of direct sunlight.

The sun can damage the skin even on cloudy days, so it's important to find shade for relief, wear hats and sunglasses and wear light-colored clothes to cover the body and protect the skin.

Sun-protective clothing with a broad-spectrum UPF or ultraviolet protection factor of 50+ is another effective option for children younger than six months.

For infants and children older than six months, choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 50+ that offers UVB and UVA protection. Apply sunscreen liberally at least 30 minutes before heading outside, reapply every two hours and apply more after swimming, sweating or toweling off. Make sure to apply sunscreen to the nose, ears and tops of the feet,

and use SPF 50+ lip balm for the lips.

Ultraviolet (UV) rays are strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. To decrease sun exposure, stay in the shade and plan activities outside of those times, when possible.

Swim Safety

The Red Cross reports 10 people die from drowning each day, with 20 percent being under the age of 14. Parents and children both need to know how to swim and practice water safety. Children can start to learn the concepts of how to swim between the ages of one and four, depending on the child. Look for swim lessons with parent involvement in children older than one year of age.

Adults need to be in the water at all times and at arm's length from infants and toddlers for, "touch supervision." For older children, adults need to be, "water watchers," paying close attention and free from distractions such as talking, scrolling on a phone, tending to chores, drinking alcohol or socializing.

Water safety includes teaching children to ask permission to go near water and assessing moving water for currents. It is also important to know the signs of drowning and learn how to assist children in the water. Children and weak swimmers need to wear life jackets when around water. Pool safety includes eliminating glass and electrical hazards, taking toys out of the pool when not in use, not running on a pool deck and properly securing a pool when not in use.

SUMMER SAFETY CONT'D

Hydration Station

With higher levels of heat and humidity, the risk of dehydration increases, particularly for children. Keeping kids hydrated means making sure they get plenty of water and other fluids.

Ensure that kids drink plenty of water before going outside. Provide kids with a full water bottle and encourage fluids regularly. If a child is not drinking enough, add electrolyte replacement drinks such as Pedialyte.

Signs of dehydration include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, thirst, dry lips and mouth, irritability, decreased urination and a fast heart rate. Checking urine color is a quick indication of hydration status, with a pale-yellow color indicating proper hydration, while darker urine indicates dehydration. Without proper fluids, continued dehydration can lead to heat exhaustion and heat stroke and needs immediate medical attention.

Safety on Wheels

Actively supervise children on bikes and other wheeled toys. Ensure children wear properly fitting helmets and pads while riding scooters, bikes, skateboards and roller skates. Limit riding to driveways, sidewalks and bike paths. If golf carts are used, ensure seat belts are available for children and that drivers are not under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Insect Bites and Stings

Insect bites can make kids miserable. Avoid scents such as strong-smelling soaps, shampoos and perfumes to keep bugs at bay. A broad-brimmed hat helps keep insects away from the face. Use mosquito nets to cover strollers for babies and run fans to help keep bugs away. Remove any standing water to avoid breeding mosquitoes.

Insect repellants can repel biting insects such as mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, chiggers and biting flies. Follow directions carefully and choose a stick, lotion or unpressurized spray and apply once a day. Help younger children apply insect repellant and supervise older children. Do not apply repellant to hands, fingers or around the eyes, nose or mouth. Only apply on the skin or outside clothing. If your child develops a rash, wash with soap and water immediately,



and contact your pediatrician.

Teach kids to stay calm and walk away from stinging insects such as wasps and bees. Swatting and waving hands around may provoke an attack. If a child is allergic,

keep an Epi-pen available when they are outside.

Complete a thorough body and head check for ticks any time a child is outside in a wooded area. Use tweezers to pull a tick out by its head, close to the skin. Pull straight out, swab the area with alcohol, and let your pediatrician know.

Burn Hazards

Fireworks can easily burn a child. Keep a hose or bucket of water handy if using fireworks and teach children not to point fireworks at anyone. Adults should always light fireworks, one at a time, and move away quickly. Never light fireworks in glass or metal containers, and after use, douse them with water before discarding them. Sparklers can provide heat up to 2000 degrees Fahrenheit and must be closely monitored with no more than one per child at a time. Enjoying a public fireworks display is a much safer option for children.

Develop a three-foot perimeter and create a, “kid-free zone,” around grills, fire pits and campfires. Supervise children while they roast marshmallows or hot dogs.

Give playground equipment a quick touch to make sure it's not too hot for children to play on.

Taking a few minutes to assess summer activities ahead of time, gathering all the necessary supplies, and teaching your children how to develop a, “safety mindset,” in each situation can help keep summertime fun and free from injuries.

Elizabeth Alden McCants, MD, is a pediatrician providing care at HopeHealth Pediatrics in Manning and Kingstree and is accepting new patients. Call 843-355-5628 in Kingstree, 803-433-4124 in Manning or visit hope-health.org for more information.

CITY OF DARLINGTON OPENS NEW SPLASH PAD

Submitted by Public & Community Affairs Director, Hunter Thomas



(left to right): Mayor Curtis Boyd, Clerk/Treasurer Gloria Pridgen (back row), Councilwoman Elaine Reed, Councilman John Milling (back row), City Manager Lenessa Hawkins, Contractor Roosevelt Scott (back row), Councilman Bryant Gardner, Recreation Department's Mike Chittum, Councilwoman Shelia Baccus, Recreation Department's Dana Chrisley and Councilwoman Angela McRavin.

DARLINGTON – The City of Darlington's highly anticipated Splash Pad is now open to the public.

On Saturday, June 14, Mayor Curtis Boyd and members of City Council cut the ribbon to the new 4,000 sq-ft Splash Pad property, located at the corner of Orange and Liberty Streets. The Splash Pad will operate throughout the spring and summer season each year.

“I'm excited to finally have the Splash Pad up and ready for all our residents to enjoy with their children and families,” Boyd said. “The Splash Pad is free to the public. It has been a long time

coming. We've worked hard to provide quality of life for our residents and the surrounding areas. Come enjoy. It's going to be a great summer.”

The new facility has 20 interactive water features, as well as handicap accessibility and new restrooms. There are currently three covered seating areas; however, the facility will continue to evolve over time.

“The gates are now open to the new Splash Pad,” said City of Darlington Public & Community Affairs Director, Hunter Thomas. “Everyone came together to make this vision a reality and now our residents and visitors have a fun and safe place to soak in the sun and enjoy the beautiful days in the Pearl of the Pee Dee.”

The installation of the Splash Pad marks the second major completed project for recreation within the City of Darlington this year. Back in April, the ribbon was cut to the nearly \$9 million, A Squared Investments Sports Complex located on Blue Street.

Hours of operation for the Splash Pad will be from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday through Saturday and 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sundays. Children should not be left unsupervised on the property.

For more information, please visit cityofdarlington.com or call 843-398-4000.

HAVE A STAYCATION THIS SUMMER!

Set up camp in the scenic Pee Dee Country!



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Campground, Dillon**



**Crossroads Coach
Resort, Lake City**



**Lee State Park,
Bishopville**



**Little Pee Dee State
Park, Dillon**



**Standing Pines
Campground & RV
Resort, Hartsville**



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LYNCHES RIVER PARK: NATURE, INNOVATION & COMMUNITY By Les Echols



Lynch River New Splash Pad

Parks Superintendent Jennifer Majors, of Lynch River County Park in Florence County, South Carolina, continues to make a significant impact through her leadership and environmental stewardship. With a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies and Growth Management from Rollins College and a Master of Applied Science in Environmental Policy and Management from the University of Denver, Majors combines academic excellence with practical experience. She is also a certified parks and recreation professional through the National Recreation and Parks Association.

Since joining Florence County Parks and Recreation in April 2010 and taking on the role of parks superintendent in 2017, Majors has led numerous initiatives aimed at enhancing public access to outdoor recreation and environmental education. Her responsibilities include managing the park's overall operations, safety protocols, natural resource

preservation and the development of innovative programming.

Summer 2025 marks the 10th anniversary of the Environmental Discovery Center's Summer Camp, a major highlight for families and children in the region. The camp continues to offer interactive, nature-based learning experiences designed to foster environmental awareness and outdoor exploration. The Environmental Discovery Center staff emphasizes the importance of engaging youth through meaningful, hands-on activities that encourage a lifelong appreciation for the natural world.

This summer also brings several exciting facility upgrades. In May, the park unveiled a newly renovated Splash Pad featuring nature-themed water elements that provide children with a fun and safe way to cool off during the hot South Carolina summers. The Climbing Wall is open for climbers of all skill levels, adding a unique adventure

component to the park's diverse offerings.

Pet lovers can look forward to the grand opening of a new dog park in early July. The facility includes water features and agility equipment to provide exercise and enjoyment for dogs and their owners. This addition further positions Lynch River County Park as a versatile, family-friendly destination.

To attract a broader range of outdoor enthusiasts, the park recently launched a 23-site campground designed for all types of campers, including those traveling with large RVs, as well as tent and hammock campers. Additionally, an equestrian campground and new horse trails have been completed, along with access to an equestrian arena. These features offer horseback riders a scenic and accommodating environment.

Looking ahead, construction is underway on a 27-hole championship-level disc golf course, expected to open in the fall. This new attraction is anticipated to draw competitive players and recreational users alike.

For more information about upcoming programs and events, visitors are encouraged to visit the park's website at www.lynchesriverpark.com.

While Majors hinted at a significant award the park recently received, details remain under wraps. Her ongoing dedication ensures that Lynch River County Park remains a dynamic hub for outdoor recreation, education and community connection.

PARK AND RECREATION MONTH

COME CELEBRATE WITH US THIS JULY!



THE MAGIC OF LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM By Ronette Genwright



Francina Youngblood Weeks

MARION—The warm embrace of community lies in shared experiences that inspire connection and growth. Parks and recreation programs stand as quintessential pillars of this ideal, transforming public spaces into vibrant hubs of activity, creativity and inclusivity. By fostering opportunities to thrive, they weave bonds that enrich lives and strengthen neighborhoods for generations to come.

Francina Youngblood Weeks, a resolute teacher at Creek Bridge STEM Academy in Marion County, South Carolina, exemplifies how educators extend this ideal into their classrooms. Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Week is the daughter of Cheryl Goodman and Bernard Youngblood. She graduated from Morris College with a bachelor's degree in health science and a minor in criminal justice. She is enrolled currently at the University of Phoenix pursuing a master's degree in elementary education. She is married to Brian Weeks, and they share the joy of raising two daughters, Brooke Alyse and Faith Cherelle.

Her dedication to teaching shows in her innovative methods, such as organizing educational field trips. For a variety of teachers, the decision to organize a field trip stems from both practical and aspirational motives. Now days, districts require annual excursions, but the true magic lies in how educators interpret these mandates. Field trips are planned to balance educational requirements with engaging activities, whether they align with curriculum standards or introduce students to new experiences.

Selecting the perfect location is both an art and a science. The destination must align with academic objectives while also sparking curiosity and excitement. For Weeks, the, "magical experience," of Myrtle Beach was the ideal choice. Close enough for logistical feasibility, yet offering an entirely new realm of discovery, this destination extended classroom lessons in a meaningful way. The underlying criterion for choosing a site is simple yet effective: it must allow students to connect their experiences to academic concepts.

Follow-up activities ensure the trip is a seamless extension of the classroom. For example, tasks tied to English and

Language Arts (ELA) standards help students reflect on their experiences while reinforcing curriculum objectives. These activities ensure that the trip is not just a fleeting moment but an integral part of their academic journey.

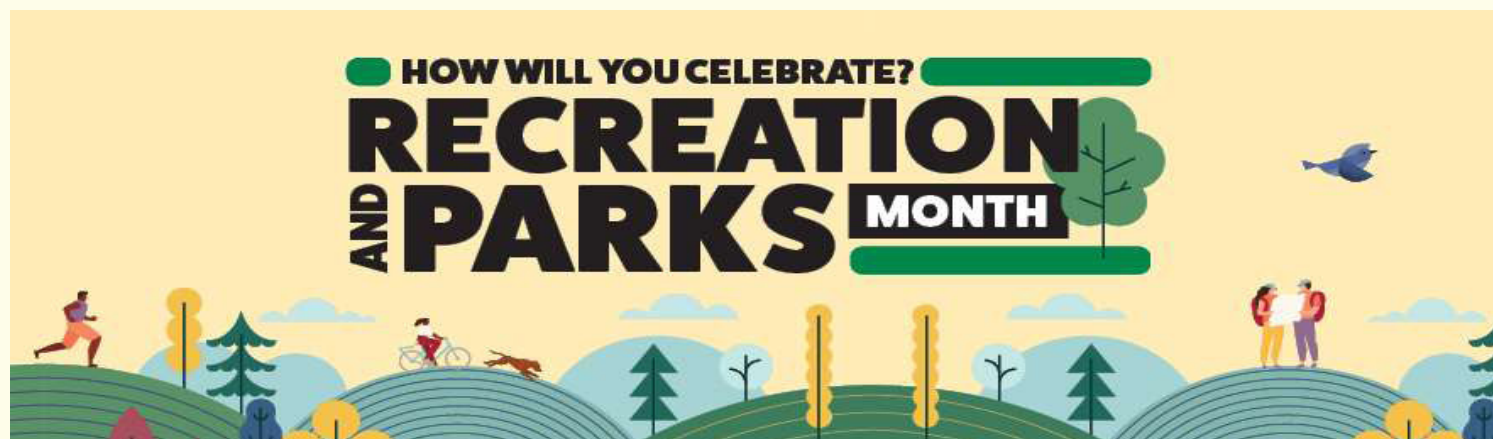
Meticulous planning is essential to a successful outing. Teachers often prepare weeks ahead, securing permission slips, setting expectations and laying down clear rules for participation. Behavioral preparation is equally critical. Students who understand the importance of following guidelines often rise to the occasion, demonstrating their best behavior on the day of the trip. For those requiring extra guidance, strategies like sitting with the teacher on the bus or exclusion from the outing serve as both accountability measures and motivators.

Logistical challenges are inevitable, but initiative-taking planning can mitigate potential issues. A common concern is providing meals for students. Weeks collaborated with cafeteria staff to prepare bagged lunches, ensuring no child went without food regardless of financial circumstances. This thoughtful approach resulted in a harmonious lunch break where every student enjoyed their meal, a small yet significant victory.

Safety remains paramount during field trips. Teachers employ various strategies, such as implementing the buddy system to ensure students are paired with dependable peers. Chaperones, often comprising of parents or staff, add an extra layer of supervision. Even venue selection can impact safety and organization. For instance, Weeks arranged for her students to visit a magical theater reserved exclusively for their group. This controlled environment allowed chaperones to focus entirely on the students, providing peace of mind while enabling immersive learning.

Field trips are transformative experiences that enrich education in ways traditional teaching methods cannot. By stepping into new environments, students gain fresh perspectives and engage in active learning that resonates beyond the classroom walls. For educators like Weeks, the effort required to organize such excursions is rewarded tenfold by the joy and growth observed in their students.

Whether exploring a magical destination like Myrtle Beach or delving into a local landmark, field trips remind us of the boundless possibilities of education. By weaving together creativity, curriculum and care, teachers open doors to unforgettable adventures, sparking a love of learning that lasts a lifetime.



GETTING OUTDOORS DOES YOUR BODY GOOD

The golden sunlight warming your skin, the rhythmic whisper of the wind through towering trees, and the steady, grounding sensation of the trail beneath your feet—these moments aren't just enjoyable, they're beneficial too. Spending time outdoors offers a wealth of health benefits, from the fresh air in your lungs to the mental and emotional peace found in nature's embrace.

Physical exercise such as walking the Florence Rail Trail is a full-body workout! That hike builds stronger muscles and bones, improves your sense of balance, decreases the risk of some respiratory issues, and improves your heart rate.

Immersing yourself in nature can uplift your mood and support mental well-being. Time spent outdoors helps ease stress, soothe anxiety, and even lowers the risk of depression, as shown in a study by Stanford University researchers. Beyond its mental health benefits, being outside heightens your awareness of your surroundings, sharpening sensory perception. With so many positive effects, connecting with nature is so beneficial that some doctors even prescribe it as a form of therapy.

Spending time outdoors doesn't have to be a solo adventure. Next time you head outside, invite a friend, neighbor, or family member to join you—it's a great way to make the experience even more enjoyable. Trekking with a companion or group can strengthen ties, creating opportunities for shared challenges and meaningful conversations. Outdoor exercise offers an ideal setting to bond with people of all ages. Whether it's with a sibling, a longtime friend, or even a grandparent, walking the trail together can deepen connections and foster a healthy, lasting relationship.

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1. **Move Naturally.** Choose activities like gardening that will get you moving.
2. **Know Your Purpose.** Share what you love to do while helping others.
3. **Down Shift.** Ease stress by sitting quietly in nature.
4. **80% Rule.** Eat until you feel 80% full.
5. **Plant Slant.** Increase intake of fruits and vegetables.
6. **Friends at Five.** Wrap up your workday and connect with family and friends.
7. **Positive Pack.** Proactively surround yourself with the right group of people.
8. **Belong.** Become involved in civic- or faith-based organizations.
9. **Loved Ones First.** Care for children and elders in your family.

More information may be found at f1s.org/BlueZones

Catherine K. Lee, D.S.L., M.B.A.

F1S Blue Zones Coordinator

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5 EASY WAYS TO HELP PROTECT OUR PARKS



Leave no trace.

Pack out all trash and belongings to keep parks pristine and preserve natural beauty.



Respect wildlife.

Observe animals from a distance and to maintain their natural behaviors, never feed them.



Stick to designated trails.

Use marked paths to protect fragile ecosystems and prevent soil erosion.



Use campsites responsibly.

Set up camp only in designated areas and follow fire safety protocols to minimize impact.

Educate and advocate.

Spread awareness about conservation efforts and support policies that protect park environments.



DISCOVER South Carolina

Check out VISITFLO.COM to find information on all of the parks and outdoor activities in Florence County.

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2025 ARTFIELDS COMPETITION WINNERS Submitted by ArtFields



OH LORD, I HAVE MY DOUBTS
2025 GRAND PRIZE WINNER
ARTIST: MITCHELL BURLESON
LEXINGTON, KY
ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

I am a Textile Designer from Clayton, NC. I discovered textile design and weaving. I graduated from the Wilson College of Textiles with a Bachelor of Science

in Fashion and Textile Design in May 2020. I continued my education at Haywood Community College in the Professional Crafts Program, studying under Amy Putansu completing the program in 2022. I am now a graduate student at the University of Kentucky.

Artist Website: [Mitchellweaves.com](https://mitchellweaves.com)

ARTIST STATEMENT

"Oh Lord, I Have My Doubts," is part of a series about the Southern Baptist Church. The work depicts the gates of heaven backed by a hazed weaving. My journey with substance abuse has shown that a higher power exists, but I don't know if what I've experienced in adulthood, is what I was promised as a child. Before finding my sobriety, I was not proud of the life I'd led. I've reflected on the person I was and who I would like to be in life. Will I ever see the gates of heaven? Oh Lord, I have my doubts.



OVERSEERSUCKER SUIT
(MCLEOD PLANTATION)
2025 SECOND PLACE WINNER
ARTIST: COLIN QUASHIE
CHARLESTON, SC
ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Colin Quashie was born in London, England in 1963 and raised in the West Indies. He

served as a naval submarine sonarman until honorably discharged in 1987 in Charleston, SC.

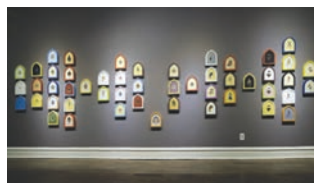
Quashie's creative journey is motivated by social issues. His art is a conduit to explore issues affecting Black America. His work often uneased audiences, which led to a series of censored exhibitions.

In 1996, he quit art and transitioned to screenwriting. His credits include producer and an Emmy for documentary writing. By 2005, his craft sharpened to a satirical edge. He quit art again and earned a bachelor's degree in nursing from MUSC. Quashie now works full time as an RN while producing his art.

Artist Website www.quashie.art

ARTIST STATEMENT

Seersucker is the iconic fabric of the South, associated with the refined attire of Southern gentlemen. In a region known for its humid climate, seersucker's qualities made it a practical choice. Its symbolism underscores the racial and social divides of the time. While white men comfortably wore seersucker suits, the enslaved wore threadbare remnants. The artist has recontextualized and rebranded seersucker as, "Overseersucker," by overprinting its lined pattern with the names of the enslaved. McLeod Plantation in Charleston, SC, offers a powerful commentary on the injustices of Southern slavery. This transformation challenges Southern heritage and reminds us of suppressed marginalized voices. This rebranding prompts us to reevaluate history and question the narratives that shape our perceptions.



DRIFT
2025 PEOPLE'S CHOICE
(2D) WINNER
ARTIST: ERIC STANDLEY
BLACKSBURG, VA
ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Eric Standley is a professor of studio art at Virginia Tech. His artworks are drawn, developed in vector software, cut with a laser and assembled by hand. He is represented by Eli Bronner of the Charles Moffit Gallery of NY, Dinner Gallery of NY and Media Force of Tokyo Japan. Standley has exhibited in 146 museums and galleries around the world. His artworks are part of the permanent collections of the Haegeumgang Theme Museum, South Korea, the Palace of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, the Scherenschmitt Museum, Vreden, Germany and The Zupi Collection of São Paulo, Brazil.

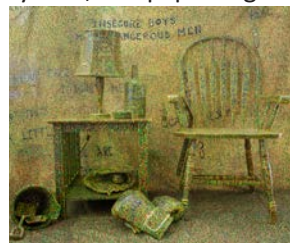
Artist Website www.eric-standley.com

ARTIST STATEMENT

"Drift," was a yearlong, weekly routine and performance that enacted a pseudo-Darwinian model of variety and natural selection. Relationships between patterns, cognition and improvisation were disrupted by choosing from the following prompts:

- Elaborate on the previous week's work
- Create the opposite of the previous week's work
- Abandon the previous week's work

The individual compositions within the installation constitute a species. The constraints of the prompts, time, medium, technique and size are heritable traits. Some compositions were duplicated within a week's time, others never made it to paper. Love is the root interval of my value system, and paper aligns as humble, vulnerable and fragile.



ALL THE TERRIBLE THINGS
2025 PEOPLE'S CHOICE (3D)
WINNER

ARTIST: JOE QUINN
MYRTLE BEACH, SC
ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

I am a multi-medium artist working in 2D, 3D and digital art.

My primary mediums are painting, drawing, printmaking, photography and installation. My work is an outward manifestation of my own internal dialogue and reaction to a tumultuous and information overloaded world. My imagery comes from a muscle memory of engagement within the blue-collar environs of NYC during the 1970s and 80s, and its intersection with Southern culture. My work speaks in a contemporary sense to current history and subject matter.

Originally from NYC, living on the South Carolina coast, Quinn holds an MFA in fine art from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, and a BA in studio art from CCU. Quinn serves as adjunct professor of art at HGTC in Conway. **Artist Website** www.joequinnimages.com

ARTIST STATEMENT

"All the Terrible Things," explores the dynamics of the ritualistic and abusive relationship by a father. The false narrative of violence, verbal abuse and the wielding of fear and anger as symbolic of masculinity is depicted as if through the eyes of a child. The work serves as an artistic laboratory and memory box of overwhelming linework and mark-making. Each piece is from a direct recollection of the artist.

OLD WAYS BY NEW MEANS

An immersive, multi-gallery art experience at
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Narzhio Clavonboy Stuckey

During American Artist Appreciation Month, we explore the limitless realm of artistic expression. This celebration honors the creativity of artists whose works enrich our lives, offering unique insights into diverse cultures, histories and perspectives. Through mediums such as painting, sculpture, photography and digital art, artists connect us emotionally, inspire dialogue and bridge divides. This month serves as an opportunity to recognize the transformative power of art and the talents that bring these masterpieces to life.

Narzhio Clavonboy Stuckey, born Nov. 2, 1981, in Florence, South Carolina, to Alphonso Washington and Shirley Stuckey, has a personal and profound relationship with art. After receiving his GED from Poyner Adult Education Center in Florence, he built a life with his wife, LaShana Stuckey, and their three children, Treazure, Zahir and Storm, along with their cherished pit bull, He-Man. Stuckey's artistic journey began in his youth, demonstrating exceptional talent in elementary school, with one of his drawings earning a place in the Columbia Museum.

One of Stuckey's significant influences is William H. Johnson, a fellow native of Florence, whose works shaped his artistic perspective. He admires Johnson not only for his artistry but also for the shared experiences of mental illness and resilience. Stuckey emphasizes that Johnson's contributions often receive less recognition compared to artists like Vincent van Gogh, highlighting the challenges faced by Black artists whose works frequently carry the weight of personal and cultural pain.

Stuckey reflects on his self-taught painting skills, which emerged in 2008, a pivotal year marked by a personal struggle with mental health. He attributes his journey into acrylic paint to an intense period of suicidal depression, stating that his last suicide attempt coincided with the day he began painting in April 2008. He views art as an outlet for emotional expression and healing, a perspective that informs his deep appreciation for American art and its role in the community.

According to Stuckey, Black artists paint with a distinct depth rooted in their lived experiences as African Americans or Indigenous Americans, contributing profoundly to shaping culture. He calls attention to the broader spectrum of art displayed in museums today, celebrating the diversity of cultural backgrounds represented, such as Mexican, African, Indian and Chinese art. These exhibits foster connections, allowing visitors, especially children, to relate to and appreciate works that resonate with their cultural identities.

Stuckey also acknowledges the transformative power of art in public spaces. He draws parallels between the graffiti on moving trains and murals in airports, noting how these forms of art transcend geographic boundaries. He observes that modern technology such as social media platforms have significantly expanded the reach of art, enabling artists to share their work with a global audience.

Reflecting on changes from 1992 to the present, Stuckey describes the evolution of artistic freedom, likening it to freedom of speech. He sees contemporary art as a platform for individuals

to express their innate talents and connect with the world. Art is not limited by age or circumstance. He advocates for greater involvement of children in art to provide them with an emotional outlet, particularly for those dealing with abuse or depression. For Stuckey, art is a universal language, accessible to everyone — from children with coloring books to seniors in nursing homes.

Stuckey has an abstract painting in his studio titled "Patience in a Dying America," a



Painting entitled
There is a Way

work he describes as a reflection of the racial tensions that persist across the United States. He notes that the piece holds deep personal significance and has had a lasting emotional impact on him. In 2020, he also completed a mural of George Floyd in Florence, South Carolina, which garnered national recognition through coverage by NBC. To aspiring artists, Stuckey offers the following advice: remain consistent in your practice, maintain confidence in your abilities and invest in building a strong professional network.

THE ARTISTIC JOURNEY OF JASMYN BINES



Jasmyn Bines pictured with her artwork

Since its official recognition in 1992, American Art Appreciation Month has evolved into a vibrant celebration of creativity across the United States. Each August, the occasion invites us to reflect on the transformative power of art — not merely as decoration, but as a reflection of culture, emotion and identity. From the bold strokes of a mural in a city alleyway to the quiet elegance of a portrait in a gallery, art shapes how we perceive the world and ourselves. This month, whether you are flipping through a sketchbook, strolling through a museum or discovering a new artist online, take a moment to appreciate the stories behind the canvas. Art is not only something we observe; it is something we feel.

Jasmyn Bines, 33, was born in Florence, South Carolina, to Cynthia Bines. She relocated to Connecticut at the age of seven and graduated from Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk. Bines is one of six siblings and is a single parent to her 11-year-old son, Mason. Approximately 10 years ago, she returned to Florence.

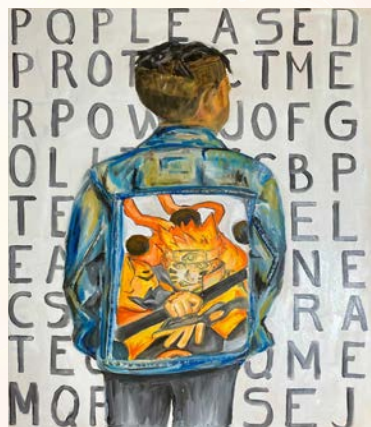
Bines is a portrait artist who works primarily in oil paint on canvas. She frequently receives commissions, recreating client-submitted photographs as fine art pieces. In addition to commissioned work, she also produces original paintings that reflect her personal creativity and perspective.

"Art Appreciation Month is important to me because there weren't a lot of people I grew up with that I could look up to," Bines said. "Art is something I picked up one day as a way to escape the hardships I faced as a child, and it turned into something profitable and something I fell in love with — it became my profession." She shared that receiving recognition for her work holds deep meaning both professionally and personally.

Bines reflected on how she was once the girl quietly drawing in a corner, and now she finds herself honored to be interviewed and featured in a magazine. She believes American artists contribute to the nation's cultural heritage by visually representing the country's evolving story and the various interpretations of what America is and what it may become. In her view, American artists are distinguished by the country's cultural diversity, which offers a unique perspective compared to the more singular viewpoints often seen in other nations.

She cited Charleston-based artist John W. Jones as a recent source of inspiration. After attending his exhibition at the Gately Museum in downtown Florence, Bines was moved by his acrylic work, which reimagines slave auction postings. Jones' collaboration with

THE ARTISTIC JOURNEY CONT'D



Jasmyrn painted this piece as a letter to society asking them to PLEASE PROTECT her son. Too often, young Black boys are misjudged, perceived as threats before they're ever given a chance to speak or simply be. Like so many mothers, she sees her child as her moon and her stars. Yet, with that love comes a constant fear: will he make it home safely from the park, the store, church, or even his own front yard?

This piece is the most meaningful work that she ever created. It's not just a painting—it's a mother's voice, raw and vulnerable, asking the world not to let her child become another statistic.

a descendant of a prominent Charleston slave trader added historical depth and emotional power to the exhibition.

Bines shared that she endured significant hardship as a child, including time spent living in shelters. Art became a crucial outlet for her — a tool she used to process her experiences. While her siblings did not share this creative outlet, it became her way of navigating emotional pain. In 2023, she lost her brother, a tragedy that inspired her to establish a nonprofit organization in his memory. Her organization, Empty Arms, is dedicated to providing children with opportunities to explore their artistic or other talents, with the goal of guiding them away from destructive paths.

Bines also recalled attending a gallery exhibition while in college in New Hampshire, where she encountered an oil pastel on paper that left a lasting impression. It was during that moment, she said, that she understood the power of communicating through art.

To aspiring artists seeking to make their mark both locally and nationally, Bines offers this advice: never give up. She acknowledged that there were moments when she considered walking away from her art, but ultimately, it became her therapy and her purpose.

THE CREATIVE VISION OF CREGORY ADAMS

By Cynthia O. Ford



Cregory Adams

MARION — In the heart of Marion County, South Carolina, a bold voice in theater is challenging audiences to ask deeper questions and see themselves in the stories that unfold on stage. Cregory Adams, playwright, director and founder of Sigma Male Productions, is using the power of live performance to reflect real-life experiences, spark conversation and give underrepresented voices a platform.

Adams has written and produced four original plays: "Am I Toxic," "You Know Your Mama Can't Cook," "Am I Toxic II" and "Submission." Each work is rooted in real-life scenarios and designed to confront emotional and relational complexities that are often hidden behind silence. These productions are carefully written to resonate with universal themes, challenging assumptions, exposing truth and evoking strong emotional responses.

Adams' creative journey began during his years in the Marion High School band under the leadership of Michael Fox. That experience sparked a love for the arts and opened the door to creative writing. He began writing short stories that ignited something lasting: a belief in the power of words to captivate and connect.

His debut production, "Am I Toxic," marked a turning point. "It

THE CREATIVE VISION CONT'D

was therapeutic," Adams shared. "Seeing something come to life from start to finish helped me process my own experiences." That vulnerability now defines his artistic voice.

Adams' plays are carefully crafted to challenge perspectives, confront hard truths and move audiences emotionally. His inspiration comes from lived experience and cultural observation. Whether exploring toxic relationships, self-worth or emotional healing, his themes are built around one central idea: making people feel seen. "Each play starts with a word or a moment of clarity," he explained. "From there, I build the message."

Musical influences also shape his writing style. He credits Gil Scott-Heron's spoken word as a pivotal artistic influence, especially the powerful rhythm of "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." Additionally, the harmonies of Boyz II Men taught him how to balance peace and chaos in his storytelling.

Adams' company provides playwrighting, directing and production services while also nurturing emerging artists. He works with local talent to bring his visions to life and often builds characters around the people he knows. "It's something magical when people see a version of themselves on stage," he shared. "That kind of representation matters."

In a world often driven by digital content, Adams sees theater as a sacred space for connection. "The stage is more personal than TV. It can't be edited," he explained. "It's raw, it's honest and it reaches people in a way that screens can't."

He believes theater is especially vital for underrepresented voices. "Theater gives people the power to express themselves, whether verbally or nonverbally. It pulls something from the pit of the soul." For Adams, the power of art lies in its ability to evoke transformation — not just applause.

His work has been both celebrated and scrutinized, but as a producer, he sees adversity as fuel. "The challenges made me work harder. They made me sharpen my gift," he said.

Adams is now expanding beyond the stage. He is in production for a television drama titled, "Seventh Avenue," a series following the lives of seven couples as they navigate seven major relationship challenges. Also in development is "The Am I Toxic Series," adapted from his original play.

His long-term vision is to take his work worldwide while remaining rooted in community. He is passionate about mentoring shy but talented creatives who just need an opportunity. "I want to give people a chance to see if they can do it," he said. "That transformation — from doubt to discovery — is powerful." American Artist Appreciation Month carries deep meaning for Adams. "Personally, it gives me an avenue to express myself and be appreciated. Professionally, it's a canvas, a space to be who we are, use our imagination and share it with anyone who's willing to receive it."

He encourages communities to support local creatives not just by attending shows but by advocating for arts education. "Support your school boards. Arts programs enhance everything — math, science and life. Just show up. Encourage and be present."

When audiences leave one of his plays, Adams hopes they walk away with one thing: a question. "I want them to ask, 'Why?' and 'What's next?'" he said. "That's how change begins."

Through his courage, clarity and creativity, Adams is redefining what it means to produce art that matters. He doesn't seek permission. He seeks truth — and in doing so, he inspires others to do the same.

To learn more, visit Sigma Male Productions on Facebook or YouTube. For inquiries, call 803-426-9775 or email sigmamaleoriginalproductions@gmail.com

FLORENCE COUNTY MUSEUM: A LEGACY OF ART & HISTORY By Les Echols



Andrew R. Stout

The Florence County Museum has established itself as a key cultural institution in the Pee Dee region, offering visitors a rich blend of art, history and educational programs. Since its opening in October 2014, the museum has become a vibrant gathering space dedicated to preserving the unique stories of Florence County while highlighting the broader context of Southern art and culture.

The museum's origins trace back to the early 2000s when plans were set in motion to expand the original Florence Museum, then located on Spruce Street. Andrew R. Stout, who earned a Bachelor of Arts in Art Education from Francis Marion University in 2003, and a Master of Education in 2007, later studied museum management at the University of South Carolina. He began his career at the museum as curator of education in 2001. He became director in 2006 and was instrumental in guiding the museum through its transition and growth. Stout



Opening reception of *Fighters For Freedom*: William H. Johnson Picturing Justice on loan from the Smithsonian American Art Museum

played a key role in planning, securing funding, developing operational policies and building a professional staff to meet the museum's expanding mission.

Today, the Florence County Museum houses an extensive collection that includes the, "Wright Collection of

Southern Art," acquired in 2013, and important works by Florence native William H. Johnson. The museum regularly features exhibitions that showcase regional artists, historical themes and contemporary perspectives. Notably, the Eastern Carolina

Contemporary Biennial exhibition highlights local creative voices and reflects the museum's commitment to diversity in the arts.

Beyond exhibitions, the museum maintains a strong focus on education and community engagement. Monthly Family Day events, guided tours and Art After Hours programs provide accessible opportunities for visitors of all ages to explore and connect with the arts. The museum also organizes tours for schools and community groups, supporting lifelong learning and cultural appreciation.

The museum's achievements are the result of collaboration among curators, educators, volunteers and local stakeholders, all supported by steady leadership. Under Stout's direction and with his involvement in establishing the Florence County Museum Foundation, the institution remains committed to being a welcoming, relevant and inclusive space.

More than just a building, the Florence County Museum serves as a cultural hub that reflects the rich heritage of Florence County. Through its collections, exhibitions and programs, it continues to honor the past while inspiring the community's future generations.



Students from Sneed Middle School learning about artist and Florence native, William H. Johnson

FMU PAC ANNOUNCES 2025-2026 SPOTLIGHT SERIES By Les Echols



The FMU Performing Arts Center is pleased to announce its 2025-2026 Spotlight Series.

The season opens with Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee Don Felder, formerly of The Eagles. Best known for co-writing and performing, "Hotel California," Felder also received writing credits for, "Victim of Love" and "Those Shoes." He has released four solo albums, including, "The Vault (Fifty Years of Music)," which reflects on his five-decade career in the music industry.

Following Felder's performance is The Righteous Brothers, "Lovin' Feeling Farewell Tour," a captivating musical journey that spans the early days of rock and roll. From heartfelt ballads to high-energy anthems, the show will feature decades of iconic hits

including, "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," "Unchained Melody" and "(I've Had) The Time of My Life."

Next, Floyd Nation will take the stage, performing the music of Pink Floyd. Commemorating 50 years since the band began producing new music at the renowned Abbey Road Studios, Floyd Nation pays tribute to the artistry, legacy and spirit of the legendary group.

Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives will follow with a performance featuring selections from their latest release, "Space Junk." With a career spanning more than 50 years, numerous albums and countless live shows, Stuart and his longtime band continue to explore new creative horizons.

The 2026 portion of the series begins with, "Direct from Sweden – The Music of ABBA." Audiences can expect a vibrant evening filled with beloved hits such as, "Dancing Queen," "Chiquitita," "Waterloo" and "Mamma Mia."

In February, "Alfreda Sings The Divas of Soul," will honor the groundbreaking contributions of iconic female vocalists, including Aretha Franklin, Tina Turner and others, delivering a powerful tribute to the genre's most celebrated voices.

Gary Lewis and the Playboys will take the spotlight next. With eight gold singles, 17 Top 40 hits, four gold albums and more than 45 million records sold worldwide, the

band will perform favorites such as "This Diamond Ring," "Save Your Heart for Me," "Everybody Loves a Clown" and "She's Just My Style."

Concluding the season is Women of Americana, a lively exploration of the Americana genre and its influential role in shaping American music.

Performance dates are as follows:

- Don Felder – Sunday, Sept. 7, 2025
- The Righteous Brothers – Friday, Oct. 10, 2025
- Floyd Nation – Thursday, Oct. 23, 2025
- Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives – Thursday, Nov. 13, 2025
- Direct from Sweden – The Music of ABBA – Friday, Jan. 23, 2026
- Alfreda Sings The Divas of Soul – Friday, Feb. 6, 2026
- Gary Lewis and the Playboys – Saturday, March 14, 2026
- Women of Americana – Thursday, April 16, 2026

Single tickets and the popular Buy 4 PAC promotion will go on sale at noon on Monday, June 9. With Buy 4 PAC, guests can save 10 percent or more when selecting four or more shows during the 2025-2026 season. Tickets may be purchased online at www.fmupac.org, by phone at 843-661-4444, or in person at the PAC Ticket Office.

For additional information or to purchase tickets, visit www.fmupac.org.

K. JEANETTE SHARES FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT THROUGH SONG By Glaciria Brown Mason



Artist K. Jeanette

For over 30 years, August has been the time set aside by the U.S. Congress to celebrate American Artists Appreciation Month. No matter what form of art you appreciate, during this time, we recognize artists' contributions to our cultural heritage. Local Songstress Kimberly Jeanette Cooper, (K. Jeanette, her stage name), is self-described as, "A woman who loves God and loves people. I am churchy as I've been told. I love children and am passionate about helping people in need. I feel that if I can help one person, I will have made God happy with my ministry. I love worship and I love to sing his praises. If I can minister to one person and help them come to Christ, I've done what the Lord says."

When not dedicating her time to her music, Cooper serves as a call center

operations manager at PGBA, a subsidiary of Blue Cross Blue Shield, where she has dedicated 29 years to her career. Cooper manages the performance of 20-25 health insurance associates and earned the elevation to manager one and a half years ago.

Cooper's love for music came at an early age and she began singing around the age of five, at New Providence United Methodist Church in Darlington, SC. While her musical gift affords her the ability to sing a myriad of different genres, Cooper's preference is concentrated on gospel quartet. Cooper has sung for audiences throughout her life but began singing professionally in 2018. She performs at local churches, weddings, festivals, praise in the park and other regional events, as requested. Her goal is to minister to the masses with the hope that one person comes to know God through the message from her ministry. "Then I am satisfied," she says.

Cooper's gospel music career is managed by Devine Management LLC, Manager Kenneth Smith. She proudly beams over her recent single, "Shine," released November 1, 2024. Shine can be found on Spotify and Apple music. Cooper is appreciative to have received a City of Darlington Proclamation on March 22, 2025, as well as a proclamation from the State of SC on April 13, 2025.

Artist Cooper absolutely loves what

she does. She is inspired by and holds admiration for many fellow artists, some being: The Sensational Brown Brothers of Florence, SC; Lisa Knowles; Ronica & The Blazing Stars, among others. Cooper is currently working on completing her album project where she can continue to let God use her in ministry. "I get to share my gift; the gift God gave me, with the world and it's an added bonus if someone gives their life to God," shared Cooper.

With a large network of family and friends who are always in her corner, Cooper is grateful for their support of her dreams and vision. One such dream close to her heart, is in memory of her late mother, Mrs. Edith Mae King. Cooper founded the Edith Mae King Foundation, with the mission to assist those who go through breast cancer with any needs they may face during their journey. The foundation held its kickoff event last year, a children's sneaker ball.

Cooper is the youngest of five, with siblings: Howard King Jr., Jesse King Sr., Calvin King Sr., and Sonya King-Barr. A native of Darlington, SC, Cooper attend Mayo High School, and earned both an associate degree and a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work from Limestone University in Gaffney, SC. Cooper is married to her amazing husband Marvin D. Cooper, and they share four amazing children: Tamara, Tierra, Treyvon and Tristan.

SMALL WORKS 2025

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BELLA CEBREIROS: FINDING HER VOICE By Cynthia O. Ford



Bella Cebreiros

MARION — Each August, American Artist Appreciation Month offers a powerful reminder of how creativity shapes culture, inspires communities and provides a vital outlet for expression, particularly among youth. From murals that tell the story of a neighborhood to sketches that capture unspoken emotion, art holds the power to influence how we view the world and ourselves. This month, Diversity Works Magazine honors that spirit

by spotlighting rising artists whose work reflects more than talent—it reflects heart, perspective and purpose.

One such emerging talent is 13-year-old Bella Cebreiros. Equal parts artist, cheerleader and academic standout, Cebreiros is already cultivating a voice that resonates far beyond her sketchpad. Her story is a celebration of how art can help young people explore identity, process emotions and inspire others, all while reminding us that creativity knows no age limit.

Cebreiros traces the beginning of her artistic journey to early childhood, filled with creative encouragement. “My mom put art in our heads early on,” she said. “I would draw and paint anything I could. I picked it up naturally because I enjoyed everything involving art.” While many of her peers turned to screens for entertainment, Cebreiros reached for notebooks—transforming quiet moments into bursts of creative expression.

Although she explores a variety of styles, she is especially drawn to landscapes and discovering meaning in small, often overlooked details. “I like to look at a picture and find something in it that others might miss,” she said. “I try to make a lesson out of what I draw.” Her artwork is a blend of observation and introspection—lessons embedded in brushstrokes and shaded lines.

Much of her inspiration comes from real-life experiences and emotional moments shared with family and friends. “When I draw, I feel free and open-minded,” she said. “A canvas is like free fall—you can do anything with it.”

Cebreiros finds motivation in two key figures: Bob Ross, whose calm approach to painting taught her not to fear mistakes, and her mother, whose early support helped build her confidence. “You don’t have to know what you’re doing—just do it. If I mess up, I just turn it into something else,” she explained. “And my mom always said, even if you think you can’t, just try.”

She prefers solitude when creating. “I might start a piece in the middle of the night,” she said. “I need quiet to focus. I enjoy every moment of the process when I’m alone.”

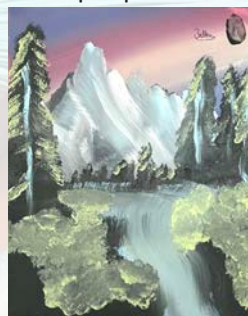
Despite her passion, Cebreiros acknowledges that sharing her art has not always come easily. “I couldn’t just walk up to people and say I’m an artist,” she said. “My mom would introduce me, then I’d go from there.” Over time, she has pushed past doubt by adopting a simple philosophy: “If you don’t use it, you lose it.”

Even when a piece does not turn out as planned, Cebreiros remains committed to the process. “I make the best out of it,” she said. “It might not look like I planned, but it could be worse—and I always try my hardest. I won’t stop until I like it.” Cebreiros views her art as a mirror for emotions, growth and perspective. “I hope people see what I see,” she said. “I get lessons out of my art, and I want them to find something in it too.” Her goal is to inspire others, especially young people, to pick up a pencil or paintbrush and explore the possibilities within themselves.

“Art helps your mind grow,” she added. “It’s a language. In a loud room, everything can go quiet when you’re looking at a painting. Something so small can create something so big.”

Her aspirations reflect both humility and vision. “When I go to college, I don’t want art to be my major, but I don’t want to forget what I can do either,” she said. She is considering a future in architecture or public speaking, though she intends to keep art as part of her life’s journey. “There are so many opportunities out there.”

Cebreiros dreams of sharing her work beyond her immediate circle — through online galleries, community showcases or murals in her hometown. “I want people to see what I have,” she said. “Not just my family or friends, but everyone.” If given the opportunity to paint a mural in Marion County, she said it would reflect its structure, history and people. “It would be motivational and beautiful — a message to let people know what Marion County holds.”



Twilight Peaks

Being recognized during Artist Appreciation Month holds deep significance for Cebreiros. “I felt supported,” she said. “Like my art meant something. It feels like a beginning.”

To other young people who love art but may hesitate to share their work, she offers simple but powerful advice: “Do it scared. If you mess up, try again. It’s your art and your feelings—don’t stop.”





Samuel Tomlinson, MD

A healthy prostate is an important aspect of overall well-being for men. The prostate is a gland about the size and shape of a walnut that plays an important part in male reproduction. It is located below the bladder and in front of the rectum. A tube called the urethra runs through the center of the prostate gland and carries urine from the bladder to exit outside the body.

The main functions of the prostate are to help make semen, the fluid that carries sperm, aid in pumping out sperm during sex, act as a filter to protect sperm from toxins and produce hormones responsible for the male sex drive.

Most men will have some kind of prostate issue during their lifetime, with symptoms that can affect urination and/or sexual function. Medical issues such as inflammation, enlargement or cancer of the prostate can press on or restrict the urethra and cause symptoms affecting urination. Urinary and sexual symptoms vary widely in men and can range from none to mild, moderate to severe.

Prostatitis is when the prostate becomes inflamed. The two types are acute prostatitis and chronic prostatitis. There are a variety of medications to help manage symptoms of both acute and chronic prostatitis.

Acute prostatitis is caused by an infection, which is usually bacterial, and symptoms include sudden painful urination, a weaker urine stream, chills and fever. It is typically treated with antibiotics.

Chronic prostatitis, also known as chronic pelvic pain syndrome, includes symptoms of persistent or recurring discomfort, pain or burning with urination, an increased urge to urinate, difficulty emptying the bladder and/or pain with ejaculation. While the exact cause of chronic prostatitis is often unknown, it is linked to chronic inflammation with or without infection.

Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) is commonly referred to as an enlarged prostate. This is a common, non-cancerous medical condition that happens as men age. It usually occurs after age 50, when the prostate may even double or triple in size. While the size of the prostate does not always cause symptoms, the most common symptoms are related to urination.

Symptoms can include a frequent or urgent need to urinate, urinating more at night (typically two to four times), difficulty starting urination, a weak or start-and-stop stream, dribbling or an inability to fully empty the bladder. Less common symptoms include urinary tract infections, blood in the urine or not being able to urinate. The inability to urinate is a medical emergency, as this can damage the kidneys and increase PSA, a prostate-related substance in the blood, if not treated quickly. BPH can also affect sexual function, causing a decreased sex drive or erectile dysfunction.

There are many treatments for BPH, including medications, surgery and other minimally invasive procedures. The type of treatment depends on the symptoms, the size of the prostate and any other health

conditions a man may have. Men can make an informed decision about treatment for BPH by discussing symptoms and treatment with their primary health care provider.

Men with higher levels of testosterone or who have jobs or hobbies that may irritate the prostate, such as riding horses, motorcycles, bicycles or operating tractors and backhoes, may be at an increased risk of prostatitis and BPH over time.

Prostate cancer affects one in eight men in the United States at some point in their lives and the risk increases with age. The risk of prostate cancer is higher in African American men and in those with a family history or positive genetic testing for prostate cancer.

The good news is the chance of dying from prostate cancer is low since most prostate cancers are slow-growing. Prostate cancer screening guidelines are as follows:

- Age 50 for men at average risk of prostate cancer and expected to live at least 10 more years.
- Age 45 for men at high risk of developing prostate cancer. This includes African American men and men who have a first-degree relative (father or brother) diagnosed with prostate cancer before age 65.
- Age 40 for men at even higher risk or those with more than one first-degree relative diagnosed with prostate cancer before age 65.

The screening for prostate cancer is a simple blood test called PSA or prostate-specific antigen. Slightly elevated levels of PSA may be normal, but increased levels may indicate the presence of prostate cancer. A digital rectal exam may also be completed. Other tests to confirm the diagnosis of prostate cancer include imaging tests and biopsies. PSA tests may be recommended annually or bi-annually depending on risk status. Prostate cancer is easier to treat and cure if caught early. It is recommended that men talk to their primary health care provider about prostate cancer screening and follow-up testing.

If prostate cancer is diagnosed, there are many treatments available, including active surveillance for slow-growing cancers with further testing at scheduled intervals, surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy. Working with a urologist and/or oncologist along with the primary health care provider to develop a treatment plan can help men make the best decision for themselves.

A healthy lifestyle can help men lower their risk of developing prostate problems. Maintaining a healthy weight, getting regular physical activity, consuming a healthy diet, managing stress and getting adequate rest are all part of the equation to lower the risk of prostate issues as well as other lifestyle-related conditions like diabetes and heart disease. Developing a relationship with a health care provider built on trust and honest conversations can help men make informed decisions on when to screen for prostate cancer and opens a dialogue for when prostate or other medical issues arise.

Tomlinson is a family medicine physician serving patients at HopeHealth in Kingstree and is accepting new patients. Call 843-355-5628 or visit hope-health.org for more information.



KNOW THE RISK. GET THE TEST. PROTECT YOUR FUTURE.

PROSTATE CANCER SCREENINGS SAVE LIVES

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among men in South Carolina—and Black men are nearly twice as likely to die from it. But when caught early, it's highly treatable. The South Carolina Cancer Alliance is committed to saving lives through education, free screening events, and access to care.

If you're 40 or older or have a family history of cancer, talk to your doctor or find a free screening near you.

Get informed. Get screened. Your life matters.

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PROSTATE CANCER AWARENESS: BREAKING THE SILENCE, SAVING LIVES By Cynthia O. Ford



Tyron Wilson

HEMINGWAY — In the fight against prostate cancer, one man is helping communities speak up, get tested and prioritize their health.

Each September, Prostate Cancer Awareness Month reminds us of the critical importance of education, early detection and support for men facing one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths. Launched in 1989, this national observance highlights the need for increased access to screenings and trusted information about treatment options. The South Carolina Cancer Alliance is one of the key players driving these efforts, especially in communities of color where awareness and access are often limited. Among its most passionate advocates is Tyron Wilson, an engagement specialist and community leader from the St. Mark Community in the Hemingway area of South Carolina.

"My job is to go into different communities, find leaders and form partnerships with churches and organizations to spread awareness about prostate cancer," Wilson explained. He brings over 20 years of experience working in community outreach. Before joining the Alliance, he served as a senior companion director with Neighbor to Neighbor, where he helped seniors acquire transportation to medical appointments. "I've always loved anything dealing with community," he said. That same passion led him to establish the nonprofit Tyron Wilson Let Us Mentor Teens Project seven years ago, which serves youth in Williamsburg and Georgetown counties. "We are a hands-on

program that starts working with youth from age ten. We take them outside their communities to show them there is more to life."

"Men are dying at a higher rate. They don't realize it's as simple as taking a blood test. That's why we have to make sure the information is out there," Wilson said. "There are options, and people need to know what those options are."

Prostate cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death in men. According to Wilson, the main reason for this alarming statistic is simple—many men are not going to the doctor. "Prostate cancer grows at a slower rate than most cancers, so if you catch it early, you can manage it. But everything comes back to awareness and letting men know it is okay to go to the doctor."

Part of the problem is rooted in misconceptions. "I've had people tell me they don't want to know. Some believe the test itself will make them sick," Wilson said. "Many don't even realize it's just a simple blood test." Although Wilson has only been part of the Alliance for a short time, he's already led four to six outreach events across the state. He also emphasizes the role of women and families in this fight. "Spouses have to support their men in going to the doctor. It matters."

Early detection, he emphasized, is key. "The earlier you get tested, the better the chance of saving your life. Providers come out to community events and do the blood test, and the results are sent within five to seven days. We help connect people to local providers like HopeHealth and McLeod. Our goal is to get them in the door so they'll take their health seriously."

He believes trust in the healthcare system is improving but remains a challenge. "Healthcare systems are doing more now. They've got community engagement coordinators and are really

PROSTATE CANCER AWARENESS CONT'D

trying to partner with organizations like ours. But it is still up to the community to take advantage of those opportunities.”

Wilson stresses that families have a critical role to play in supporting men’s health. “We have to stop treating prostate health like it’s a secret. I’ve had people thank us for talking about it openly. Older generations didn’t talk about these things, but we need to break that cycle. Encourage your loved ones to get tested, take time off work and tap into resources if they don’t have insurance.”

Breaking the stigma starts with communication. “You’ve got to be careful with your language,” Wilson said. “Meet people where they are. Speak plainly about the test, what the results mean, and what happens next. Don’t scare them—educate them.”

One of the most powerful moments in Wilson’s journey

came before he even joined the Alliance. “I had never heard of them before I became part of the team,” he said. “Now, I get to help save lives. It means everything to see the smiles on people’s faces when they get good news or reconnect with family at one of our events.”

His message to men is heartfelt and direct. “Think about your family. Your job will still be there. Take half a day and go to the doctor. For those who love them—make sure the men in your life are getting checked out. Encourage them to get health insurance. There are options out there.”

As he continues traveling the state, spreading awareness one conversation at a time, Wilson leaves men with this simple truth: “Focus more on your health so you’ll be around longer—for yourself and the people who love you.” For more information or to contribute to this organization visit www.sccancer.org.

LEADING WITH FAITH: A SURVIVOR'S MESSAGE TO MEN EVERYWHERE By Cynthia O. Ford



Representative Terry Alexander

Prostate cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths among men in the United States, according to the American Cancer Society. While it often develops without noticeable symptoms, early detection can make all the difference. For Terry Alexander of Florence, South Carolina, that difference came through routine checkups, faith and a profound commitment to men’s health advocacy.

Born and raised in Florence, Rep. Alexander has long been a pillar of service. A graduate of Francis Marion University and Howard University’s School of Divinity, he currently serves in the South Carolina General Assembly and as the interim pastor of Monumental Baptist Church. Deeply engaged in his community for decades, he never imagined he would become a spokesperson for the very health issues he sought to address.

“I had been seeing my doctor twice a year since I was 49,” Alexander shared. “In 2019, I was diagnosed. I had no symptoms. I went to the gym, didn’t consume red meat, pork, fried food or sodas. Because of those regular checkups, they caught it early.” Though the cancer was initially too small to act upon, his diligence allowed doctors to monitor it closely. Eventually, he faced a choice: surgery or radiation. “I chose radiation,” he said, recalling the process that required 28 consecutive days of treatment. “Because I caught it early, it wasn’t as bad. It’s one of the easier cancers to deal with—if you catch it.”

His diagnosis, however, triggered more than just medical decisions. “I’m in ministry. I’ve led a prayer ministry every morning since 2012,” he said. “There’s a direct connection between faith and healing. I trusted in that power. For nine months, only my wife, siblings and children knew. I didn’t want anything interfering with my healing.”

Even before his diagnosis, Alexander had been working to raise awareness about men’s health, establishing a men’s health initiative in Florence and convening monthly meetings at Hope Health to encourage dialogue about mental, physical and emotional health. “When one person is sick, it affects the whole family,” he explained. “I didn’t know I’d become a spokesperson, but now I can talk about it.”

He emphasized how easily prostate cancer can be detected today. “It’s just a simple blood test. The issue is we’re afraid of what might be living in us. But if you don’t know, you can’t do anything about it.” As a hospital chaplain, he witnessed firsthand the consequences of avoiding checkups. “I challenge men, especially Black men, to get checked regularly.”

His family and faith became his anchor. “They were prayerful. I texted them every day before leaving for treatment. If I’m going to preach about the power of prayer, I had to live it when it hit me.” His church members did not know he was undergoing treatment until it was completed. “I wanted to stay focused.”

Access to health care in vulnerable communities remains one of his chief concerns. “Transportation, insurance and affordability are still big issues,” he said. “Even with insurance, there remains concerns. We’ve filed thousands of legislative pieces, but very few get passed. I am working to make care more accessible for everyone.”

For newly diagnosed men, his advice is simple but firm: “Follow the doctor’s advice. Get a second opinion if you need to but listen. If you knew what to do, you wouldn’t need a doctor. Make a choice and stay in touch with your care team.”

Surviving cancer reshaped his perspective on life and leadership. “Now I wake up and ask, ‘What’s next?’ I don’t entertain anything that is not positive or does not add value. You can’t bring everyone to your table.”

As he looks ahead, his mission is clear. “I want to help as many people as I can. It’s not just the next generation—it’s men older than me, too. Take care of your body. You’ll need it. We must live and act out of a sense of who we are and whose we are.”

He expressed that communities can support prostate cancer awareness, especially during Prostate Cancer Awareness Month in September and Men’s Health Month in June, through education as it was done to lower breast cancer numbers. “Back in the day, breast cancer numbers were high. But we talked about it. Now the numbers are down. The same can happen with prostate cancer if we share our stories.”

With a great expression of emotion and commitment, he offered the three words that carried him through his darkest moments and continue to guide his path forward:

“I trust God.”

KAYLAN'S JOURNEY Submitted by Erica Buffkin, prevention coordinator



Kaylan Smith

Sometimes it's worthwhile to step back and look at the whole picture of who someone is and the experiences and growth that brought them to where they are today. One of those stories is Smith's. She is a Peer Support Specialist working at Circle Park Behavioral Health. If you're unfamiliar with that title, a Peer Support Specialist is someone with lived experience in substance use who is in recovery and provides support and services to others facing similar challenges. In her words, "I'm not just someone who helps others in recovery, I'm someone who has lived it. I've walked the path of addiction. I know firsthand how dark, isolating and overwhelming it can be. I know what it's like to be judged, to feel hopeless and to believe you're alone. But I also know something else: recovery is possible. I'm living proof of that."

Smith's journey led her to Circle Park in hopes of starting her recovery journey, and that's where everything began to change. For years, she struggled with substance use and found herself facing multiple legal charges and time in jail on a few occasions. Eventually, the Department of Social Services became involved in her life, and her children were removed from her home. In that moment, realizing she was losing her kids, she knew she had hit rock bottom. However, the best thing about rock bottom, in her case, was that the only way to go from there was up.

She was ultimately referred to Circle Park Behavioral Health Services. When she walked through our doors, she felt broken, ashamed and completely lost. But she had a newfound drive to change the way she had been living, and she decided nothing could stop her on her road to recovery. Smith decided to check herself into the Chrysalis Center, our inpatient residential program for women and children. With that decision, she started her journey to healing and restoration.

At the Chrysalis Center, she began taking steps to forgive herself. She began to rebuild her self-worth and, for the first time in a long time, she began to love and accept herself again. After completing her time at the Chrysalis Center, Smith transitioned into our Intensive Outpatient Program and followed that up with group sessions, one-on-one counseling and continued peer support services.

Throughout her process of recovery, she found a community where she felt she belonged. She found strength through shared experiences. She found a renewed spirit of hope. Most importantly, she discovered that there was a purpose in the pain that she had experienced over the years. She came to realize, during her journey to reclaiming her life, that she wanted to give back and work with others who are still struggling with addiction the same way so many people helped her throughout her time at the Chrysalis Center and Circle

Park.

Smith learned, from her personal experience with us at Circle Park, that our services truly work when it comes to recovery. She said, "Circle Park gave me the foundation I needed to rebuild my life. Now I had the desire, I showed up, and I put in the work. That experience eventually led me to where I am today as a full-time Circle Park employee helping others navigate their road to recovery."

One aspect of Smith's position is working within the Medication Assisted Treatment program. She's had the opportunity to see firsthand how life-changing this approach can be. Medication Assisted Treatment helps individuals gain stability and reduce cravings in order to stay on their recovery path. Ultimately, it gives people the breathing room that they need to rebuild their lives and, for many, it's the bridge filling the gap between surviving and thriving.

Smith explained, "My purpose is to walk alongside people as they rediscover their strength, to support them as they rebuild their lives and to remind them that healing takes time. I bring the perspective of someone who has been through addiction and recovery myself, which helps build trust and connection."

That's why MAT check-in sessions are so important. These check-ins aren't just about receiving your medication; they're about building a connection with people. They're a space where our clients can be honest. They can share struggles and triumphs. The time spent together allows people an opportunity to build accountability and to be heard by someone they can trust who is invested in their journey. We want every client to know that they are not alone and that someone cares about them and understands what they are going through. We give people the structure and encouragement they need to keep moving forward, one day at a time.

Recovery isn't a one-size-fits-all plan. Everyone's journey is unique, but for many Medication Assisted treatment is a powerful, valid and effective path towards healing. Smith is honored that she has the opportunity to be a part of that process, walking with people as they rebuild, grow and rediscover their strength.

Outpatient treatment at Circle Park provides individuals with confidential assessment, counseling sessions, Peer Support services and referral services as needed by experienced, credentialed and licensed professionals. We also provide prevention programming and are a community distributor of free Narcan. All you need to do is come in and let our staff at the front desk know that you would like to have it on hand as a concerned community member and we can provide you with a short training on how to administer it properly.

If you or a loved one are struggling with addiction, Circle Park Behavioral Health Services is here to help. For more information on treatment services and recovery options call us at (843) 665-9349 or visit one of our office locations at 238 S. Coit St. in Florence, 111 N. Matthews Rd. in Lake City or 2811 S. State Hwy. 41 in Hemingway. Your recovery starts here!



Providing High-Quality,
Cost-Effective Prevention, Treatment,
Peer Support, and Medication
Assisted Treatment

Florence

843.665.9349

238 S. Coit St., Florence, SC

Lake City

843.665.7988

111 N. Matthews Rd., Lake City, SC

Hemingway

843.551.2343

2811 S. State Hwy. 41, Hemingway, SC



Danielle Williams

Street drugs have become more dangerous and deadly over the past several years. The ongoing drug crisis was responsible for an estimated 107,543 American deaths in 2023 compared to 67,367 in 2018. 70 percent of the 2023 deaths were related to fentanyl use, and 30 percent to other synthetic stimulants. Fentanyl and other synthetic drug seizures by law enforcement have also increased. By the end of 2022, more than 35 million fentanyl pills

were seized, compared to 289,000 in 2018.

The illegal drug market has become more efficiently lethal with a move away from plant-derived drugs toward stronger synthetic drugs. Compared to plant-derived drugs, synthetic drugs are more easily made, don't require growing and harvesting time and don't need as many workers to mix and manufacture the drugs. Drug cartels have partnered with chemical companies for an array of synthetic ingredients to manufacture cheaper drugs and combinations of drugs. Drug traffickers use technology to advertise and sell products, recruit and train couriers and deliver to customers with no face-to-face contact, making it harder for law enforcement to trace.

The increased amount of stronger synthetic drugs on the street has led to a substantially increased risk of drug overdose. People may buy a drug and unknowingly face a dangerous and unpredictable mix of fentanyl, methamphetamine, heroin or an ever-changing addition of new chemicals. Although there are fentanyl test strips available, other synthetic drugs are harder to detect and treat.

One such threat is a drug called Xylazine, which is FDA-approved for use in animals as a non-opioid sedative and pain reliever. It is not safe for humans. Xylazine is used as a drug adulterant, often added to enhance the effects of other drugs. It can be combined with fentanyl, and this stronger, cheaper combination is often misleadingly sold as heroin. Xylazine is frequently added to pressed pills and sold as counterfeit drugs for ADHD, anxiety and depression. Commonly known as "tranq" or "the zombie drug," Xylazine slows down brain function, breathing rate, heart rate and blood pressure. When combined with an opioid such as fentanyl, it can greatly increase the risk of overdose and death. Regular use of Xylazine can also produce sores on the body that often become infected and need medical attention to heal.

Narcan, a drug used to reverse opioid-related side effects, is available over-the-counter. However, Narcan does not reverse the effects of Xylazine. Nevertheless, it is still recommended to use Narcan if Xylazine use is suspected since it is most often combined with fentanyl or other opioids, and Narcan may help prevent an overdose or death. Buying drugs has become an increasingly dangerous "buyer beware" market and a slippery slope, with many unknowns around the synthetic drugs being consumed.

Individuals who use substances may feel a false sense of invincibility and confidence that they can handle the drugs they take, whatever they are. But over time, a person who is addicted can become frustrated as they may not be getting high anymore, using drugs only to avoid getting sick or having more episodes of overdosing. Substance abuse can also lead to serious life problems, such as the loss of a job, the erosion of relationships with children or the deterioration of a marriage or partnership. Thankfully, the frustrations of addiction can often lead to motivation to reach out for help. Substance abuse treatment is the most effective road to

recovery for someone dealing with drug or alcohol addiction.

Substance use disorder treatment may include inpatient care, medical detox and out-patient care, or a combination, depending on the patient's needs.

At HopeHealth, substance use disorder treatment is available at the Florence, Manning and Orangeburg locations. Patients start with a diagnostic assessment to determine an appropriate treatment plan. As an outpatient treatment facility, our treatment plans include medication-assisted treatment for a diagnosis of opioid use disorder or alcohol use disorder, or without medication-assisted treatment for all other substance use disorders.

aMedication-assisted treatment is used to normalize brain chemistry and body functions, block euphoric effects and decrease cravings. These evidence-based medications can also prevent or treat an overdose and help promote long-term recovery. At HopeHealth, these medications may include Narcan, Vivitrol, Sublocade or Suboxone.

Some patients may be referred to an intensive outpatient program or inpatient treatment facility if medically warranted. We work with each patient's unique needs for an appropriate level of care that is updated regularly as the patient makes progress.

Drug addiction takes time to overcome, but there is always hope to create a new life and become free from addiction. If you or a loved one is suffering from a substance abuse disorder, take the first step towards healing and reach out for help.

Danielle Williams is a behavioral health counselor, specializing in alcohol and substance abuse treatment at HopeHealth and is accepting new patients. You do not have to be a patient at HopeHealth for substance abuse treatment. A brief and confidential over-the-phone assessment is required prior to an appointment. Call (843) 432-3690 for more information about substance use disorder and treatment.

JAMES FLOWERS: A STORY OF RECOVERY AND PURPOSE

By Cynthia O. Ford



Pictured left to right Marvin Hemingway, James Flowers and Kenneth Hughes

MULLINS— September is National Recovery Month, a time to celebrate the strength of individuals on the path to recovery and highlight the importance of accessible treatment, community support and second chances. This year's theme, "Every Person. Every Family. Every Community," speaks to the power of healing at every level of society. Among the many voices of recovery, James Flowers stands out as a story of faith, transformation and commitment to helping others.

Born in Norfolk, Virginia, Flowers spent time in both California and South Carolina growing up. Raised between homes, his early exposure to addiction began with his father, who struggled with alcoholism. As a teenager, Flowers looked up to his father and often accompanied him to bars. At fifteen, after watching a television special on the rising crack epidemic, he experimented with the drug. "One night, I felt my heart almost stop," he recalled.

JAMES FLOWERS CONT'D



"A few days later, I used again, but I knew something was wrong."

Eventually, he was introduced to heroin and began a long battle with substance use. He lived homeless on the streets of Miami and hustled along beaches. His addiction led to multiple arrests and two prison sentences. Still, he held onto faith. He stated that no matter where he lived, he always

prayed the same prayer every night, "I prayed every night, 'God, take it away. I don't want to die like this.'"

In 2008, Flowers checked into Bruce Hall Detox Center. "I was at my end," he said. Eventually he met his wife, a nurse, and decided not to return to California. "God spoke to me and said, 'This is it.' Even after I got clean, my mind was still messed up. Recovery isn't just physical—it's mental, emotional and spiritual."

Though he had relied on Social Security for years, Flowers decided to work and pursue a different path. With the help of mentors Kenneth Hughes and Marvin Hemingway, he began working in maintenance and home décor. "Ken became like a life coach. He and Marvin helped me come a long way."

His recovery journey was far from linear. "It was a day here, a day there. Some people relapse after 25 days clean. I had to work for peace, and without peace, there's no recovery."

Flowers eventually started Hey Friend Recovery Outreach, a grassroots effort to help people experiencing homelessness and addiction find resources and rehabilitation programs. "I give back because someone gave to me," he said. "My mom and family supported me so many times, even when I didn't deserve it."

Still, he faced major challenges—including being laid off. "Telling my wife I lost my job was one of the hardest moments. But I knew I couldn't go back. God told me not to look back."

Today, Flowers is no longer dependent on drugs, and he is pursuing a new purpose. "I want to be a counselor. Some of the best counselors are the ones who've lived it. I want to give back what I stole out of life."

He now attends discipleship training, reads his Bible and stays active. "I love my life today. I have something to do every day. I never had a driver's license until I was 45. Now I have a job, a wife and I'm a dad. My children are blessing from God."

To those in early recovery or still struggling, Flowers offers this: "Take it one day at a time. Don't rush. Keep seeking God and let Him do the work. Go to work, find your purpose. You don't know what doors will open until you ask."

When asked to describe his journey in one word, Flowers said, "Redeemed." After years of prison, homelessness, and pain, he now lives in peace and gratitude.

His hope for the future? "To be a husband, a father, and a man of God—and to help the next person find their way out."

As National Recovery Month reminds us, recovery is not just possible—it is powerful. Flowers is living proof.

BREAKING THE CYCLE... A CONVERSATION OF POTTER HOUSE RECOVERY By Ronette Genwright



Pictured left to right Nick and Nicole Page, and Robert Wallace

Potter House Recovery is more than a program—it is a daily mission. At the center is the Executive Director and co-founder, Nicole Page, who is also in long-term recovery. "In July, I'll have six years of continuous sobriety," she shared. Raised in a loving home, she recalls, "There was absolutely no reason behind me going down the path I did. I was a happy child and graduated from Irmo High School in 1991 as an A-B student."

Her parents divorced when she was six years old, and although her father faced challenges with alcoholism, he has maintained sobriety for over 30 years. Her passion for helping others strengthened in 2020 when she and her husband, Donovan Page, assisted two men discharged from a local treatment center. That call inspired them to open a men's sober living house. Together with Robert Waller, they founded Potter House Recovery, named in honor of Hayden Potter, who lost his life to substance use.

Since opening in March 2022, the organization has grown to eight houses serving over sixty residents. Their peer-run model offers substance use treatment without clinical services. "Everyone who works or volunteers is in recovery," she noted. Programs include a 28-day intensive recovery plan and a 90-day vocational recovery option where residents work while paying for their treatment. Additional services include transitional housing, peer support, recovery workshops, book studies, equine therapy, yoga and volunteer work.

On National Recovery Month, she said, "It matters. It shows that recovery can be fun. I thought it would be boring when I first got sober, but now I have the best life I have ever had." She

is enthusiastic about reducing stigma, reminding others: "We are not lowlifes. We did not choose this disease—it chose us."

Financial challenges remain a barrier. "Most people come to us with nothing," she said. Employment and health care are also difficult, especially for those with criminal records. Thankfully, organizations like Mercy Medicine and Hope Health help fill the health care gap.

Potter House opened post-pandemic, but its effects linger. "The isolation during COVID affected many people."

"Zoom meetings helped, but it was not the same." Looking ahead, Potter House plans to expand to new regions with the highest needs. They also created Phoenix Rising Sober Living for those seeking a sober lifestyle without formal treatment. "We don't accept insurance, but we work with foundations to offer treatment scholarships." Her advice to those struggling: "Nothing changes if nothing changes. It is scary, but you do not have to do it alone." Community support, even from those not in recovery, is powerful. "Just knowing someone cares can make all the difference."

Supporters can donate essential items like hygiene products, twin sheets, towels, notebooks and Walmart gift cards. We need volunteers, sponsors and vendors for the Farm to Freedom Festival on September 27, 2025. To get involved, email npage@potterhouserecovery.com. Potter House Recovery is a SCARR-certified, 501(c)(3) nonprofit and member of the Florence Chamber of Commerce and Together SC. No referral, only readiness to achieve sobriety. Call 843-615-5869 or visit www.potterhouserecovery.com to start the intake process.



Covington House

With heart, vision and lived experience, Potter House Recovery continues to restore lives—one step, one person at a time.



Behavioral Health

Behavioral Health

At Genesis Health Care, we believe your mental health is just as important as your physical health. That's why we offer a range of treatment options and assessments to help our patients flourish. Your mental well-being is essential to an overall quality of life. We offer a safe space for patients to seek help, guidance and treatment in their mental health journey.

Our behavioral health counselors, social workers, therapists and psychiatrists provide the following services:

- Behavioral Health Screening and Assessments
- Mental Health Treatment
- Individual, Family and Group Counseling
- Pediatric Psychiatry Services
- Medication Counseling/Management

Our trained behavioral health team specializes in creating an environment that is comfortable and welcoming for all. We strive to help our patients achieve their goals and to maintain an optimal quality of life. Our Genesis Healthcare promise is to offer compassionate, high-quality care that you can depend on.

If you have been experiencing any of the following, ask your primary care provider about scheduling a behavioral health appointment:

- Worry, anxiety or paranoia
- Feeling isolated or lonely
- Inability to focus on daily tasks
- Difficulty sleeping
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm
- A lack in energy, motivation or interest in activities you normally enjoy
- Problems overeating or neglecting eating
- Difficulty maintaining healthy relationships

Behavioral health services are currently offered at the following locations:

Genesis Healthcare Darlington

115 A Exchange Street
Darlington, SC 29532
843-393-9421

Olanta Family Care

211 S. Jones Road
Olanta, SC 29114
843-396-9730

WHAT TO EXPECT:

At Genesis Health Care, we work with you to develop a treatment plan specific to your individual needs. As a community health center, we are committed to providing top-quality healthcare at an affordable price.

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[genesisfqhc.org](https://www.genesisfqhc.org)

843.393.7452



Liz loving on her two donkeys

personal and emotional well-being is deeply enriched for people of all ages and walks of life.”

Stirrup Hope in Florence, S.C., provides a safe and loving environment for those who experience any mental, physical emotional trauma or disability. The farm is a 60 plus acre oasis that houses donkeys, retired horses and ducks that help in comforting those who need support. At its inception, Stirrup Hope used equine therapy as a therapeutic approach to promote physical, mental and emotional well-being. Since their growth with animals and activities, more has been added to their continuum of care. “But,” Liz Moore said, “Stirrup Hope has become more than equine therapy because we have more than just horses.” Director and Co-founder of Stirrup Hope, Moore facilitates sessions with the participant and horse and encourages growth, confidence and trust. The horses were initially the only animals housed at Stirrup when she began in 2020. Moore first became aware of the need for an equine learning facility in the area during the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, she sought a way to help children struggling with isolation by allowing them to spend time outdoors with horses.

As the program grew, she realized there was a real need for equine learning services in the Pee Dee area for both children and adults. Each horse has unique backgrounds and was donated because of Moore’s care for the well-being of the horse, in spite of their physical condition. “We are now an Equine-Facilitated Learning program. EFL is an emerging field in which horses and humans work together as guides and facilitators to help people enhance their life skills, improve emotional wellbeing and increase self-awareness. It is also known as Equine Assisted Learning, Equine Facilitated Experiential Learning, Equine Facilitated Therapy and Equine Assisted Growth and Learning.”



Liz with one of her horses

Walking onto the campus of Stirrup Hope, there is a strong feeling of belonging. The feeling is not just because the volunteer staff is so welcoming, but also because the energy of the animals there provides a sense of calm. The donkeys, horses and ducks all are in a habitat that is caring and nurturing, and experiencing them is a part of the therapeutic journey at Stirrup Hope. “Through the instinctual nature of the horse,

horses is to encourage empathy and compassion. Volunteers lead their participants through non-mounted exercises and activities that teach self-regulation, soft breathing, a sensitive touch, compassion and leadership. Through these activities, the human body learns to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, the network of nerves that relax the body and aid in the body’s response to stress via a lower heart rate, lower blood pressure and better digestion. This promotes a state of physical and emotional well-being, which helps the individual better manage stress, anxiety and fear.

There are other animal partners on the farm who fill visitors with joy: Gabriel, Wilson and Henry are donkeys



Liz feeding the ducks

that are furry, lovable therapy partners who enjoy being fed, petted and sharing playtime with visitors. Further down from the barn is a pond with white and multicolored ducks who aren’t afraid to interact with visitors, especially those who have their feed. To gaze upon the small marsh and listen to their calls in nature creates a peaceful setting where visitors can spend time in connection with what helps them find

serenity.

After the pond, visitors can take a ride or walk their nature trail. The beginning of the trail captures the five senses with a small trough of herbs that can be eaten raw such as basil, dill and cumin. After the olfactory experience, visitors can journey along the sensory nature trail. The trail is aligned with what Moore described as the wonderful pieces of art created by visitors. A beaded drape, painted rocks, sensory stations and swings are all to be used to stimulate the senses to assist in finding ways to heal from trauma. This part of the therapy process is designed to reduce stress and lessen anxiety. Adjacent to the sensory trail is a garden where organic vegetation can be picked and taken home. The garden has various fruits and vegetables that are hand-planted and harvested.

Participants in Stirrup Hope are led through various activities that teach compassion, sensitivity, self-esteem, self-expression and self-love. Stirrup Hope Equine-Facilitated Learning promotes learning, growing and embracing the hearts of humans and animals that help to heal participants one at a time.



WHEN I THINK OF HOME, I SMILE By Jennifer Guiles Robinson



Melissa Morales pictured in front of her jewelry.

Every year, from September to October, Americans observe National Hispanic Heritage Month by celebrating the histories, cultures and traditions of American citizens whose ancestors came from the Caribbean, Mexico, Spain, Central and South America. During Hispanic Heritage Month, the accomplishments and cultural diversity of those who migrated are honored.

Melissa Morales celebrates her culture and heritage by sharing her pride in her home, Guayaquil, Ecuador, where she was born and raised. Guayaquil, is on the Pacific coast of Ecuador and is the largest and most populated city. Morales stated, “there is no spring or fall, there is standard weather all year round.

Ecuador is a celebratory place that loves festivals, events and especially celebrating holidays. Holidays are recognized differently in Ecuador than in the U.S., as Labor Day in Ecuador is on May first. Easter is celebrated the same as the U.S., Morales said, but there are more days and events that happen during the week. “We eat a lot,” she exclaimed and shared the ingredients of a traditional soup they eat during the holiday, Fanesca. It is typically prepared during Lent, Easter and



Crystal Jewelry Business Stellar Gemz

especially Good Friday, and is made with desalted salt cod, and a variety of vegetables, beans, 12 grains (that symbolize the 12 apostles), milk, cream and squash. “It’s the way Ecuadorians celebrate Jesus Resurrection... as a prayer before each meal is very traditional, so there is no specific date to give thanks, we also don’t have or celebrate Thanksgiving, or Black Friday.”

As in Mexican culture, Ecuadorians celebrate Dia de Difuntos (the Day of the Dead). It is a time to celebrate the lives of those who are deceased and not mourn. There is much preparation and a lot of consumption of traditional foods for this commemoration. A popular drink enjoyed during the celebration is Colada Morada which is made with blackberries, purple or black corn flour, cinnamon, cloves and pineapple.

Restaurants and nightlife are plentiful in Ecuador with many clubs being open from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. There, the legal drinking age is 18.” Social life is big in Ecuador, with many activities, concerts, events going on all year around. As much as they appreciate their culture, they are also in tune to the political occurrences in Ecuador and in the U.S.

Morales said the political status in Ecuador is complicated. “Even though it is complicated, we are a developing country in many ways, we have a new administration, and we have faith that we are progressing into a new era.” It is required to have a title to get most jobs, but it is also very competitive, the minimum wage at this starts at \$470 USD per month, but the higher the position in any company, the higher the salary. We are a dollarized country, but the money exchange used to be ‘Sucre.’ Successfully though, in the year 2000, the economy dollarized. Ecuador has petroleum, but they have no ownership of it,” Morales stated. “Due to our rich land we grow all our food, and we are major exporters worldwide of banana, cacao, shrimp, coffee, flowers and other products,” she shared. The tariffs imposed by the current administration in the U.S. do not affect them as they have

their own for international products coming in. One of their main focuses is education and ensuring people are able to matriculate through the system receiving what is needed to be successful. Educational requirements differ from the U.S. as public schools are for low-income families. Private schools are very normal, and only when students get to high school, are they able to choose their specialty. Morales graduated in commerce and administration, but there are other specialties that are chosen to graduate from high school, like biology, physics, social studies and chemistry. In college or university, students can decide to study another career. All schools and universities give English classes and students are required to take extra exams to graduate bilingual. At the universities there are many exams, no dormitories and classes are offered at night to help those who work full time.



Melissa with her family in Baños, in Ecuador.

Morales’ experiences and opportunities led to her to the U.S., and now Florence, SC is her home. “I work in a tax credit company, and I have been working for over two years, and my business is crystal jewelry called Stellar Gemz,” she stated. Morales said she appreciates the support she has received in Florence and feels treated equally. When asked about the difference between Ecuador and the U.S., she just says that life is very similar to the U.S. socially, technologically and educationally. Except for all their cultural traditions and food, they are a country that is developing at a different pace than the U.S. “Don’t be afraid to ask about our culture, we love to teach,” she exclaimed.



**Magnolia
Money
Matters**

Running a business means juggling many moving parts, and among the most critical of them is keeping your financial records in order. Whether you're a solo entrepreneur, a growing e-commerce brand or a brick-and-mortar business, proper bookkeeping is more than just a routine task — it is a foundational practice that supports financial clarity, informed decision-making and long-term growth.

Bookkeeping involves recording and organizing all financial transactions within a business. While it might seem tedious or overwhelming at times, accurate bookkeeping is what allows a business owner to truly understand their income, expenses, profitability and cash flow. Without organized records, business owners risk making decisions based on guesswork rather than facts.

The Role of Accurate Bookkeeping

Accurate bookkeeping does more than keep the IRS satisfied. It empowers business owners to answer essential questions: Are we profitable? Can we afford to hire a new employee? Do we need to cut costs? How much should we set aside for taxes? Bookkeeping is the process that ensures you have real data to base these answers on.

Well-maintained records allow for the preparation of key financial statements, including the profit and loss statement, balance sheet and cash flow statement. These documents aren't just for accountants or tax season; they are decision-making tools that every business owner should learn to use.

Bookkeeping also helps:

- Monitor cash flow
- Track expenses accurately
- Make tax filing smoother and more accurate
- Ensure timely payments to vendors and employees
- Detect and prevent fraud or financial mismanagement

The Business Growth Connection

Many business owners don't realize that sloppy or inconsistent bookkeeping can directly hinder growth. If you don't know where your money is going or how much you're actually making, it's nearly impossible to scale effectively. In contrast, businesses with clean, up-to-date financials can identify patterns, predict cash needs and plan strategically.

For example, by analyzing regular financial reports, you might discover that a specific product line has significantly higher profit margins than others. Or you might spot a recurring expense that no longer adds value to your operations. These insights enable you to make decisions that drive profitability.

Moreover, accurate bookkeeping is essential when applying for business loans or funding. Lenders and investors want to see well-documented financial records before making any commitments. Without that transparency, your application may be denied, even if your business is successful in practice.

Bridging the Financial Literacy Gap

Small businesses are the backbone of the economy, and yet many business owners, especially those from historically underserved communities, lack access to clear financial guidance. At Magnolia Money Matters, we aim to bridge that gap with straightforward bookkeeping services that empower business owners to make smart, confident decisions.

We work with entrepreneurs at different stages of business to help them gain control of their finances, avoid costly mistakes and lay the groundwork for sustainable growth. Our mission is to provide clear, practical and approachable bookkeeping solutions that help business owners better understand their numbers and use that knowledge to grow. From breaking down financial reports to offering insights that

support smart decisions, we focus on delivering services that make sense for real-life entrepreneurs. Clear books will not only bring peace of mind — they can open doors to funding, partnerships and future opportunities. With the right support and a strong bookkeeping foundation, your business can thrive in any environment.

Common Bookkeeping Mistakes to Avoid

If you're handling your books yourself, you're not alone; many small business owners start off this way. However, here are a few common mistakes to watch out for:

- 1. Mixing personal and business expenses:** Keep separate bank accounts and credit cards for business to maintain clarity.
- 2. Neglecting monthly reconciliations:** Reconcile your bank and credit card accounts every month to catch errors early.
- 3. Improper categorization:** Misclassifying transactions can distort your financial reports and lead to incorrect tax filings.
- 4. Falling behind:** Delayed data entry results in unreliable records. Stay on top of your books regularly.
- 5. Skipping backups:** Always keep secure backups of your digital records in case of data loss.

Even if you only make a few transactions a month, establishing good habits early on can save you time, stress and money in the long run.

You Don't Have to Do It Alone

Bookkeeping isn't everyone's strength, and that's okay. Delegating your financial recordkeeping to a professional can free up your time to focus on what you do best — growing your business, serving your clients and building your brand.

At Magnolia Money Matters, we specialize in helping small and medium-sized businesses gain confidence and control over their finances. We offer tailored bookkeeping services, industry-specific insights and simple reports that make sense. Our mission is to help you go from overwhelmed to organized.

Let's Connect

If you're ready to stop guessing and start growing, we're here to help. Reach out to Mallory Brayboy, principle bookkeeper of Magnolia Money Matters, to schedule a consultation or learn more about our services. You can find us online at www.magnoliamoneymatters.com.

Keeping your financial records in order isn't just a smart habit — it's a vital step toward building a confident, profitable and sustainable business. Let us help you build yours.



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TEENS & MONEY: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



Financial literacy is a critical skill that helps set the foundation for a stable and prosperous future. By understanding the basics of money management, teens can make informed decisions and avoid common financial pitfalls.

According to the annual Teens and Personal Finance survey, a study of teens ages 13-18 conducted by Wakefield Research on behalf of Junior

Achievement and MissionSquare Retirement's Foundation, 45 percent of high schoolers took a personal finance or financial literacy class at school. This is up from 31 percent in 2024, indicating the nation's youth are interested in building a strong financial foundation. What's more, of the students who took their school's curriculum, 64 percent found it extremely or very helpful, yet despite this increase, data reveals knowledge gaps remain. In fact, 42 percent of teens surveyed are terrified they won't have enough money to cover their future needs and goals.

"There is so much for teens to absorb when learning about finances and planning for their future, they often struggle to envision what lies ahead," said Andre Robinson, president and CEO of MissionSquare Retirement. "Offering engaging programs that can boost financial knowledge, and decision-making skills can only help to inspire young individuals to build a strong foundation of lifelong financial resilience."

Here are four economic topics to discuss with teens to help make a positive impact on their financial readiness and prepare them for financial decisions they'll face in adulthood.

Mastering Saving and Budgeting

A strong starting point for teens is to create a simple budget

that tracks income and expenses. Because only 36 percent of teens surveyed save a part for their futures when they receive money, this can help them understand where money is going and identify areas they may be able to save for the future. This is particularly important considering 68 percent of teens agree that saving for retirement is something they can think about later in life.

Understanding Credit

Credit is a powerful tool but can also be a source of financial trouble if not managed properly. It's essential to understand how financial behaviors, like paying bills on time and keeping credit card balances low, impact their credit scores. A higher FICO score, which 80 percent of teens surveyed had never heard of or did not fully understand, can lead to better interest rates and more favorable loan terms.

Managing Common Debt Pitfalls

According to the survey, 43 percent of teens believe an interest rate of 18 percent on debt is manageable and can be paid off over time. However, it's important to understand the true cost of debt and how interest rates can accumulate over time and lead to significant financial strain. Establishing good debt management habits early, such as avoiding high-interest debt and paying off balances quickly, can lead to a healthier financial future.

Investing and Planning Ahead

Many teens find saving accounts, side hustles or keeping cash at home to be their preferred investment strategies. Only 13 percent said they currently invest a portion of their money.

Encouraging teens to learn about different types of investments, such as stocks, bonds and mutual funds, can help them make informed decisions and begin to build long-term wealth.

For more information to help teens improve their financial knowledge, visit ja.org.

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HERRING NAMED BRANCH OPERATIONS

COORDINATOR *Articles submitted by Morgan Holden, marketing assistant*



Amber Herring

MULLINS— Anderson Brothers Bank is pleased to announce Amber Herring's promotion to branch operations coordinator at its Latta branch, located at 100 E Main St in Latta.

Herring has been an essential part of the ABB team since 2020, and her promotion marks a significant advancement for both her and the Latta branch. In her new role, she will oversee daily operations, support customer service and teller staff, and ensure that every visitor to the branch receives the excellent service for which ABB is known.

"We're thrilled to have Amber as the BOC for the Latta office," said Branch Manager Glenn Green III. "She will manage the daily activities of the branch, ensuring exceptional customer service. Amber and her team will continue to demonstrate ABB's strong commitment to the Latta community."

As the Coordinator, Herring will be responsible for tasks such as planning schedules, approving daily operations, monitoring cash flow and providing team members with training and resources. She will also assist customers with care and precision, particularly during unexpected banking situations.

Herring graduated from Dillon High School and earned her degree in accounting from Florence-Darlington Technical College. She is very involved in the community and treats every interaction with a professional and customer-oriented approach. Outside of work, Herring enjoys volunteering at local events and spending time with her family. She lives in Latta with her husband Josh and their two sons, Cayden and Emerson.

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STEADMAN JOINS ABB AS VP – COMMERCIAL BANKING IN FLORENCE



Malorie Steadman

MULLINS— Anderson Brothers Bank is thrilled to announce that Malorie Steadman has joined the organization as vice president – Commercial Banking at the Florence location on 501 2nd Loop Rd., Florence, SC.

In her new role, Steadman will be instrumental in helping local businesses grow. She will identify and acquire commercial banking opportunities, develop lending solutions customized to each client's needs and build strong relationships within the community. With her expertise, Steadman will work closely with business owners to understand their financial requirements and ensure a smooth lending process that promotes economic growth and positive impact in the area.

A native of Turbeville, Steadman holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in accounting from the University of South Carolina. She is also a current student in the South Carolina Bankers School Class of 2026, which adds to her valuable skills in the banking industry. Beyond her professional achievements, Steadman is an active member of the Florence community. She has served as the past president and is currently an active member of the Florence West Rotary Club and an ambassador for the Greater Florence Chamber. Additionally, she is proud to serve on the board of the House of Hope of the Pee Dee, demonstrating her commitment to making a positive impact in the area.

"Malorie is going to be a very important part of our growth in Florence and beyond. She brings a positive energy that represents ABB well. We are fortunate to add another great teammate!" said Bryan Lenertz, SVP Regional Executive.

ESTATE PLANNING FOR BUSINESS OWNERS



All business owners can benefit from some level of estate planning. Building protection into your business plan is one of the most important decisions you can make to safeguard your partners, employees and family. Below are four key components of estate planning to help ensure you're set up for long-term success.

The most fundamental estate planning tool is a **will**. A properly executed will gives clear direction to your executor about how to manage or distribute your assets when you pass away.

A somewhat more complex component of an estate plan is a **revocable trust**—a legal entity created to hold your assets while you're alive. Among its many benefits is that your appointed trustee can take over management of your assets if you're incapacitated. A revocable trust also helps streamline the transfer of assets by avoiding potentially lengthy legal proceedings and costly court fees. In some cases, it may offer

creditor protection for beneficiaries.

Next are **powers of attorney**. Naming a health care power of attorney allows your representative to make crucial medical decisions on your behalf if you're unable to, while a financial power of attorney can manage your bills and finances until you're able to resume control.

Finally, a **buy-sell** agreement is a powerful tool that helps ensure a smooth transition of your business. Often funded with life insurance, a buy-sell agreement can help meet your family's financial needs after you're gone and outline the terms of succession among remaining partners. It allows everyone involved to agree on those terms in advance.

While some basic estate planning can be completed using self-guided online tools, it's typically best to work with a licensed attorney to draft and execute your documents. Ideally, your attorney, financial advisor and insurance agent should collaborate to help you manage and protect both your business and personal estate.

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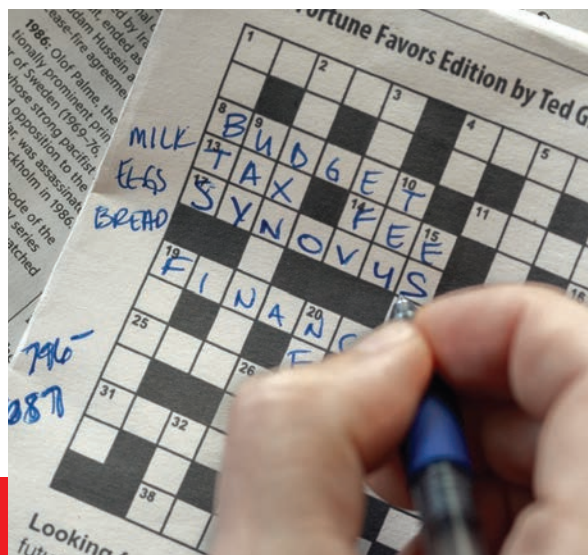
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HOW TO BUILD CREDIT - WE CAN HELP

Submitted by Palmetto First Federal Credit Union

First off — congrats, grad! You crossed the stage, tossed the cap and now you're officially stepping into the real world. It's exciting, overwhelming and, yes, it can get a little expensive. Whether you're starting a new job, figuring things out or enjoying some well-earned downtime, here are real-world money tips to help you start strong.

1. Understand Your Paycheck

Your job offer said \$50,000, but your first paycheck doesn't look quite like that. Welcome to taxes, insurance and possibly a 401(k).

Take time to understand what's being deducted from your paycheck and why.

Pro tip: Setting up direct deposit into both your checking and savings accounts can make budgeting easier and faster.

2. Create a Budget You Can Stick To

Budgeting doesn't have to be boring. It's simply a plan for how you want to use your money.

Try the 50/30/20 rule:

- 50 percent for needs (rent, groceries, bills)
- 30 percent for wants (dining out, subscriptions, fun)
- 20 percent for savings and debt payments

Use free budgeting apps or our online banking tools to keep tabs on where your money's going.

3. Use Credit (But Don't Let It Use You)

Building credit is important, but balance is key.

Use your credit card for small purchases you can pay off each month. There's no need to max out your card to build credit — that's a common myth that can lead to debt.

Palmetto First offers credit card options designed for young adults. Reach out if you're ready to start building smart credit habits!

4. Start Saving (Even If It's Just a Little)

No one expects you to have it all figured out on day one. But saving even \$10 a week adds up.

Set up automatic transfers from checking to savings — so you're saving without even thinking about it.

Emergency fund goal: at least 3 months' worth of expenses. Your future self will thank you.

5. Attack Any Student Loans With a Plan

Student loans can feel like a mountain — but you've got this.

Know your loan types, grace periods and minimum payments. If you're able to pay more than the minimum, you'll save on interest costs over time.

Need help with a repayment plan? Our team is happy to point you to helpful resources!

6. Keep Learning (The Money Stuff Matters!)

You just finished school, but real-world learning never stops — especially when it comes to your finances.

Follow trusted blogs, tune into money podcasts, or chat with us at Palmetto First. We're always here to help you level up your money game.

Bonus Tip: Celebrate Smart

You've earned the celebration — just try not to blow your whole first paycheck on it. (We're looking at you, \$300 dinner tab.)

Find ways to treat yourself *and* stay on track. That's the sweet spot.

We're Here to Help

At Palmetto First, we're here to answer your questions and guide you as you build financial confidence. With the right mindset and tools, you've got everything it takes to win the real-world money game. Your credit union has your back every step of the way.



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BRIGHTENING THE JOURNEY OF PEDIATRIC CANCER FOR CHILDREN By Jennifer Guiles Robinson



Children are bright spots in this world. Their youth, innocence, and joy tend to add light to a dim world. If you pay attention to their light, it can be infectious and transform one's outlook on life. But for many children, trying to shine when they are sick can be a bit challenging, especially if they battle cancer. Because it is not a subtle illness, pediatric or childhood cancer presents itself with various symptoms. Those symptoms may require a battery of tests to determine their causes, but when specialists are able to determine diagnoses, it becomes easier to be able to create a plan for treatment. Children may spend a series of hospital stays receiving treatment and the process can be painful with additional side effects. "Getting to treatment is a big part of the battle for so many of our families. Only nine counties in the Carolinas have a pediatric oncology center out of 146. So many of our families must travel for hours just to get to



treatment. They either have to drive to and from day after day or find a place to stay nearby with no way to cook at home. That's where we come in, relieving that financial burden so they can focus on their child's health," stated Executive Director Laura Ellen.

Once the treatments have been completed, the road to recovery begins. But during recovery, annual exams are recommended to ensure treatment is effective. They are also often monitored for kidney and liver issues. Many

children on the recovery journey and their families advocate for those who share the same experience.

"September marks National Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, a crucial period to shed light on the impact of cancer on children and their families. Children's Cancer Partners of the Carolinas is dedicated to raising awareness and providing support for more than 2,500 children battling cancer across North and South Carolina this year alone. The mission of Children's Cancer Partners of the Carolinas is to provide comprehensive support and loving compassion to families whose children are battling cancer to improve their overall quality of life. The organization serves children and families throughout SC and NC. Their services are available to a diverse population of children and their families."

Every working day, an average of three children are diagnosed with cancer in the Carolinas, contributing to the 700 or more new cases each year. These children join the ranks of over 9,000 who are already in treatment or survivorship. Cancer remains the #1 disease killer of children and youth in America, with new diagnoses rising by approximately 0.07 percent annually over the last three decades.



Charlie is a cancer patient being photographed after treatment.

Despite advancements in adult cancer treatments, children continue to face significant challenges:

- Limited Access to Care:** Only nine locations in the Carolinas treat pediatric cancers, contributing to disparities in care, especially for children from rural or low-income families. These children are three times more likely to face delayed diagnoses, undertreatment, or relapse due to distance from treatment centers and limited family resources.
- Inadequate Research Funding:** Less than 4 percent of all cancer research funding is dedicated to pediatric cancers. Over the past four years, 73 new treatments have been introduced for adults, whereas only four new treatments have emerged for children in the last 73 years.
- Life Expectancy Impact:** While adult cancer victims lose an average of 15 years of life, children lose an estimated 71 years of life expectancy. The survival rate for children drops significantly when considering a realistic survival period of 20 years, with only one in three surviving.

Children's Cancer Partners of the Carolinas serves as a vital safety net with wraparound services, ensuring that all children in the Carolinas have access to the best possible care. CCP will assist more than 2,500 children this year, receiving treatment at Carolina or national pediatric oncology centers, providing over \$1,000,000 in travel costs. The organization will raise and distribute approximately \$2.7 million in direct support to Carolina families, exclusive of administrative and fundraising expenses. Without their willingness to support families regardless of their economic statuses, many children of lower income families would not be able to afford cancer treatment. Laura Allen said, "With only 10 pediatric oncology locations in nine counties in all of the Carolinas, just getting to treatment can be a huge part of the battle for so many of our families. We work tirelessly to provide the resources and assistance families need, from transportation and lodging for treatment to emotional support and financial aid, so they can focus on what matters most: their child's survival."

Children's Cancer Partners of the Carolinas holds a GOLD Star charity rating from Guidestar and is the leading referral resource for Carolina pediatric oncology centers. As part of its ongoing mission, CCP is committed to raising awareness, supporting families, and advocating for increased research funding to improve the outlook for children battling cancer.



PEE DEE'S MUSC NURSES SHINE IN S.C. TOP 100 LIST

Articles submitted by John Russell, marketing manager/Media Relations



Palmetto Gold 2025 Recipients

The South Carolina Nurses Foundation, a coalition of nursing organizations in the state, has honored 11 registered nurses from MUSC Health Florence, Marion and Black River medical centers as part of South Carolina's top 100 nurses, awarding them the prestigious Palmetto Gold Award.

Palmetto Gold is a statewide nurse recognition program that honors registered nurses who embody the highest standards of excellence in nursing practice and demonstrate unparalleled dedication to their profession, patients and communities. Nominations are received from employers and peers from a variety of nursing education and health care settings across the state. The selected nurses were honored at a formal gala on April 26 and presented with a specially designed Palmetto Gold pin and certificate.

"To every nurse striving to make a difference, know that your dedication matters, your compassion is felt and your excellence does not go unnoticed," said Patricia McLeod, interim chief nursing officer for MUSC Health Florence, Marion and Black River medical centers and a former Palmetto Gold recipient. "I encourage each of you to continue leading with purpose and practicing with integrity."

2025 Palmetto Gold winners

MUSC Health Marion Medical Center

- Angela Thompson, Mullins Nursing Center
- Whitney Hewett
- Eboni Johnson

MUSC Health Florence Medical Center

- Gwendolyn Lowery
- Felicia McQueen
- Joanalyn Nobleza
- Christi Stubbs

MUSC Health Black River Medical Center

- Brandy Hysong
- Milton Richards
- Brittany Walker
- Kim James

Nurses at MUSC Health Florence Medical Center have been among those recognized each year since the Palmetto Gold program was established in 2002.

Gwen Lowery, a nurse on the seventh-floor progressive care unit at MUSC Health Florence Medical Center, said while she's honored to receive the award, she wouldn't have been a nurse for almost 44 years if she didn't love what she does.

"Anything I do that's nursing-related is not for accolades. I enjoy what I do. I think it makes it worthwhile; it's not just a job. I'm sure there are others far more deserving than me, but I'm pleased about it," said Lowery.

In addition to recognizing individual achievement, the Palmetto Gold program is a cornerstone for advancing nursing education in South Carolina. Proceeds from the annual gala help to fund scholarships for every registered nurse undergraduate program in the state.

50K TRUIST GRANT BOOSTS MUSC WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



MUSC Truist Group

MUSC Workforce Development is proud to announce it has received a \$50,000 grant from the Truist Foundation to support the OneMUSC Workforce Development Initiative to address the state's health care workforce challenges more fully, specifically in rural and underserved areas.

Truist's commitment to inspiring and building better lives and communities is in alignment with the OneMUSC Workforce Development Initiative, leveraging and perfecting the model deployed at MUSC Health Florence, Marion and Black River medical centers, which provides access to career information, addresses learner concerns and positively affects health inequity and disparities in every community it serves.

"South Carolina continues to face a critical shortage of physicians, nurses and allied health professionals. These shortages are most severe in rural areas, and they directly impact the quality of care provided and community health outcomes," said Jay Hinesley, CEO of MUSC Health Florence, Marion and Black River medical centers. "As the state's only comprehensive academic medical system, MUSC Health is uniquely positioned to respond to this challenge, and this grant will enhance our

ability to do just that."

Forty-one of South Carolina's 46 counties are considered Health Professional Shortage Areas. The Federal Health Resources and Services Administration projects that South Carolina will face a shortage of more than 13,000 nurses. The OneMUSC Workforce Development Initiative seeks to help fill this shortage by supporting career entry and growth in underserved communities across MUSC Health's extensive footprint across the state.

"Truist Foundation is proud to support the OneMUSC Workforce Development Initiative and help address health care workforce challenges," said Truist Market President John Rutenberg. "Our purpose at Truist is to inspire and build better lives and communities, and this donation will support career development in the health care industry."

In collaboration with myriad community, cross-sector and interagency partners, the OneMUSC Health Workforce Development Initiative has identified resources to train and retain more physicians, nurses and technicians in South Carolina. This program aims to expand critical priority occupations through the existing MUSC Health registered apprenticeship by adding 360 patient care technicians each year, starting in 2027." Thank you to every MUSC leader, care team member, preceptor and mentor for creating the welcoming, supportive environments where apprentices don't just gain skills, they find belonging, purpose and a future," said MUSC Workforce Development Manager LeeAnn Weaver Hayes. "I'm incredibly proud of what we've built together – and even more excited for the future we're creating across South Carolina."

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MCLEOD HEALTH LAUNCHES INTERNAL MEDICINE RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Submitted by McLeod Health

McLeod Health

The Choice for Medical Excellence

McLeod Health is pleased to announce its newly accredited Internal Medicine Residency Program at McLeod Regional Medical Center in Florence, South Carolina. This expansion in graduate medical education reflects McLeod's ongoing mission to strengthen health care delivery across the region by training and equipping the next generation of internal medicine physicians.

The program is fully accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education—the national accrediting organization that sets and monitors standards for U.S. graduate medical education programs to ensure quality training and safe, effective patient care.

The new Internal Medicine Residency Program will be led by Dr. Victor Collier, who recently joined McLeod Health as a hospitalist and program director. A Board-Certified internist, Collier completed

both medical school and residency at Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis. He previously served as associate program director for an internal medicine residency in Indianapolis and most recently as program director in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

"I believe McLeod is a great place to build an Internal Medicine Residency Program," said Collier. "With the diversity of patients and clinical services, it offers all the experiences residents need to become exceptional physicians."

Joining Dr. Collier is Dr. Richard Duff, a seasoned pulmonary and critical care physician who will serve as associate program director. The program will also be supported by a team of physician faculty members drawn from McLeod Health's highly skilled and experienced medical staff, many of whom have extensive teaching backgrounds and deep ties to the community.

Located at McLeod Regional Medical Center, a 517-bed tertiary care hospital, the program will offer:

- Comprehensive clinical experience in

both inpatient and outpatient settings

- A structured, evidence-based curriculum with emphasis on patient safety and quality improvement

- Opportunities for scholarly activity, including research, case reports and presentations

- Personalized mentorship and career development in primary care, hospital-based medicine and subspecialty fellowships

"Internal medicine physicians play a critical role in the future of health care—especially in rural and underserved regions," said Dr. Dale Lusk, corporate chief medical officer and senior vice president for Graduate Medical Education at McLeod Health. "This residency program is an investment not only in physician education but in the long-term health of the communities we serve."

Residents will begin training in July 2026. The program will accept applications through the Electronic Residency Application Service for interviews in the fall of 2025. To learn more, visit www.mcleodresidency.org or contact via email at mcleodimresidency@mcleodhealth.org.

ACS AWARDS \$10,000 TO MCLEOD FOUNDATION

Submitted by the American Cancer Society



ATLANTA, GA—The American Cancer Society recently awarded \$10,000 to the McLeod Health Foundation to provide transportation assistance to patients with cancer during treatment. The

grant is part of a nationwide investment of \$9 million that is expected to provide nearly 63,000 eligible patients with nearly \$800,000 in transportation and lodging services.

"We are pleased to accept this award and to continue our years-long partnership with the American Cancer Society," says Elizabeth Jones, the McLeod Health Foundation's executive director. "These funds will greatly assist our Helping Oncology Patients Everyday Fund accomplish its mission to provide patients with what they need to access and stay in treatment."

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.

Access to high-quality cancer treatment impacts cancer outcomes. A lack of transportation and lodging needed to receive quality care can lead to missed appointments, treatment interruptions and delays in follow-up care. In a 2023 Journal of the National Cancer Institute study, American Cancer Society researchers found that delayed care due to lack of transportation is associated with increased emergency room use and mortality risk among adults with and without cancer history.

"Transportation obstacles or the cost of a hotel room should not be barriers that determine the survival of those needing cancer treatment," said Dr. Arif Kamal, chief patient officer for the American Cancer Society. "Partnering with health systems and organizations across the country to provide funding to deliver the direct assistance needed helps to fill these equity gaps and improves cancer outcomes."

The American Cancer Society believes all people should have a fair and just opportunity to live a longer, healthier life free from cancer regardless of how much money they make, skin color, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status or where they live. In addition to providing transportation and lodging funding to health systems and organizations, the American Cancer Society runs a Road To Recovery program that provides free rides to and from treatment and over 30 Hope Lodge communities that provide a free place to stay during treatment.

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"Placing the hands of concern back into the healthcare of our communities."

The Pee Dee Medical Professionals Association, Inc. (PDMPA)

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Pictured from left to right: Gerry Shea, Office of Congressman Russell Fry; Lesli McGee, Chief Strategy Officer; Emily Lucero, Vice President of Facilities Management; Ronald Fowler, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of McLeod Health; Melissa Brad-ley, FNP; Dr. Kerolos Rizk, McLeod Oncologist; Dr. Donny Huynh, McLeod Oncologist; Judy Bibbo, Vice President of Patient Services; Dr. Virginia Clyburn-Ipock, McLeod Radiation Oncologist; Donna Isgett, President and CEO of McLeod Health; Will McLeod, CEO of McLeod Regional Medical Center; Nicole Spencer, Director of Oncology; Chris Hurst, Regional Practice Administrator for Oncology Services; Monica Vehige, CEO of McLeod Health Seacoast; Scott Montgomery, CEO of McLeod Health Loris and Carolina Forest; Elizabeth Jones, Executive Director, McLeod Foundation; Christina Jackson, Director, McLeod Foundation; and Kayla Thompson, Chair of the HOPE Fund Advisory Committee.

LITTLE RIVER-McLeod Health leaders announced today the expansion of its nationally accredited McLeod Cancer Program with the opening of the first Comprehensive Cancer Center in Horry County where all cancer treatment services are located under one roof. This new Cancer Center is a continuation of professionalism, expertise and commitment established five decades ago at the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research in Florence.

During a grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony held on April 30, attendees were able to tour the new Cancer Center on the campus of McLeod Health Seacoast. The state-of-the-art facility has been designed to prioritize convenience for patients and their families while providing the advanced cancer care they need. Services in the new Cancer Center include medical oncology, chemotherapy/ immunotherapy treatment, radiation oncology, genetic testing and research.

Donna Isgett, president and CEO of McLeod Health, offered the welcome for the ceremony. "At McLeod Health, we continue to fulfill our mission by providing the highest level of cancer treatment to patients close to home where they can remain surrounded by their support system of family and friends. We are local people caring for local people. This investment in the provision of cancer services accommodates the health care demands of a growing region. The new McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research demonstrates a very visible example of McLeod Health's commitment to meeting the health care needs of the residents in Horry County and surrounding communities."

Before delivering the invocation, Ronald Fowler, chairman of the McLeod Health Board of Trustees said, "We are pleased to provide the coastal region with world-class cancer treatment and research. Together with our physicians and medical teams, we are truly making a difference in the detection and treatment of cancer for the patients and families we serve. Cancer touches each of us and today we celebrate a place where hope lives."

"In this new Cancer Center, we are expanding the medical oncology and infusion services we have been offering patients on this campus for the past 10 years to now include radiation oncology with stereotactic radiosurgery, PET/CT scans, genetic

counseling and access to clinical research trials," explained Dr. Donny Huynh, a medical oncologist with McLeod Oncology and Hematology Associates at Seacoast. "At McLeod Health, we use a team approach to diagnose and treat cancer. Physicians representing various specialties, nurses, research staff, navigators, radiation therapists, pharmacists and social workers all collaborate in recommending treatment plans for our cancer patients, especially in challenging cases. Each team member with the McLeod Cancer Centers makes it our purpose to involve patients and their families in the treatment plan, and to navigate them on this journey – to be by their side when they are the most vulnerable."

Dr. Virginia Clyburn-Ipock, a radiation oncologist, added, "McLeod's Radiation Oncology program at this Cancer Center eliminates the unnecessary burden patients have faced having to travel to multiple facilities for their cancer care in Horry County. By bringing radiation therapy and chemotherapy together in this facility, McLeod further demonstrates its patient-centered mission. We know we are smarter when we work together. This center will allow the medical oncologist and radiation oncologist to be in the same building, working hand-in-hand to provide the very best care for patients."

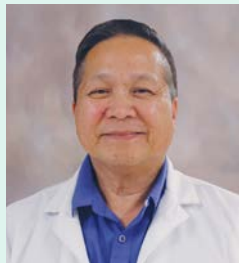
Will McLeod, CEO of McLeod Regional Medical Center, stated, "As the tertiary care center for the region, our vision is to serve as the choice for medical excellence. The opening of the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research in Horry County continues our 120 year tradition of improving the well-being of our 18-county service area. We are pleased to offer patients and families, both present and future generations, with a place of hope, caring, and survival and the guiding touch of a medical team ready to take on this challenge with them."

Accredited by the Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons, McLeod Cancer Centers demonstrate excellence in key elements crucial to the treatment of a complex group of diseases. These services include offering state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment facilities, cancer conference boards, a tumor registry and quality improvement programs.

The new Cancer Center is located at 3781 McDowell Lane in Little River, SC, on the campus of McLeod Health Seacoast.

CARESOUTH CAROLINA WELCOMES MARIANO RAZON AS NEW AFTER-HOURS PROVIDER

Articles submitted by CareSouth Carolina



Mariano Razon
DNP, APRN, FNP-C

HARTSVILLE—CareSouth Carolina is proud to welcome Mariano Razon, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, to its dedicated team of providers as part of its expanding after-hours program. Razon brings over seven years of experience in community mental health and now turns his focus to primary care, where he hopes to make a broad and lasting impact.

"I'm very much interested in primary care because it offers a wider spectrum," said Razon. "After working in mental health, I saw that many patients also had other medical issues. Integrating both mental and physical health care is key to helping people live healthier, more complete lives."

Razon will be serving patients during CareSouth Carolina's extended hours, helping fill critical gaps in health care access across the Pee Dee region. With clinics often closed in the evenings, CareSouth's proactive after-hours program ensures that individuals and families still have access to timely, comprehensive care—especially for those who cannot visit during traditional workday hours.

"Many no-shows happen simply because patients are

working, lack transportation or have other conflicts during the day," Razon said. "Being open until 8 p.m. on select weekdays provides much-needed flexibility and helps community members stay on top of their health."

CareSouth Carolina's After-Hours program offers late weekday hours at:

- **Tuesday** – Bishopville
- **Thursday** – Bennettsville Main
- **Wednesday** – Cheraw
- **Friday** – Society Hill

Additionally, Saturday hours (9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) will now be offered in Chesterfield, where Razon will also be seeing patients. Hartsville and Dillon have already been offering Saturday clinics from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

A passionate advocate for prevention and health maintenance, Razon emphasizes the importance of long-term wellness through lifestyle choices and early intervention. "Health care is satisfying work because you're providing services that help people optimize their lives," he said. "When you're healthy, you can do more. My focus is on increasing health span and quality of life."

When he's not caring for patients, Razon enjoys mountain biking, gardening with his wife, walking for exercise, spending time at the beach, enjoying the sunrise and sunset and visiting friends and family.

CARESOUTH'S DR. CRYSTAL LEONARD NAMED SCPHA DELEGATE



Crystal Leonard

CareSouth Carolina's clinical pharmacist, Crystal Leonard, PharmD, MBA, has been elected as a delegate to the South Carolina Pharmacy Association, representing the Pee Dee Region.

Leonard, who has served patients at CareSouth Carolina for the past two years, will begin her term as delegate in July 2025, continuing through June 2027. She will be formally introduced at

the South Carolina Pharmacy Association's Annual Convention taking place June 19-22 in Hilton Head, South Carolina.

"Being elected to represent the Pee Dee region is a true honor," Leonard said. "One thing I've always loved about our profession is how collaborative it can be. My passion is rooted in patient-centered care and working alongside other healthcare professionals to create a fully integrated approach."

Leonard's role at CareSouth Carolina goes beyond the pharmacy counter. She plays an active part in providing medication education, increasing adherence among patients and ensuring that every individual—regardless of their ability to pay—receives high-quality, compassionate care.

"The reason I went into pharmacy in the first place was because of family," she shared. "I've always wanted to make a real difference in people's lives. So many patients struggle with non-adherence, and I want to be part of the solution—to educate, support and empower them."

The South Carolina Pharmacy Association has a long-standing history of elevating the pharmacy profession across the state. Established in 1876, the Association was born out of a need for greater quality control and accountability in the practice of pharmacy. Today, the South Carolina Pharmacy Association continues to advocate for its members and the advancement of pharmacy practice, education and legislation in South Carolina.

CARESOUTH CAROLINA WELCOMES NICOLE CHAPMAN TO HARTSVILLE



Nicole Chapman

HARTSVILLE — CareSouth Carolina is proud to welcome Nicole Chapman, MSW, LISW-CP, as the newest behavioral health provider at its Hartsville office.

Chapman brings years of clinical experience and a passion for helping others to her new role at CareSouth Carolina.

"I was at a point in my career where I wanted to go into outpatient and work more one-on-one with individuals," Chapman said. "I had multiple personal and professional connections who spoke highly of CareSouth Carolina's culture and environment. When I learned about the opportunity, I jumped on it."

Chapman will be joining CareSouth Carolina's nationally recognized Integrated Behavioral Health program, where patients receive quality care by some of the best, most caring professionals in the field of mental health. In her new role, she will see patients of all ages, focusing on creating strong, supportive therapeutic relationships. She emphasizes the use of empathy, active listening and collaboration to help individuals reach their goals.

"My approach is all about developing trust and understanding," she said. "It's about creating a space where people feel heard and supported."

Chapman is especially drawn to the holistic, team-based approach that CareSouth Carolina is known for—integrating medical and mental health services to ensure patients have a complete care plan.

"It's such an impactful model," she said. "When mental health and medical providers work together, we can make a real difference in people's healing journey. That collaboration is what makes CareSouth Carolina special."

Outside of her work, Nicole enjoys reading, spending time with family and friends and staying connected to her community.

To make an appointment, please call 843-332-3422.

Convenient Locations:

Bennettsville Center
999 Cheraw Street
Bennettsville, SC 29512
843.479.2341

Bennettsville Pediatric Center
210 W. Main Street
Bennettsville, SC 29512
843.479.1200

Bennettsville Women's Center
1076 Marlboro Way Rd., Suite 1
Bennettsville, SC 29512
843.454.2294

Bishopville Center
545 Sumter Highway
Bishopville, SC 29010
803.484.5317

Bishopville Pediatric Dental
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Bishopville, SC 29010
866.815.9845

Cheraw Center
812 State Road
Cheraw, SC 29520
843.537.0961
843.921.6711 Foot Care

Chesterfield Center
204 Perry Wiley Way
Chesterfield, SC 29709
843.623.3080

Dillon Center
1016 Old Latta Highway
Dillon, SC 29536
843.774.4337

Hartsville Center
1268 S. Fourth Street
Hartsville, SC 29550
843.332.3422
843.339.5520 Chiropractic

Lake View Center
103 N. Kemper Street
Lake View, SC 29563
843.759.2189

Latta Center
122 Latimer Street
Latta, SC 29565
843.627.6252

McColl Health & Wellness Center
3080 Highway 15-401 E
McColl, SC 29570
843.523.5751

Society Hill Center
737 S. Main Street
Society Hill, SC 29593
843.378.4501

Pharmacy Locations:

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1280 S. Fourth Street
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545 Sumter Hwy
803.588.7960

BENNETTSVILLE
999 Cheraw Street
843.456.7777

SOCIETY HILL
737 S. Main Street
843.378.4148

CHERAW
812 State Road
843.865.4080

DILLON
1016 Old Latta Highway
842.627.7154

LATTA
122 Latimer Street
843.627.6261

CHESTERFIELD
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CARE SOUTH CAROLINA EXPANDS HOURS AT FIVE SITES

Submitted by CareSouth Carolina

HARTSVILLE—The Health Resources and Services Administration, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, announced an investment in CareSouth Carolina that will allow the organization to add additional hours of operation to support the critical clinical and administrative staff.

Since health centers see patients regardless of their ability to pay, this expansion of operating hours will be particularly critical for people who are uninsured, underinsured or have Medicaid coverage and struggle to find affordable care outside of traditional business hours and cannot afford expensive visits to urgent care, retail clinics or emergency departments.

The week of May 6, CareSouth Carolina added three additional hours of operation per week for its Bishopville, Bennettsville and Rosa Lee Gerald (Society Hill) centers. The organization will also have two additional hours of operation per week in Cheraw, and four additional hours per week at its Chesterfield center.

It will be open until 8:00 p.m. on select weekdays:

- Tuesday — Bishopville
- Thursday — Bennettsville Main
- Wednesday — Cheraw
- Friday — Society Hill

In addition, Saturday hours will be 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Chesterfield, Hartsville and Dillon.

Walk-ins are welcome, and appointments are encouraged. You can call your local office to make an appointment.

"We believe that expanding the hours of operation at five of our centers will make services more accessible, especially for those whose work hours limit current access," CareSouth Carolina CEO Ann Lewis said. "The five locations--Bishopville, Cheraw, Bennettsville, Rosa Lee Gerald in Society Hill and Chesterfield--will each have regularly scheduled weekly expanded hours. We are hiring a special team to assure that these expanded hours are consistently available."

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This funding will also help health center patients with common challenges in accessing health care – for example, taking a child to the doctor after work or getting a timely appointment on the weekend – and help connect patients to preventive services and resources for health-related social needs to improve health outcomes.

Many patients currently forgo care altogether in these circumstances, putting their health at greater risk and leading to more expensive visits to emergency departments when conditions get more serious.

"No one should have to delay or skip a trip to the doctor because of work or school. The millions of Americans who can't miss their daytime work shift, whose kids are in school, who have limited childcare or who face transportation challenges deserve the same access to quality care," said Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra. "These investments will help to extend operating hours, especially for patients in rural or underserved communities nationwide. I'm proud to be part of an administration that leaves nobody behind."

CareSouth Carolina is a private, non-profit community health center delivering patient-centered health and life services in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. CareSouth Carolina operates centers in Bennettsville, Bishopville, Cheraw, Chesterfield, Dillon, Hartsville, Lake View, Latta, McColl and Society Hill.

Services provided by CareSouth Carolina include family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, women's services, OB/GYN, HIV/AIDS primary care, infectious disease primary care, IV therapy, substance abuse prevention, dental, chiropractic services, pharmacy, senior support services, family support services, clinical counseling, laboratory, ultrasound, X-Ray, agricultural worker health services, podiatry and veterans' choice provider.

CHILDHOOD OBESITY AWARENESS: SCHOOL MEAL TIPS

Submitted by Kitty Finklea, RDN HopeHealth



Kitty Finklea, RDN

School is back in session, with rushed mornings, after-school activities, nightly homework and less time to focus on preparing fresh, healthy meals. Carving out some time to regroup from summer and plan nutritious meals and snacks is important to help children and teens consume more of the vital nutrients needed for their growing bodies and brains. Good nutrition also helps kids perform better in school and after-school activities, plus they have more energy and feel better overall. Here are some meal planning tips to make it easier for everyone!

Power up with breakfast

Breakfast provides the necessary brain fuel to help kids think and process. Aim for a breakfast that includes a protein option for staying power, such as eggs, cheese, nut or seed butter and Greek yogurt. Add two to three more food groups from whole grains, fruit, dairy or vegetables. For picky eaters or kids that aren't hungry, first establish a breakfast habit with two food groups and build in another food group over time.

Three simple, balanced breakfast options are egg muffins with veggies and a side of fruit, cheese or peanut butter toast with fruit, or whole grain cereal with milk, fruit and nuts or seeds. If you're running late, grab a protein bar or protein shake and a piece of fruit.

Pack a healthy lunch

When packing lunch, include three to four food groups. Start with protein, such as grilled or baked chicken, preservative-free deli meat, tuna, hardboiled eggs, cheese, nut or seed butter or meat from last night's dinner.

Next, add whole grains or starches such as whole grain bread, wraps, crackers, pasta, potatoes, rice or corn. Include fresh fruit or fruit packed in juice, dairy including milk or yogurt and veggies such as carrots, celery and cucumber slices with ranch dip. Add in a portion of "fun food" like chips or cookies.

If your kids eat school lunch, discuss the menu each week and encourage them to build a balanced plate by picking a protein, starch, and the fruits, dairy and veggies they like.

Schedule strong snacks

Snacks help fuel kids between meals and keep them from getting too hungry. Make sure kids have a snack when they get home, and pack snacks for any after-school activities. A strong snack consists of protein for longer-lasting staying power combined with a starch or fruit.

What's for dinner?

Nutritious dinners include a protein, whole grain or starch, a vegetable and fruit or dairy.

Plan ahead to simplify the process. Cook larger quantities and freeze part for another day, find easy time-savers including sheet pan and crockpot recipes the family enjoys, and add in themed meals for fun such as Breakfast for Dinner, Taco Tuesday, or Spaghetti Friday. In a pinch, a rotisserie chicken with frozen veggies or a salad kit and a quick-cook rice or other starch is a well-balanced meal.

Research over the last 30 years reveals eating together as a family at least three times a week is beneficial for children of all ages. This time together improves academic performance, builds connections, boosts self-esteem and decreases the risk of substance abuse and eating disorders. Sitting down to



breakfast or lunch as a family also counts! Schedule time together each week without screens or phones and keep the conversation light. Visit thefamilydinnerproject.org for inspiration and recipes.

More meal planning strategies to consider

Create a master list of tried-and-true meals and engage the kids for input on their favorite meals to add and what foods or meals they would like to try. Keep adding to your master list over time. Add a grocery list template in your phone for staple items and check inventory before food shopping to make the process more efficient.

Plan for three to five dinners a week, and when possible, cook enough to freeze or add to other meals. For example, make enough grilled chicken for dinner with additional chicken for wraps at lunch.

Update your meal plan each quarter to include in-season produce and meals that go with the season. Add a new recipe at least once a month, and let the family vote on whether the meal is a keeper. Focus on successful meals, and don't stress about meals that don't make the cut. Successes and failures are part of the process!

Let kids help in the process starting as early as age two. Visit cacfp.org for a list of age-appropriate kitchen tasks from the Child and Adult Care Food Program.



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Manning

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(803) 825-4113



hope-health.org/pharmacy

HOPEHEALTH WELCOMES NEW PROVIDERS

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



Neva Bailey, LPC, CASII

Neva Bailey, LPC, CASII, is a Behavioral Health Consultant serving patients at HopeHealth in Timmonsville. She earned a Master of Education degree in School Guidance Counseling from Cambridge College in Augusta, Georgia. Bailey has lived in Timmonsville for 22 years and is passionate about her community. Her clinical interests are stress management, grief and loss, anxiety and depression, Cognitive behavioral therapy and children and adolescents.



Lashonda Dingle, FNP

Lashonda Dingle, FNP, is a family nurse practitioner at HopeHealth in Manning. She earned a Master of Science degree from Walden University in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and an Associate of Nursing degree from Florence Darlington Technical College in Florence, South Carolina. Her clinical interests are primary care and family medicine. A Manning native, she is a member of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, the American Nurses Association and the South Carolina Nurses Association.



Daniel Duarte, DMD

Daniel Duarte, DMD, is a dentist at the HopeHealth Medical Plaza in Florence. He earned a Doctor of Dental Medicine degree from the University of New England in Portland, Maine. He then graduated from the Oral Health Leadership Institute, which provides foundational and essential building blocks for dentists serving in federally qualified health centers. Duarte has served in the U.S. Army National Guard since 2013, from a dental student to a platoon leader and dental officer. He enjoys connecting with patients and fostering trust, understanding and a personalized approach to a patient's overall well-being. He is fluent in conversational Spanish.



Samantha Dukes, LPC

Samantha Dukes, LPC, is a behavioral health consultant at HopeHealth Pediatrics in Manning. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology and a Master of Science degree in Applied Psychology (Clinical/Counseling option) from Francis Marion University in Florence, South Carolina. Her clinical interests are behavioral concerns, anxiety, depression, relationship distress, anger, PTSD and trauma.



Paul James, DNP

Paul James, DNP, is a nurse practitioner serving patients at HopeHealth in Lake City. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Coastal Carolina University in Conway, South Carolina, a Master of Science in Nursing, and a Doctor of Nursing from the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, South Carolina. His clinical interests are COPD, asthma, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidemia. A native of Florence, James is excited to serve this community and the surrounding areas.

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.



Sweet Feet Diabetic Foot Spa is honored to announce our partnership with TLC Your Way Hospice Services to provide gentle,

specialized diabetic foot care to their patients. At Sweet Feet Diabetic Foot Spa, we believe in dignity, comfort and compassionate care—especially for those in life's most delicate moments. Our certified foot care specialists will now bring soothing, medically safe treatments directly to the hospice patient's home, helping enhance quality of life one step at a time.

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- ✓ Spa-quality care in a hospice setting
- ✓ Serving with heart and purpose

This collaboration reflects our shared mission: to bring gentle, compassionate care to those who need it most.

Proper foot care is important for everybody, but especially for seniors with diabetes. That's because your feet can suffer if your diabetes is not well-controlled.

Why do people with diabetes have a higher amount of foot issues?

There are two main reasons that can lead to an increase in foot issues for those living with diabetes. **Peripheral neuropathy** (nerve damage), caused by continually high blood sugar levels, can result in a loss of sensation in the feet making it difficult for individuals to feel pain, heat or injuries. **Poor circulation**, also known as peripheral artery disease, can decrease blood flow to the extremities. As a result, the healing process is slowed, making the feet more susceptible to infections.

What are some common foot care complications?

Calluses are areas of skin that become thick and hard from rubbing or pressure. Calluses occur more often and build up faster on

the feet of people with diabetes.

Foot ulcers are breaks in the skin or sores that occur most often on the ball of the foot or on the bottom of the big toe. Foot ulcers are a leading cause of hospital admissions for people with diabetes.

What type of symptoms of neuropathy can occur in your legs and feet?

- Sharp, shooting pains
- A burning or tingling feeling
- A feeling of being pricked with pins
- Throbbing
- Numbness (not able to feel pain, heat or cold)

What are the consequences of neglecting foot care?

• Poorly managed foot ulcers can lead to deep infections, including cellulitis, abscesses and bone infections (osteomyelitis). These conditions can be challenging to treat and often require aggressive medical intervention.

• Diabetes is one of the leading causes of lower-limb **amputations** globally. Most amputations are preceded by foot ulcers or infections that could not be adequately controlled.

• Foot problems can significantly impact mobility, independence and overall quality of life. They also place a considerable amount of emotional and financial burden on individuals and their families.

Footcare is a cornerstone of diabetes management and can mean the difference between maintaining mobility and independence or facing severe complications like infections and amputations. A healthy lifestyle and adopting daily foot care practices can help you ensure that you do not develop foot complications.

Thank you, TLC Hospice Services, for trusting us to walk this journey with you.

Providing foot care for those nearing the end of their journey is an absolute honor. Thank you to Mrs. Samuels, owner of TLC Hospice, for making this possible for her patients.

A photograph showing a person's feet being examined by a healthcare professional. The person is wearing white socks and white shoes. The healthcare professional is wearing a blue uniform and is using a stethoscope to listen to the person's feet. The background is a wooden floor.

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RELIEF WITHIN REACH: EXPANDING PAIN CARE IN PEE DEE

Submitted by Hanna Caddell, marketing and communications coordinator



Dr. Sushruth Moku, DO

For many people, pain is more than just an occasional ache - it's a daily challenge. Whether caused by arthritis, injury, nerve damage, or illness, chronic pain can take a heavy toll on everything from work and relationships to sleep and emotional health. But for patients in rural areas like the Pee Dee, finding expert help for complex pain conditions hasn't always been easy.

That's why Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center is proud to welcome Dr. Sushruth Moku, DO, an interventional spine and pain management specialist now seeing patients locally! His arrival represents more than just a new provider - it's a major step forward in expanding access to specialty care right here at home.

"Pain is deeply personal. It's not just about treating symptoms - it's about understanding how that pain affects someone's life," says Moku. "My role is

to listen, evaluate, and then create a plan that fits each individual patient."

Moku treats a wide range of conditions, including:

- Chronic back and neck pain
- Joint and arthritis-related pain
- Neuropathy and nerve pain
- Post-surgical pain
- Sciatica and herniated discs

While some may assume pain management always involves medications, Moku emphasizes that there's no one-size-fits-all approach. His treatment plans often incorporate interventional techniques like targeted injections, nerve blocks, and neuromodulation, in addition to lifestyle guidance and coordination with physical therapy or primary care.

"I believe in conservative, thoughtful treatment. Many patients are surprised at how much relief they can find with the right combination of therapies - and without relying on opioids," he explains.

Carolina Pines' decision to bring pain management in-house comes in direct response to a growing need in the community. For years, patients had to travel long distances - often to larger cities - just to see a specialist. That meant longer waits, less follow-up, and in some cases, untreated pain becoming worse.

"We heard from our primary care teams that chronic pain was one of the most common concerns their patients had," says Dr. Brian Sponseller, Chief Medical Officer and Interim CEO at Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center. "Now, with Dr. Moku here, we're able to

offer those patients an expert resource close to home - and that's a game changer for continuity of care."

This move also reflects the hospital's commitment to health equity - recognizing that access to specialty services shouldn't depend on geography, income, or transportation. Everyone deserves the opportunity to live a fuller, more comfortable life.

Moku joins a growing network of providers at Carolina Pines Medical Group who are dedicated to serving patients in every phase of life.

"It takes a team," Moku says. "Pain doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's connected to someone's history, their health, their goals. When we collaborate across specialties, we give patients the best chance at long-term relief."

For patients living with persistent pain - or for families supporting a loved one who is - help is now closer than ever. It starts with a conversation.

Moku sees patients at Carolina Pines Medical Group, located at 701 Medical Park Drive, Suite 303 in Hartsville, SC. To schedule an appointment, call 843.383.2764. For more information, visit themedicalgroup.com/pain-management.



MEET OUR NEW CEO: NICOLE ECHOLS Submitted by the South Carolina Cancer Alliance



Nicole Echols

The South Carolina Cancer Alliance is proud to announce the appointment of Nicole Echols as its new chief executive officer. Echols brings a wealth of experience in nonprofit leadership and stakeholder engagement. Most recently, she served as director of external affairs at HopeHealth, where she led efforts to strengthen relationships with key partners. Her extensive background in nonprofit operations and her ability to build meaningful alliances have earned her a reputation as a

passionate and effective leader.

“Nicole is a visionary leader with a deep understanding of South Carolina’s communities and the challenges they face,” said board member Marvella Ford, Ph.D. “We are thrilled to welcome her as our new chief executive officer. Her passion, experience and statewide relationships will be key to expanding our reach and impact in the fight against cancer.”

Throughout her career, Echols has received numerous accolades, including the Florence Young Professional of the Year and Black Pages Top 40 Under 40 in 2015, and the prestigious Fred R. Sheheen Award for Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership in 2019. In 2024, she was named the Elizabeth K. Cooke Advocacy MVP by the National Association of Community Health Centers for her outstanding efforts on behalf of Community Health Centers.

She holds leadership roles on several boards and councils, including Women in Philanthropy, the Women’s Rights and Empowerment Network, Pee Dee First Steps (as board chair) and Together SC. Echols is also an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and a past president of the Junior League of Florence. She contributes her expertise on advisory boards such as the Duke Energy Advisory Board and the MUSC Patient Advisory Council.

“Cancer is something that affects nearly every family in South Carolina,” said Echols. “The SC Cancer Alliance plays a vital role in easing that burden through prevention, early detection and access to care. I’m honored to serve as chief executive officer and to lead this important work as we continue to expand our reach and impact across the state.”

To honor Echols’ appointment as chief executive officer and support the ongoing work of the SC Cancer Alliance, individuals are invited to make a contribution at www.SCCancer.org. Your gift will help continue vital efforts in cancer prevention, early detection and support for South Carolinians impacted by cancer.

Founded in 2003, the South Carolina Cancer Alliance is a statewide, multidisciplinary network of cancer experts, healthcare providers, community organizations and volunteers. The Alliance leads the development and implementation of the SC Cancer Plan—South Carolina’s roadmap to achieving greater equity and access in cancer prevention, treatment and survivorship. Through strategic collaboration and a deep commitment to those affected by cancer, the SC Cancer Alliance is making a measurable and meaningful difference in communities across the state.

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MUSC EMERGENCY INNOVATION EXPANDS STATEWIDE

Articles submitted by Helen Adams, MUSC Catalyst News



A pilot program aimed at improving patients' experiences in Charleston Emergency Departments has been such a success that it's now being used at MUSC Health Florence Medical Center and soon in other hospitals in Orangeburg, and Marion. (Pictured from left) VPIT Navigator Amanda Bryant, Dr. Danny Park, Divisional Nursing Director of Emergency Services, Beth Vlahavas, Divisional Emergency Director, Christo Courban, and Advanced Practice Provider Lead, Dustin Hayes, PA-C. (Photo credited to MUSC Health Florence Medical Center)

A pilot program aimed at improving patient experiences in two MUSC Health emergency departments in Charleston has been so successful that it's now expanding to three other MUSC Health hospitals—in Orangeburg, Florence and Marion.

The results are impressive, said Dr. Marc Bartman and Dr. Danny Park, the emergency medicine physicians leading the initiative. Their program, which focuses on cutting "door-to-provider" time, has reduced the average wait to see a doctor by 50 percent. It has also decreased the number of patients leaving the emergency department (ED) without being seen by 80 percent.

"We have an opportunity to reimagine emergency care," Park said. "For the past 20 years, the ED care model has barely changed. We're bringing innovation into

the space to create a more patient-centered experience from the moment a patient walks through our doors."

Virtual Provider in Triage

The program, called Virtual Provider in Triage (VPIT), uses telehealth to connect patients with physicians shortly after they arrive. Patients meet with providers one-on-one in private consultation rooms, often within minutes.

Those with straightforward needs—such as medication refills—can often be treated entirely through the virtual visit, freeing up in-person resources for patients with more complex issues. For those who require additional care, the virtual consultation can trigger earlier imaging or lab work to expedite treatment.

Still, Bartman and Park stress that telehealth does not replace in-person care. Instead, it enhances it by jump-starting the clinical process and reducing wait times, helping patients feel seen and heard sooner.

Improving the Process

Bartman said the innovation began by rethinking the initial steps of emergency care. "We decoupled the traditional triage process," he said.

In many emergency departments, triage nurses ask screening questions, with occasional physician input. But that can feel rushed and impersonal to patients, Park said.

"Often, patients don't even realize they've spoken to a provider," he said. "We want to make sure each patient has a clear,

one-on-one conversation with a provider early in their visit."

The result is a more streamlined and personal approach. "It's paying off," Bartman said. "We've increased the efficiency of how quickly we're seeing patients, and we've significantly improved the patient experience."

Follow-Up Care Expands

The VPIT program is also expanding to include virtual follow-up care. "As part of their discharge plan, select patients will be scheduled for a virtual follow-up visit with one of our providers," Bartman said. "This brief check-in allows us to reassess their condition, address new or ongoing concerns, and prescribe medications if needed."

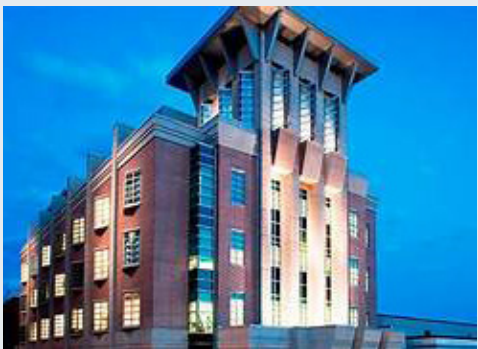
These follow-ups also help determine if recovery at home is appropriate or if further in-person evaluation is necessary. "This added layer of support ensures safer transitions and helps prevent unnecessary return visits to the ED," Bartman said.

Gaining National Attention

The impact of the VPIT program has drawn national interest. Bartman and Park have presented their model to audiences across the country, and several health systems have reached out for guidance on implementation.

"This is an opportunity for us to change the status quo and move the field forward," Park said. "We're not merely improving metrics and outcomes—we're redesigning what emergency care can look like."

MUSC HOLLINGS CANCER CENTER'S \$860M ECONOMIC IMPACT IN SC



MUSC Hollings Cancer Center

CHARLESTON- MUSC Hollings Cancer Center is a significant driver of the South Carolina economy, according to a new study authored by Joey Von Nessen, Ph.D., a research economist at the University of South Carolina Darla Moore School of Business, that provides a comprehensive assessment of Hollings' economic impact on

the state.

With a twin focus on patient care and cutting-edge research and development, Hollings' large workforce and operations contribute to an extensive supply chain network that generates robust economic ripple effects across many industries in South Carolina and beyond, resulting in a demand for a broad portfolio of goods and services. This economic activity generates well-paying jobs for South Carolinians and leads to additional income tax revenue for the state.

"As the only National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center in South Carolina, Hollings is uniquely positioned to attract a highly educated workforce that is at the forefront of cancer research and care – efforts that benefit residents of our state," said Raymond N. DuBois, M.D.,

Ph.D., director of Hollings Cancer Center. "And with this study, we are able to see how that expertise also benefits the state monetarily through our impact on job creation, purchasing and even state tax contributions."

With South Carolina experiencing both a growing and aging population base, the demand for health care – especially oncology-related services-- will continue to rise. Hollings Cancer Center is poised to play an increasingly critical role in the economic and physical health of South Carolina in the coming years.

"Our new cancer hospital, scheduled for completion within five years, will significantly expand this economic impact as we hire more researchers, providers and staff – and increase our capacity to care for more patients," added DuBois.

FIRST MUSC LEQEMBI PATIENT DOING WELL By Helen Adams, MUSC Catalyst News



Pictured Chris and Janet Long. Janet Long encourages people to see a neurologist as soon as they start to wonder about having Alzheimer's. Photo by Julie Taylor

Chris Long and his wife, Janet, were thrilled when he became the first patient at MUSC Health to receive the Alzheimer's drug Leqembi. Now, more than a year and a half later, we caught up with them during Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month.

We found the Longs on vacation in Michigan, where Chris continues to receive Leqembi infusions until they return to South Carolina this fall. Leqembi is designed to

slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

Janet believes the medication is making a difference.

"I think that the Leqembi has really slowed things down," she said. "He still has full conversations with people. He still has his full sense of humor. He still golfs; we do all kinds of stuff with our friends."

He even gave speeches at the recent wedding rehearsal dinners for both of their sons.

"We were out there Greek dancing at the second one," Janet added, laughing.

Chris said receiving Leqembi has made him feel more hopeful about the future, even though he understands the disease isn't going away. His neurologist, Dr. Andrew Keegan, is also encouraged.

"He has clinically remained stable, which is excellent to see," Keegan said. "Our goal with these treatments is to slow decline."

Chris is one of more than 80 patients now receiving Alzheimer's treatment infusions at MUSC Health. Some are getting Leqembi, while others are receiving Kisunla, another drug that, like Leqembi, targets amyloid plaques in the brain—hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease.

Dr. Nick Milano, a neurologist and colleague of Keegan's, explained that while the medications work slightly differently, both are monoclonal antibodies that help the immune system remove the harmful plaques.

Asked how effective these treatments seem to be, Milano noted that it's still early.

"We don't have large enough numbers to really do a scientific assessment of that," he said. "But I think in almost all of our patients, the drugs are well tolerated, and they stick with them. The few patients I've seen who are now past the year-and-a-half mark seem to be doing well. A lot of them are holding steady without significant decline."

Still, he emphasized, there's no way to know how patients would be doing without the medications.

Milano highlighted several important considerations for patients thinking about treatment:

- First, the drugs are only approved for people with early symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. They're not currently for patients who show protein buildup on scans or blood tests but don't have cognitive issues—though that may change as research evolves.

- Second, doctors must carefully assess who is a good candidate. People with a specific genetic variant are at higher risk for side effects, so genetic testing is required before starting treatment.

- Third, patients interested in treatment should consult a neurologist—preferably one experienced in administering and monitoring these therapies.

"And when they're talking with their neurologist, they should ask about the neurologist's experience with these drugs, as well as their plan for monitoring and managing potentially serious side effects," Milano said.

- Fourth, those side effects can be significant. They include inflammation, bleeding, headaches, nausea and allergic reactions. Some patients experience fever, lightheadedness, or changes in heart rate. However, a recent study found that only about 1 percent of patients had side effects serious enough to require hospitalization.

"You do need to weigh the benefits of these drugs, which are not a cure," Milano said. "They slow progression, but there is some risk, so make sure your treatment plan is something you're comfortable with. The medication's not right for everyone."

MUSC Health is also working to expand access to Alzheimer's treatment infusions outside of Charleston, including establishing clinics in other hospitals in its regional network and offering virtual consultations through the South Carolina Alzheimer's Network.

Chris has spent a lot of time in the infusion clinic at MUSC's West Ashley Medical Pavilion.

"I usually read. Sometimes just veg," he said. "Don't do a heck of a lot. It's about an hour, and you wait about a half-hour after that," referring to the observation period to monitor for any immediate side effects.

While Leqembi isn't a cure, Chris and Janet are grateful to have something to fight the disease with.

Janet offered advice for others navigating similar circumstances:

"As soon as you start wondering whether you could have Alzheimer's, get in to see a neurologist," she said. "Because the sooner you get analyzed to see whether you can have the treatment, the better."



Janet and Chris Long talk with nurse Wanda Crosby at the West Ashley Medical Pavilion, where he's getting a Leqembi infusion. He's been on the treatment since October 2023. Photo by Julie Taylor

DR. JENIQUA DUNCAN NAMED S.C. CLINICAL QUALITY LEADER Articles submitted by CareSouth Carolina



Dr. Jeniqua Duncan

HARTSVILLE - CareSouth Carolina proudly announces that Jeniqua Duncan, D.O., M.B.A., CH-CBS, chief of value-based care, has been named the 2024 Clinical Quality Leader of the Year by the South Carolina Primary Health Care Association. The award was presented during this year's South Carolina Primary Healthcare Clinical Retreat.

Dr. Duncan was recognized for her outstanding leadership in driving clinical transformation and achieving measurable improvements in health outcomes across the CareSouth Carolina network. Known for her strategic vision and results-oriented approach, she has led initiatives that have reduced health disparities and significantly advanced chronic disease management—particularly in hypertension care.

"I am honored to receive this recognition, but my greatest privilege in this role is leading the team of highly skilled and compassionate members of the Value-Based Care Division," Duncan said. "I am so excited to see what the team and our other CareSouth Carolina colleagues have in store for the health of our communities."

Under her leadership, CareSouth Carolina earned national

Target: BP™ Gold+ recognition from the American Heart Association and the American Medical Association. The award reflects the organization's success in implementing evidence-based hypertension protocols and training clinical staff on the latest blood pressure guidelines.

Duncan also spearheaded a remote patient monitoring program for hypertension, enabling patients to manage their blood pressure from home. As a result, CareSouth Carolina's hyper-tension control rate increased by 14 percent from 2022 to 2024, making it the top-performing health center in the state for hypertension control—up from seventh just two years ago.

"I have had the distinct pleasure of working alongside Dr. Duncan for many years and in multiple capacities," said Dr. Jeri Andrews, chief medical officer. "Her unwavering commitment to excellence is evident in every aspect of her work. Through her dedication and leadership, she has built a team that consistently delivers measurable results and drives meaningful improvements in patient outcomes. Dr. Duncan not only sets a high standard for herself but also inspires and empowers those around her to do the same—an impact that is clearly reflected in both the quality of care provided and the lives touched by her work."

The award highlights not only Duncan's clinical expertise but also her ability to lead with compassion, innovate with purpose and turn data into actionable results. Her work ensures that CareSouth Carolina continues to lead the way in value-based care, focusing on outcomes that matter most to patients.

KAITLIN HUGHES WINS STATEWIDE PRACTICE TRANSFORMATION AWARD



Kaitlin Hughes

HARTSVILLE - CareSouth Carolina proudly announces that Kaitlin Hughes, BS, RMA, director of mobile and telehealth services, has been named the recipient of the 2025 Champion of Practice Transformation Award at the South Carolina Primary Health Care Association's Clinical Retreat.

This prestigious award honors an individual who exemplifies leadership and innovation in improving access to care. Hughes'

work over the past several years has done just that. Through her vision and commitment, she has helped transform how health services are delivered to some of South Carolina's most vulnerable populations—particularly children in rural and underserved communities.

"I'm honored to receive the Champion of Practice Transformation Award," Hughes said. "This reflects the dedication of so many working to improve care, drive innovation and put patients at the center of all we do. True transformation is always a team effort."

For the past three and a half years, Hughes has led the rapid expansion of CareSouth Carolina's virtual care programs across 38 schools and youth residential facilities. By building strong partnerships with school administrators, nurses and community leaders, she has helped bridge critical gaps in access to care while also reducing missed classroom time for students.

Hughes also oversees CareSouth Carolina's ROADS (Reaching Out and Delivering Services) mobile medical unit program, which

currently provides health care services in 57 schools. Under her leadership, CareSouth Carolina has integrated mobile and virtual care into a single, seamless system—bringing health services directly to the children and families who need them most.

Her leadership has attracted significant support and investment, including several hundred thousand dollars in USDA grant funding to expand telehealth infrastructure in high-need areas. In 2022, her efforts were recognized nationally when Palmetto Care Connections named CareSouth Carolina's telehealth initiative the "Telehealth Program of Excellence."

"Kaitlin has played a pivotal role in the continued success of our school-based telehealth program," said Dr. Jeri Andrews, chief medical officer at CareSouth Carolina. "Through her leadership, the program has evolved into a model of best practices that is now being looked to by organizations across South Carolina. Over the past few years, I've had the privilege of watching Kaitlin grow into a remarkable leader. Her dedication, innovation and drive continue to inspire those around her, and I am excited to see all she will accomplish in the future."

CareSouth Carolina is a private, nonprofit community health center delivering patient-centered health and life services in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. The organization operates centers in Bennettsville, Bishopville, Cheraw, Chesterfield, Dillon, Hartsville, Lake View, Latta, McColl and Society Hill.

Services provided by CareSouth Carolina include family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, women's services, OB-GYN, HIV/AIDS primary care, infectious disease care, IV therapy, substance use prevention, dental and chiropractic services, pharmacy, senior and family support services, clinical counseling, laboratory services, ultrasound, X-ray, agricultural worker health services, podiatry and veterans' care.

TAKE IT SLOW: WHY SLOWING DOWN MATTERS THIS YEAR



Life moves fast. Really fast. Between work, errands, family responsibilities, social media and trying to keep up with everything else, most of us stay in a constant state of “go, go, go.”

But more people are starting to say “no thanks” to the nonstop grind and “yes please” to a slower, more intentional way of living—and they’re feeling better because of it.

What’s the Rush?

Let’s face it—we live in a culture that worships busyness. If your calendar isn’t packed, your inbox isn’t overflowing, or your phone isn’t constantly buzzing, it can feel like you’re falling behind.

“We’re taught to measure our worth by how productive we are,” said Dr. Karen Mendez, a behavioral health expert based in Atlanta. “But constantly being ‘on’ doesn’t leave much room for reflection, creativity or even joy.”

Sound familiar? You’re not alone. A recent survey by the American Psychological Association found that a majority of adults report feeling stressed most of the time. Many say they don’t even have time to take care of themselves—and when they do, they often feel guilty about it.

What Slowing Down Actually Looks Like

Slowing down doesn’t mean quitting your job, moving to a cabin in the woods or giving up your phone forever—unless that’s your thing. It simply means being more present and intentional with your time.

For Marcus Thompson, a high school teacher in Charleston, that meant starting each morning with five minutes of quiet before checking his email.

“I used to jump straight into work mode the second I woke up,” Thompson said. “Now I just sit, breathe, maybe sip my coffee without

any distractions. It’s five minutes, but it resets my whole day.”

Aisha Karim, a small-business owner in Minneapolis and mom of three, began taking social media-free Sundays.

“I was always ‘on’ for my customers and followers, and it was exhausting,” she said. “Now, Sundays are sacred. We stay in, cook, play music, just be. It’s the best part of our week.”

Your Body—and Brain—Will Thank You

There’s real science behind why this shift matters. Studies show that slowing down—whether through mindfulness, nature walks or even just putting your phone down—can reduce stress, improve focus and help you sleep better.

One study from the University of Michigan found that people who took just 10 minutes of quiet time each day reported lower anxiety levels and felt more clear-headed after just a few weeks.

“Your nervous system isn’t designed to be in overdrive all the time,” Mendez said. “You need space to breathe, rest and recharge.”

Easy Ways to Press Pause

You don’t need to overhaul your life to slow things down. Small changes can have a big impact. Here are a few ideas to get started:

- Wake up without your phone. Give yourself 10 minutes in the morning before diving into emails or social media.
- Add buffer time. Don’t stack appointments or tasks back-to-back. A little breathing room can change your whole day.
- Single-task. Try doing one thing at a time—yes, really. Eat without scrolling. Walk without texting.
- Make rest a priority. Don’t just rest when everything is done. Build downtime into your schedule

intentionally.

• Say no sometimes. You don’t have to do everything or be everywhere. It’s OK to skip a gathering or turn down a request.

Slowing Down—Together

For many, slowing down becomes easier with others. That’s where community plays a powerful role.

From yoga in the park to tech-free potlucks, people are gathering to unplug and reconnect. In Houston, the Yoruba Cultural Center hosts weekly drumming circles to encourage mindfulness through rhythm and movement.

“It’s about being in the moment with other people,” said founder Adewale Owusu. “When you’re fully present, life feels richer.”

Across the country—including right here in the Palmetto State—faith groups, libraries and local nonprofits are offering events that support slow living: journaling nights, meditation classes, community walks and more.

“We weren’t meant to do life alone—or at full speed all the time,” Mendez said. “Community helps us remember that.”

Joy Lives in the Pause

You don’t have to get it perfect. You don’t even have to slow down forever. But carving out a little space in your week—even just 10 or 15 minutes—can help you feel more grounded and present.

“We’re all chasing happiness in some way,” Mendez said. “But the truth is, joy usually shows up when we slow down enough to notice it.”

So, whether it’s sipping coffee on your porch in Columbia, walking the beach in Myrtle Beach, or turning your phone off during dinner in Greenville, remember there’s no prize for being the busiest.

Sometimes, the best thing you can do for yourself is absolutely nothing.



FIVE THINGS FUNERAL DIRECTORS WISH EVERYONE KNEW



(Family Features)

Most people don't want to think about death – let alone talk about it. When the time comes, families often find themselves overwhelmed by grief and the decisions that need to be made quickly.

Funeral directors see the stress and confusion that comes when no plans are in place, which replaces the peace of mind that comes with thoughtful preparation.

After consulting funeral directors nationwide, the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) uncovered five things they wish families knew before a death occurs.

1. Start Planning Early

Death and taxes are inevitable; but conversations about death should not be avoided. Document wishes and discuss preferences with family to alleviate difficult decisions in the future. Speak with a funeral director to explore options for planning a meaningful funeral.

2. Unexpected Legal and Financial Issues

Families often don't realize a power of attorney ends at death, meaning a designated person can no longer make decisions or access bank accounts once an individual dies.

To avoid complications, add a trusted loved one to your accounts and ensure policies are up to date. Too often, deceased individuals leave minor children, deceased spouses or former partners as beneficiaries, leading to legal and financial challenges.

3. Let Final Wishes Be Known

Many people believe the best place to document final wishes is in their will. However, wills are often not read until after funeral services take place, making them an unreliable way to communicate last requests. Discuss and document your wishes with family members or a trusted funeral professional who can keep your wishes until they are needed.

4. Memorialization Options

End-of-life planning offers more choices. While burial remains a preference, cremation is a popular choice which can include a viewing and service. Eco-friendly options such as alkaline hydrolysis, natural burial and organic reduction are becoming more widely available for those seeking green memorialization.

According to NFDA's 2024 Consumer Awareness and Preferences Study, 68 percent of respondents expressed interest in green funeral options.

Exploring these with a funeral professional can ensure final arrangements reflect your values, traditions and personal wishes.

5. Funeral Directors are Trusted Guides In Honoring Life

Funeral directors play a vital role in helping to create meaningful services. They provide expertise, compassionate care and personalized guidance during difficult moments.

Choosing the right funeral director is important and finding someone who understands your needs can make the difference in a personal and meaningful way.

Talking about end-of-life planning isn't easy, but it's one of the most important conversations you can have with your loved ones. Planning today can make a world of difference tomorrow.

Resources like [RememberingALife.com](https://www.RememberingALife.com), is designed to guide families through the journey. Valuable tools like, "Find a Funeral Home," connects families with local funeral directors.

"Helping People Make Better Financial Decisions"



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To be your company of choice – through integrity, trusted relationships and financial strength.

Values

We hold ourselves, the relationships we build, and the products we deliver, to the highest standards of quality. These values represent the core of who we are and what we do, every day.

Stay Connected:



THE WORLD'S MOST ELEGANT DINNER CELEBRATE'S ITS 5TH EDITION! By Les Echols



Hosts for Le Dîner en Blanc pictured left to right Charlene McKnight, Nicole Dixon, and Sadia Ferrell-McKnight. Photo credit to At Your Service Media.

The iconic and highly anticipated Le Dîner en Blanc is back in Florence to mark its 5th Anniversary Edition on Saturday, Sept. 27, 2025. This exclusive, secretive affair will once again infuse the city with the festive spirit and sense of community that has made this French tradition a global phenomenon. The dedicated host team is already working behind the scenes to create another unforgettable evening for their guests, with the venue remaining a closely guarded secret until the very last moment.

Le Dîner en Blanc is renowned for transforming the city's most prestigious public spaces into breathtaking spectacles, as hundreds of guests clad in elegant white converge for a night of glamour, connection and celebration. Each edition creates picture-perfect, Instagram-worthy moments that are instantly memorable.

To be part of this momentous celebration, guests can sign up for the new Fan List/Phase 3 at florence.dinerenblanc.com. By creating an account on the website, they'll be among the first to receive an invitation when registration opens.

Nicole Dixon, host of Le Dîner en Blanc in Florence, is thrilled to present this milestone 5th Anniversary Edition. "Le Dîner en Blanc has truly become *the* social event of the year in Florence," says Dixon. "This chic and elegant gathering is the perfect opportunity to show pride in our city, shop local and bring a touch of our unique local flavor to the event. As we celebrate our 5th Anniversary, we encourage participants to register early and not wait until the last moment — you won't want to miss this spectacular night that celebrates both our city and its vibrant community."

Event Guidelines

To preserve the unique experience of Le Dîner en Blanc, every guest plays an essential role and must adhere to the following guidelines:

- **Dress code:** A chic, all-white ensemble is a must. Elegance and creativity are highly encouraged.
- **Table setting:** Everything must be white to maintain the signature aesthetic.
- **Secrecy of the location:** To keep the venue a secret until the last moment, guests will gather at a designated departure point and be escorted by a Dîner en Blanc volunteer.
- **Cleanliness:** In keeping with the event's commitment to sustainability, guests must leave with all personal belongings, food leftovers and any litter, ensuring the location remains as

pristine as when they arrived.

• Guests are to bring the following essentials:

- A table, two white chairs, white tablecloth and two white serviettes
- A picnic basket filled with gourmet food, accompanied by proper stemware and white dinnerware
- A catered picnic basket option, available for pickup on site, will be offered for those who do not wish to pack their own. Guests must reserve it online through Le Dîner en Blanc's e-store.
- French-influenced wine and/or champagne
 - To lighten their load, though, a curated selection will also be available on the e-store for pickup on site.
- Nonalcoholic beverages

About the Hosts of Le Dîner en Blanc – Florence, SC

A strong village of diverse people in fellowship is important to the hosts of Le Dîner en Blanc – Florence, SC: Nicole Dixon, Charlene McKnight and Sadia Ferrell-McKnight.

Dixon is the owner of Rollington Enterprises LLC. McKnight is the owner of She Teaches and I Learn LLC, and the founder and executive director of Four Giving Hearts Inc. Ferrell-McKnight is the owner of Classic Touch Event, Rentals & More LLC. They are elated and looking forward to greeting guests at this year's event.

About Le Dîner en Blanc

Le Dîner en Blanc is so much more than an event. It's a unique cultural movement that empowers friends of friends to gather and celebrate their shared passions for life, food, fashion, and community, year after year, with a pinch of mystery and large serving of spontaneity. Elegantly dressed all in white, guests arrive at a secret location for a chic picnic en masse. They bring their own tables, chairs, picnic baskets—all the trimmings—to sit down with friends and make new connections in one of their city's most beautiful public spaces. The location remains secret up until the very moment of arrival. Over the course of the evening, guests from all backgrounds eat, dance, and reconnect with the finer things in life, as they appreciate the night's magical experience.

To this day, over 120 cities in 40 countries have joined the ever-growing and international network to celebrate gourmet cuisine, offer extraordinary entertainment, and bring together vibrant individuals and *bon vivants* around the world. While Dîner en Blanc International is headquartered in Montreal, Canada, every event in every city is hosted by passionate local organizers who fell in love with the original Parisian concept and wanted to bring it home and dress it up with local flair. For more info, photos, and videos of Le Dîner en Blanc events from around the world, visit dinerenblanc.com.



Le Dîner en Blanc Florence, SC 2024



- Complimentary WiFi
- WXYZ Bar
- Adaptive Event Room
- Indoor Splash Zone Pool
- Patio with Fire Pit
- Outdoor Sports Court
- Media Room
- Home2 Market
- Plug & Play Connectivity
- Chargers in every Room

Aloft Florence
820 Woody Jones Blvd.
Coming soon!



- Complimentary High Speed Internet
- Complimentary Breakfast
- Complimentary USA Today
- 24 Hour Business Center
- Indoor Heated Saline Pool
- Spacious Suites with 42" TV's
- Game Room
- Complimentary Laundry
- Home2 Market

Home2 Suites by Hilton
900 Woody Jones Blvd.
843-664-9008



- Complimentary High Speed Internet
- Complimentary Hot Breakfast
- Evening Reception
- 24 Hour Business Center
- Outdoor Saline Pool and Sports Court
- Meeting Room with AV
- Complimentary Laundry
- Suite Shop

Homewood Suites by Hilton
3450 W. Radio Drive
843-407-1600



- Newly Renovated
- Complimentary High Speed Internet
- Complimentary Hot Breakfast
- Complimentary USA Today
- 24 Hour Business Center
- Indoor Heated Saline Pool
- Meeting Room with AV
- Complimentary Laundry
- Sundry Shop

Comfort Suites
2120 W. Lucas Street
843-662-5295



- Complimentary WiFi
- Complimentary Breakfast
- Indoor Saline Pool
- Patio w/Grill & Fire Pit
- Game Room
- Complimentary Laundry
- 24/7 Market
- Fitness Room

Tru by Hilton
2140 W. Lucas Street
843-629-7050



- Newly Renovated
- Complimentary High Speed Internet
- Complimentary Hot Breakfast
- 24 Hour Business Center
- Indoor Heated Saline Pool
- Complimentary Laundry
- Fitness Center

Holiday Inn Express & Suites
2101 Florence Harlee Blvd.
843-629-9779



- Complimentary High Speed Internet
- Complimentary Hot Breakfast
- Complimentary Cookies and Coffee
- 24 Hour Business Center
- Outdoor Saline Pool
- Meeting Room
- Complimentary Laundry

Country Inn & Suites
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www.High-RiseHotels.com
121 Dozier Blvd. - Florence, SC
843-667-4630 - info@high-risehotels.com

The Rose Remedy

1 Serving | 1 minutes



INGREDIENTS:

- 2 oz. 1908 Elderflower Rose Gin
- 1/2 oz. Torani Hibiscus Syrup
- 1 oz. Herring Cherry Liqueur
- 1/2 oz. Lemon Juice
- Lemon Twist (for garnish)

Directions:

Add all ingredients to your shaker. Shake vigorously for 10 seconds. Strain shaker contents into a chilled martini glass. Garnish and serve!



WAYS TO PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE DURING THE BUSY SUMMER MONTHS



(BPT) – Summer is a season of sunshine, outdoor fun and full calendars. With travel plans, family gatherings and long days spent soaking up the sun, it's easy to let your wellness routine slide. But taking care of

yourself doesn't have to be complicated—or time-consuming.

In fact, a few small daily habits can make a big difference in how you feel and function. Registered Dietitian and Nutritionist Dawn Jackson Blatner shares four easy strategies to help you prioritize self-care and stay energized through the summer months.

1. Refresh your space

A cluttered space can add to a cluttered mind. But you don't need a deep clean to feel more grounded. Choose one small area each week—your car, work bag or even your fridge—and give it a quick refresh.

"Tidying even a single space can offer a mental reset," said Blatner. She also suggests adding something to your daily surroundings that brings you joy, like a splash of color, a favorite scent or a photo that makes you smile. These simple touches can serve as gentle reminders to slow down and care for yourself.

2. Unplug and get outside

Between work emails and social media, screen time

can creep into every corner of your day. But unplugging—especially outdoors—can help reduce stress and boost your mood.

Blatner recommends setting small digital boundaries, such as enjoying your morning coffee without checking your phone or taking an evening walk without headphones. "Time in nature is a natural mood booster," she said. Plus, sunlight helps your body produce vitamin D, which plays a role in mental and physical health.

3. Eat for how you want to feel

Rather than focusing on what not to eat, think about how food makes you feel. Choose meals and snacks that are both nourishing and satisfying.

One easy trick: create a "feel-good fridge zone." Blatner recommends stocking it with pre-cut veggies, hard-boiled eggs, antioxidant-rich berries and citrus- or herb-infused water. "These convenient, nutrient-packed choices help you stay fueled—even on your busiest days," she said.

4. Move in ways that make you smile

If traditional workouts don't inspire you, it's OK to skip the gym. Summer is the perfect time to rediscover the joy of playful movement. Whether it's paddleboarding, biking, beach volleyball or dancing in your living room, find what makes you feel alive.

"Exercise doesn't have to feel like a chore," said Blatner. "It should be something you look forward to."

By incorporating small moments of self-care into your day—no matter how packed your summer gets—you'll feel better, think clearer and be more present for all the things you love most about the season.

GRILLMASTER SETTLES: CHARCOAL VS. PELLET -- WHICH IS BETTER?



(BPT) - With warmer temps comes the return to grilling, one of America's most beloved pastimes. Given all the options available today — from equipment, fuel and methods to what you can grill (answer: pretty much everything) — your choices may seem overwhelming. But one fundamental question is paramount: Should you opt for a charcoal grill?

Whether you're new to grilling or looking to upgrade this year, you'll want to know why so many grillmasters prefer charcoal. If you're looking for real BBQ flavor, there's one fuel source that pitmasters, backyard pros and competition teams choose: charcoal. Pellet grills may have the reputation of being easy to use, but they can't match the depth of smoke, searing power or versatility of charcoal cooking. And with today's technology, charcoal grilling is just as easy — if not easier — than pellets.

To help you better understand the ins and outs of charcoal grilling, one of Masterbuilt's chef partners and star of the Netflix series *American BBQ Showdown*, Rasheed Phillips, answers common questions about charcoal grilling and his experiences.



What first drew you to charcoal grilling?

The aromas. They remind me of grilling and cooking with my grandfather. Cooking with coals just imparts such a deeper level of flavor than using something like propane or pellets. It also provides a much higher BTU (British thermal unit) output, making it perfect for grilling.

How does the flavor differ between wood pellet and charcoal grilling?

Pellets are compressed sawdust particles. Though it is technically wood, it loses so much of the flavor and cooking attributes found in using an actual piece of wood.

What kinds of dishes does charcoal grilling excel at?

Everything. It may seem like the easy answer, yet it's true — roasted or charred veggies, grilled chicken. There's nothing like a steak grilled over coals with the fat rendering, hitting the coals and releasing smoke elements back into the meat. And no one has ever said, "Hmm, love that propane or pellet taste."

When it comes to temperature control, is charcoal or pellet preferred, and why?

I prefer charcoal for several reasons, including the level of consistent burn and heat output. Charcoal also adds a true char and smoke flavor, whether it be briquettes or lump charcoal.

Besides flavor and temperature control, are there other benefits of one fuel source over the other?

The honest answer is simple: Damp or wet coal can still be lit and cooked with. I don't know if you've ever seen a pellet get the slightest bit of moisture, but it immediately turns to sawdust.

Many people think charcoal is more complicated. What do you say to someone hesitant to make the switch?

Most things seem complicated or intimidating until you try them. It's like riding a bike — once you do it, you never forget it, and it's never as scary after the first time. Charcoal allows you to impart amazing flavors while giving you a consistent and even cooking experience.

Do you have tips for someone transitioning from a pellet grill to charcoal?

1. You don't need nearly as much coal for a cook as you do pellets. Most cooks can be done with one-half to one full chimney of charcoal.
2. Experiment with flavors. Try adding fresh herbs to your bed of coals toward the end of the cook. Adding wood chunks also helps add depth of flavor.
3. Safety first: Make sure to have proper heat and fire-handling equipment.
4. Lastly, have fun. Cooking should be an enjoyable experience, not one

you stress over.

Getting started with charcoal

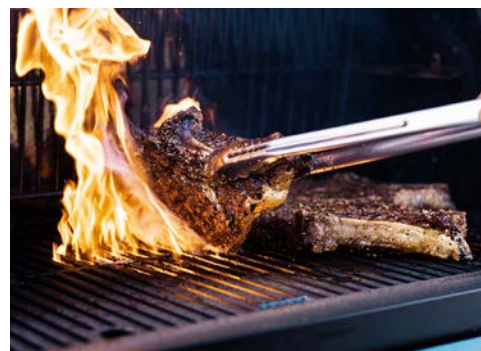
Don't settle for a shortcut — have the real backyard BBQ experience with charcoal grilling. If you're ready to experience enhanced flavor and temperature control with a charcoal grill, check out the Masterbuilt Gravity Series.

Here are some benefits you'll enjoy using a product like the new Masterbuilt Gravity Series 1150 Digital Charcoal Grill and Smoker:

- **Better temperature control** — You'll be able to get higher temps with your charcoal grill for a better sear, which is key to maximizing flavor. You can't sear with pellets, as they don't get hot enough. The Gravity Series grills reach 225°F in nine minutes and 700°F in 15 minutes. Charcoal also allows for better low-and-slow cooking.
- **Better flavor** — And you can enhance that further by adding your choice of herbs or wood chunks.
- **Better overall experience** — The open flame is not only more aesthetically pleasing, but it also helps you gauge the cooking process more accurately so you can see and understand how your food is cooking.
- **Easy to use** — The latest grilling technology improves your experience and control while cooking. Push a button, set your temp and let the grill do the work — just like a pellet smoker, but with better results.

Thinking about buying a pellet grill? Don't settle. Get bold, smoky flavor, real fire cooking and easy digital control — all with charcoal.

Upgrade to the Masterbuilt Gravity Series today. Learn more about your grilling options, find amazing recipes and locate Masterbuilt Gravity Series grills, smokers and accessories near you at [Masterbuilt.com](https://www.masterbuilt.com).



LEATHERMAN BEHAVIORAL CARE PAVILION

OPENING
FALL 2025

As mental health care has evolved to become more compassionate, the design of treatment facilities is also changing to reflect a more enlightened philosophy of care. As an example, area residents need look no further than the soon-to-open MUSC Health Jean and Hugh K. Leatherman Behavioral Care Pavilion on Cedar Street in Florence.

"The new building is intentionally designed not to feel like an institution," said Elizabeth Crowley, executive director of the Leatherman Pavilion. "Our intent is to provide the very best care in a healing, compassionate and safe environment."

The spacious, one-story building will incorporate lots of windows and natural light. The interior will feature a palette of calming paint colors, from greens to blues and purples, and be decorated with artwork by artists from South Carolina.

Crowley and Tim Smoak, clinical director, said every aspect of the design is intentional. A multidisciplinary team huddled for more than a week with Array Architects, recognized nationally for its expertise in behavioral health facilities, to discuss a design that didn't look forensic and incorporated the best features for the full continuum of care. The result: a nearly 100,000 square-foot facility with four inpatient treatment units for adults and adolescents. Together, the units will have a total of 63 inpatient beds – 51 for adults and 12 for adolescents. In addition to inpatient services, this facility will have intensive outpatient and partial hospitalization services for patients from the Pee Dee region. The facility will also include an EmPATH (Emergency Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment and Healing) unit to accommodate 20 patients (16 adults and four adolescents) for crisis stabilization.

"Behavioral health requires a lot of regulations and strict safety standards. To have a facility that not only has taken all of these requirements into account but also is aesthetically pleasing is very exciting," Smoak said.

Each unit is designed in a T shape, eliminating the need for curves and corners and providing clear visibility throughout the space. Each unit also has its own dining hall, rooms for therapy sessions, a respite room for staff and a calming room where patients can go to relax and de-stress. No safety details have been overlooked. Each patient room includes built-in furniture, hard ceilings, tamper-resistant sprinkler heads and anti-ligature hardware to minimize the risk of self-harm. An enclosed outdoor space will feature a courtyard, turf, flowers, seating areas and a basketball hoop.

Ensuring that adults and adolescents are completely separated was a key design consideration, Crowley said. The adolescent unit has its own waiting room, dining hall, gym and outdoor space. Crowley and Smoak said the much-needed Leatherman facility will be a model for behavioral health facilities.

"This is the first of its kind in the state and represents the best in public-private partnerships," Crowley said. "It takes collaboration to ensure we provide the best care possible."

"The Pee Dee region of South Carolina has long been identified as one of the most underserved in terms of behavioral health. To have this full continuum of care in our community is an unparalleled service for care providers and patients alike," Smoak said.



Learn **more.**

<https://muschealth.org/florence-behavioral-health>



Jean and Hugh K. Leatherman
Behavioral Care Pavilion



2671 Hospitality Blvd, Florence
843-432-3001



3440 W Radio Dr, Florence
843-432-1500



3000 W Radio Dr, Florence
843-629-9900



150 Westpark Dr, Florence
843-519-5200



1735 Stokes Rd, Florence
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