



THE GRIND

Manning's
Canty gears up
for comeback
from injury

B1

Sumter Post 15's charter only suspended after state
Legion admits to improper revocation procedures

American Legion
Farmer's Market on hold
until further notice

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysha@theitem.com

The American Legion Department of South Carolina admitted in court Monday to not following proper procedures to revoke Post 15's charter and

agreed to a trial allowing the Sumter post to plead its case.

Until then, the local charter is suspended, not revoked, according to Post 15 Adjutant Shawn Custer.

This decision comes amid a civil lawsuit filed by the state Legion against the local post, seeking temporary — and ultimately, permanent — control of the post's assets.

Amid the turmoil of leadership disputes and future of the post charter, the long-time Legion farmers market is on hiatus until further notice.

THE LAWSUIT

According to court documents, the State American Legion filed a complaint on Aug. 25 stating Post 15 had faced internal conflict for months, leading to allegations of financial mismanagement and a power struggle.

Nicole Custer, Sumter County Fair chairman, noticed six months into her position that deposits for rental fees for the post's two buildings on South Artillery Drive — the group's home building and Fair Memorial Building — were bringing in around the same amount of money, according to earlier

reporting by *The Sumter Item* in August.

Nicole and her husband, Shawn, the fair's manager, along with and in opposition to Post 15 executive committee members Quint and Cleo Klopfleisch, Dorian Brunson and Bill Lyons, submitted allegations against each other to the State American Legion.

All parties were notified on July 16 to attend a meeting with the state's confidential investigative committee

SEE POST 15, PAGE A11

Board selects
search firm
in seeking
next leader

BWP and Associates
facilitated process
that led to 2019 hire
of Martin-Knox

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

Sumter School District's Board of Trustees is turning to a superintendent search firm that it has experience working with in seeking the district's next leader.

By a unanimous vote, the full board selected private consulting firm BWP and Associates to lead its superintendent search on Monday night at the trustees' regularly scheduled meeting at the district office. In the process, the firm will provide candidates for the board to ultimately choose from in its selection of a new superintendent.

BWP and Associates handled the school board's search in late 2018 and early 2019 when it hired Penelope Martin-Knox as the district's fourth superintendent. That hiring process was administered in the final six months of Interim Superintendent Debbie Hamm's two-year term in Sumter.

The Sumter Item could not reach BWP on Tuesday for comment on its plans in this search, but the process in late 2018-19 included multiple community-engagement sessions and forums.

A previous board unanimously selected Martin-Knox in the spring of 2019, and she served one three-year term in the district before the trustees ultimately voted 5-4 to not renew her contract. She is currently the superintendent in Raytown School District in Raytown, Missouri, a suburban district of Kansas City.

Five trustees on the current nine-member school board served in BWP's search at the time. They include Chairman Shawn Ragin, Vice Chairman Brian Alston, Clerk Gloria Lee, the Rev. Ralph Canty and Matthew "Mac" McLeod.

The board interviewed a team of BWP consultants in executive session behind closed doors

SEE BOARD, PAGE A11

CCTC showcases health sciences



PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Central Carolina Technical College held its annual health science simulation showcase at the Health Sciences Center on Main Street on Sept. 18. The event coincided with the Society for Simulation in Healthcare's global Healthcare Simulation Week, which was Sept. 15-19.



A village for Truett: Sumter March of Dimes ambassador
family finds faith and friendship through NICU journey

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysha@theitem.com

Truett Pekuri is all cheeks and sunshine these days.

At just a year old, he greets the world and its inhabitants with endless expressions and laughter. It's a brightness that's even sweeter after learning how his journey began five weeks earlier than his due date, surrounded by the bright fluorescent lights of a hospital operating room. His first moments tested the strength of his tiny body and his mother's faith.

Kaitlin Pekuri's pregnancy was normal.

SEE TRUETT, PAGE A11



Kaitlin, Aaron and Truett Pekuri, center, stand with grandparents, Mark and Linda Pekuri, left, and Paul and Karla Prather, right, at the 2025 March of Dimes March for Babies in Sumter on Sept. 20.

ALAYSHA MAPLE / THE SUMTER ITEM



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DEATHS, B8

Jesse Jerome McQuiller
Ollie Knox Bolden
Mary Ida Robinson
Calvin Coolidge Sharpe Jr.
David Alan Brown

Willie "Bill" Elliott Jr.
Rodney Allen Adger
Albert Jacobs
Leonard Scott

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the

Sumter

ITEM

SECOND FRONT

E-mail: pressrelease@theitem.com



PHOTOS BY RHIANNON O'BERRY / THE SUMTER ITEM

Bubbles are seen floating at the Infant Mortality Awareness Bubble Release held Sept. 15 at Prisma Health Tuomey Hospital.

Tuomey highlights infant mortality prevention with annual bubble release

BY RHIANNON O'BERRY
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The third-annual Infant Mortality Awareness Bubble Release at Prisma Health Tuomey Hospital on Sept. 15 honored infants and their mothers who have died and also celebrated Healthy Start’s impact on preventing such deaths.

The program’s director, Kim Alston, has worked with the program since its inception in 1997. Alston emphasized the need for more public awareness and participation in her speech to the gathered crowd of a few dozen.

“There should be hundreds of thousands of people here,” she said.

GIVING PARENTS AND INFANTS A HEALTHY START

Healthy Start promotes thriving in infants and their parents through services from pregnancy until when the child is 18 months old. Parents are referred to the program by hospitals, churches and other community organizations and are matched with staff members who do home visits and phone calls. Staff includes a nurse practitioner who serves medically high-risk patients, a social worker who works on psychosocial health determinants and a doula.

Sisters Jamia Simon-Williams and Jay’Onah Brown are going through the program together and spoke at the bubble release. Simon-Williams went through the program with her toddler and now is back with her 8-month-old daughter. Brown, who just delivered her firstborn son about a month ago, said the program provided her with a helpful guide of what to expect during each month and trimester of pregnancy.

“I had a lot of nerves going on,” Brown shared. “Being that this was my first baby, I didn’t know what to expect.”

The program offers breastfeeding education, childbirth classes that are free for eligible participants and support groups. There are also group health education courses offered to women of childbearing age in the community on safe sleeping practices, infant nutrition and more.

“It felt like I was talking to a big sister,” Brown said of her provider. “The most meaningful thing was she made me feel very comfortable in asking her questions and with my journey.”

“We don’t want any mother dying due to complications of childbirth if they don’t need to due to misinformation or false information,” Alston shared. “This is mission work.”

When speaking to the gathered crowd at the bubble release, Alston also mentioned racial disparities in health outcomes.

Per the Centers for Disease Control website, maternal mortality in the United States was more than



Sisters and fellow program participants Jamia Simon-Williams and Jay’Onah Brown stand behind the stroller, alongside the Healthy Start team.

three times higher for Black mothers than each of the three other racial groups monitored as of March.

“Meanwhile, in 2023, the mortality rate for Black women’s infants was more than double the infant mortality rate for infants with mothers in the those same three racial groups, with Native American and Pacific Islander mothers’ infant mortality rates almost as severe.”

Healthy Start evaluates social factors that could impact the health of mother and child. They also educate mothers on post-birth warning signs for physical ailments and use screening tools to identify postpartum depression. Mothers who suffer with it then receive counseling from Healthy Start staff as well as referrals to outside providers, with Healthy Start providers acting as a liaison. At the completion of the program, there is a graduation ceremony for the infants, who don tiny caps and gowns.

Mothers build a relationship with their care team throughout their pregnancy and after.

“When we have the mothers to speak on the program,” Alston said, “a lot of them are crying because they don’t want to leave the program because they feel the connectedness to us.”

Simon-Williams said her relationship with her doula was important to her.

“She was there to uplift me at times when I felt like it was just too much for me or I felt like I wanted to give up,” she said. “They really help you. They will give you the opportunities and push you and let you know that everything’s gonna be OK.”

Brown said her friend’s niece passed away last year and would have turned 1 this September. She said the bubble release meant a lot because it uplifts awareness of losses that are hard for entire families. She is also glad that it raises awareness for Healthy Start’s services.

“If you feel like you don’t have anybody,” Simon-Williams said, “there is always someone there.”

Community members speak at Sumter City Council meeting on proposed Dollar General

BY RHIANNON O'BERRY
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At the Tuesday, Sept. 16, Sumter City Council meeting, attendees filled all seats and standing room for the public hearing of an ordinance to accommodate a new Dollar General. Many spoke against the proposed rezoning at the corner of Wedgfield and Deschamps roads, across from Sumter Speedway racetrack and abutting a residential neighborhood.

Council members discussed rezoning a 2.2-acre portion of a 9.15-acre parcel of land from Residential-15 to General Commercial to remove the restriction for single-family dwellings only and allow for demolishing of an existing house to make way for the store. After the first reading of this ordinance, proponents of the development including the property owner and Gregory Googer of Coastal Development Partners, the authorized agent facilitating the development of the proposed Dollar General, spoke on behalf of the development. Stated reasons included increased tax revenue, convenience for local residents, affordable grocery availability, jobs and longevity of Dollar General stores.

Next, opponents, who were largely neighborhood residents, spoke for about an hour. Opponent concerns included:

— Safety: They explained the intersection at the proposed development already gets congested on racetrack days and can be dangerous because of the odd angle between Wedgfield and Deschamps roads, as well as a high speed limit in the area. One resident said she has seen cars in the ditch there. Also, some residents rejected the proposition of increased convenience because nearby residential areas don’t have sidewalks connected to the proposed Dollar General site and worried that the journey there could thus be treacherous, namely for children.

— Environmental: One resident spoke about the area being prone to flooding as-is and worried that replacing wetlands and plant cover with the Dollar General and an attached asphalt parking lot would exacerbate this risk. Another resident protested the light pollution this location would bring, and a few residents cited litter they’ve seen at other locations as cause for concern this location would bring the same.

— Financial: One resident said the jobs Dollar General generates often pay low wages. Other residents worried about their tax burden increasing because of the development, including litter cleanup and demand for emergency response services.

At the next city council meeting, this ordinance will be up for further consideration and discussion.

Also at the meeting, Mayor Pro Tempore James B. Blassingame emphasized the importance of coming together after the killing of political commentator Charlie Kirk. Blassingame attended the vigil for Kirk on the courthouse steps and called it moving; he emphasized the importance of putting aside “political persuasions” to unite as a community.

CORRECTION

If you see a statement in error, contact the City Desk at (803) 774-1226 or pressrelease@theitem.com.

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The 25th Attack Group at Shaw Air Force Base has striven to “Guard with Power” since the 1940s, when it was the 25th Bombardment Group (Heavy) and executed anti-submarine warfare, weather and special reconnaissance missions in World War II. Now, it will be doing a lot more guarding with a lot more power as the newly established 25th Attack Wing after a redesignation ceremony on Thursday, Sept. 18, at Shaw.





SUMTER



Sumter High officially receives Excellence in Sportsmanship Banner at Homecoming Pep Rally



Sumter High School's Homecoming Pep Rally held Sept. 19 was full of spirit, pride and energy. The South Carolina High School League topped off the event with a presentation of the 2024–25 Excellence in Sportsmanship Banner to the Gamecocks for commitment to integrity, respect and teamwork — both on and off the field. Sumter High School is the only 5A school in South Carolina to receive the banner, the highest recognition for excellence in sportsmanship. This distinguished honor celebrates the dedication and character of Sumter High School athletes, coaches, students, staff, supporters and the wider community.



Sumter High Speech & Debate Team returns to competition Sept. 27 after more than 2 decades

SUBMITTED

For the first time since 2001, the Sumter High School Speech & Debate Team will compete in an official tournament, marking the return of a proud tradition of speech and debate at the school. The team is scheduled to attend their first tournament on Saturday, Sept. 27, at Riverside High School in Greer.

“This is an exciting moment for our students,” said Joshua Miller, lead advisor and coach of the Sumter High Debate Team. “Debate teaches skills that last a lifetime: critical thinking, public speaking, and teamwork. Our students have worked hard to prepare for this tournament, and we are proud to represent Sumter High once again after all this time.”

The team, reestablished for the first time in 24 years, has already grown to 30 members. Students have been meeting after school to practice argumentation, research and presentation skills, eager to test themselves against teams from across the state.

“Joining speech and debate has taught me how to properly



Sumter High School Speech & Debate Team members meet regularly after school to prepare for the upcoming tournament, refining their arguments and practicing their speeches.

think for myself,” said Khloe Benson, a sophomore member of the debate team. “It’s helped me overcome my fear

of public speaking, and it has given me the ability to understand issues from different perspectives.”

The return of the Speech & Debate Team marks an important expansion of academic opportunities at Sumter High School. With support from the Palmetto Optimist Club, the program provides students with a new avenue to strengthen their skills in critical thinking, communication and leadership.

The Sumter High students competing this Saturday are: Khloe Benson, Trillyon Glover, Jeremy Monubi, Johonna Patterson, Brandon Reyes, Corbin Weatherwax and Dyquan Wilson.

ABOUT THE SUMTER HIGH SPEECH & DEBATE TEAM

The Sumter High School Speech & Debate Team is an active chapter of the National Speech & Debate Association, dedicated to fostering excellence in leadership, public speaking, and civic engagement through competitive speech and debate. Originally active from 1993 until 2001, the team was recently relaunched in 2025 and is once again providing students with the opportunity to engage in rigorous dialogue and competition.

CHURCH NEWS

To update your listing or add a listing, please email pressrelease@theitem.com and include Church News in the subject line.

Hearts United, meeting at Bethesda Church of God, 2730 Broad St., announces “The Value of Blessings.”

- Saturday, Oct. 11 – Author and mentor, Lynda Shultz, will join Hearts United as we look at the importance of giving and receiving blessings. We will examine ways to nurture our spirits. Come, learn to renounce the lies of the enemy of our souls and receive the truth found in the Word of God. Come experience a time of renewal in the presence of the Lord, and uplifting worship by Joyful Sounds. Join us as we learn about the value of speaking blessings. Shultz’ recently published book, “Blessings from a Mother’s Heart,” will be available for purchase. Doors open at 9:40 a.m. for fellowship and refreshments. Meeting begins at 10 a.m. Hearts United is a community-wide, nondenominational ministry.
- Providence Baptist Church**, 2445 Old Manning Road, announces:
 - Saturday, Sept. 27 through Thursday, Oct. 2, we will have Fruit of the Spirit Revival Services: How We Should Live in Light of Christ’s Return
 - Saturday, Sept. 27, the Rev. Bennie Barwick will speak on Love at 6:30 p.m.
 - Sunday, Sept. 28, the Rev. Jim Palmer will speak at 10:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. on Joy & Peace
 - Monday, Sept. 29, the Rev. Sam Knight will speak at 6:30 p.m. on Long Suffering
 - Tuesday, Sept. 30, the Rev. Kent Wilson will speak at 6:30 p.m. on Goodness & Kindness
 - Wednesday, Oct. 1, the Rev. Jerome Underwood will speak at 6:30 p.m. on Self-Control
 - Thursday, Oct. 2, the Rev. Jim Johnson will speak at 6:30 p.m. on Faithfulness & Gentleness.

Special nightly singing will be featured throughout the revival services with Christeen Hodge, the PBC Choir, Curt Ackerman, Keith Wilson, Hank Todd and the Rev. Wayne McElveen.

Trinity United Methodist Church, 226 W. Liberty St., Sumter, has refurbished its 1920s Steinway grand piano and will celebrate with a concert on Sunday, Sept. 28, at 3 p.m. Experience the beauty and harmony of the newly refurbished piano, enhancing worship services and community events now and for years to come. Performers will include members and friends of Trinity who will showcase the piano as a solo instrument and as an accompanist to other instrumentalists/singers. Non-members of Trinity are also invited.

Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, 325 W. Fulton St., Sumter, will celebrate its 132nd Church Anniversary on Sunday, Sept. 28, at 10:45 a.m. The guest preacher will be the Rev. Dr. Said Sewell, president of Morris College. Special music will be provided by the Morris College Choir.

Church of Christ, 313 Mooneyham Road, will hold October Fest at 5 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 25. The public, gospel singers and choirs are invited to help the church praise and uplift the name of Jesus through song and praise.

Living on Purpose: My friends, let’s choose joy today!

I’m honored to have the opportunity to share my heart each week. The messages lately have given us some things to think about, as God’s word brings us into a reverential fear and awareness of His presence. Many different types of people read faith columns, including some who are not openly religious but are curious spectators. I respect your caution and where you are in your journey, and hope you will consider the Bible passages.

For those who confess Christ as their Lord, our walks are at different levels of passion as the spiritual fires burn at various degrees within us. Some of you watch the news and browse the internet to see what’s happening in the world, while others have decided that listening to the tsunami of opinions, speculations and conspiracy theories is taking a toll on their blood pressure and are determined to step away to

keep their minds and their conscience as clear and clean as possible. Which, by the way, I sincerely respect you. Whatever the case, we realize that wherever we are, absorbing negative knowledge weighs heavily on our emotions and well-being.

Yes, truth seekers are relentless because they want to know what’s going on, and that’s good, right? They do not want to be deceived, and I can perfectly relate to this way of thinking. However, we seldom consider that much of what we hear is not accurate.

Misinformation has become like a plague and among the many reasons people spew rumors, we can agree that careless gossip comes from a lack of concern and the absence of integrity. The root of slander includes being offended, which is directly associated with falling into a snare trap of hatred and misery.

People are paid for their videos, as the general goal is to gain popularity and hopefully go viral. But politics is like the old cycle of he says, she says. We do not positively know what they are saying is true. So what’s the answer? Ephesians 4:29-32 is a great place to start. “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness,

rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

I know some of you are thinking that we should be like a watchman on the walls, sounding the alarm and blowing the trumpet to warn the people of danger. I understand, and consider myself as God’s messenger, but here is the key: Standing for truth is one thing, but spreading things that might be tainted with deception is another.

Besides, if we spend more time dwelling on how evil the world is, we are becoming lopsided in our responsibility to allow God’s light to shine within us. We are filled with light because Christ is greater than sin, but we decide how much of His light is released. He is not focused or depressed about rampant wickedness and neither should we. The inspiration here is that God knows all about it, and one day soon, He will create new heavens and a new earth. It’s easy to be consumed with discouragement, but it takes faith to climb out of this snare trap and stand firmly in what God has promised. Pause a moment to read Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.” It’s a step to renewing the mind and living

in peace.

Our point this week is that we all need a large daily dose of hope. The more darkness we listen to and absorb, the more unsteady and powerless we become. In Nehemiah chapter 8, Ezra the priest spoke refreshing words of the Lord to the people, and as they were weeping, he encouraged them to enjoy God’s goodness and reminded them that the joy of the Lord was their strength. The enemy of our souls has a simple but devastating scheme to distract God’s people from His truth, which makes them physically, mentally and spiritually free. This freedom is a divine spiritual contentment that passes natural understanding. Psalm 62:5-6, “Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly, he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.”

So, let us “choose” joy today! Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, the nature and character of a spirit-filled life and the heart of our personal relationship with Jesus. When we are worried, upset, angry and disheartened, we drift into depression and hopelessness. Can you see Satan’s strategy? How can we represent God when we are filled with doubt, fear and confusion? Allow Psalm 42:11 and Romans 15:4-6 to fill your heart with confidence and hope.

Dr. Holland is a minister, chaplain and author. Read more about the Christian life at billyhollandministries.com.

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803-773-9244
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Saturday: Vigil Mass 5:00pm
Sunday: 8:00am, 10:00am, 1200pm
(Spanish) 5:00pm

The Rock Church of Sumter
365 N. Saint Paul Church Rd
803-494-7625 (ROCK)
Pastor Gwendolyn Credle
Sunday School 9:30 am
Worship 11:00 am
Wed. Bible Study 7:00 pm

Christ Community Church (CCC)
320 Loring Mill Rd., Sumter
www.cccsumter.com
803-905-7850
Sunday Worship 8:08, 9:30 & 11:00 am
Greater St. Paul Church
200 Watkins Street • 803-778-1355
Founder Bishop W.T. English
Sunday School - 10:30 am
Sunday Morning Worship - 11:30 am
Wed. Mid Week Service - 7:30 pm

Non-Denominational

Church of the Good Shepherd
401 Dingle Street
Sunday Worship: First and Third Sunday
9:30am

Interdenominational

Love Covenant Church
245 Oswego Hwy, Sumter
803-775-7605
Tommy and Angela Frederick, Pastors
Sunday Worship 11am
Thursday Evening 7pm
www.lovecovenantchurch.com

Lutheran - ELCA

St James Lutheran Church
1137 Alice Dr, Sumter
773-2260 / www.stjamessumter.org
Rev. Scott Landrum
Adult Sunday School: 9:00 am
Sunday Worship: 10:00 am

Non-Denominational

Christ Community Church (CCC)
320 Loring Mill Rd., Sumter
www.cccsumter.com
803-905-7850
Sunday Worship 8:08, 9:30 & 11:00 am
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200 Watkins Street • 803-778-1355
Founder Bishop W.T. English
Sunday School - 10:30 am
Sunday Morning Worship - 11:30 am
Wed. Mid Week Service - 7:30 pm

Presbyterian USA

First Presbyterian Church of Sumter
9 W Calhoun St (at Main St.)
(803) 773-3814 • info@fpcsumter.org
"Classes for all ages" 9:30 am
Hospitality & Fellowship
(Fellowship Hall) 10:10 a.m.
Worship (Sanctuary) 10:30 a.m.

Presbyterian - ARP

Mayesville Presbyterian Church
109 W. Sumter St, Mayesville
803-453-5759 / www.mayesvillepres.org.
Rev. Brian C. Peake, Pastor
Worship Service 11:00 am
Sunday School 10:00 a.m.

Sumter First Pentecostal
Holiness Church
2609 McCray's Mill Rd. • 481-8870.
Brett Gardner, Pastor
Sunday School: 10:00 am
Sunday Worship: 10:45 am
Wed. Bible Study/Youth Group: 6:30 p.m.

First United Pentecostal Church
14 Plowden Mill Rd • 775-9493
Pastor Theron Smith
Sunday Service: 10:00 am & 6:30 pm
Wednesday Bible Study: 7:30 pm

Pentecostal

Sumter Bible Church
420 South Pike West, Sumter
803-773-8339 • Pastor Ron Davis
Sunday School 10:00 am
Worship 11:00 am & 6:30 pm
Wed. Bible Study & Prayer 7:00 pm

Church of Christ

Plaza Church of Christ
1402 Camden Hwy. • 905-3163
Sunday School: 10 am
Sunday Worship: 11 am & 6 pm
Wed. Bible Class: 7 pm

Church of the Holy Comforter
Traditional Anglican Worship
8:30am and 11am
And online at
Facebook/HolyComfortersumtersc
Corner of North Main and Calhoun
803-773-3823Holycomfortersc.org

Anglican

Assembly of God

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www.sumterfirstag.org
Brian Vanoy, Pastor
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Small Groups: Sundays at 6 pm
Small Groups: Wednesdays at
7 pm – Adults, Royal Rangers,
Girls Rooted in Truth & Spirit





It’s membership time at Sumter’s BJ’s Wholesale Club

Customers sign up for a founding member one-year membership with BJ’s Wholesale Club on Monday at the new store’s membership center at 1140 Broad St. in Independents’ Hall Plaza. The strip plaza also includes Dreamworks Dance Academy and a Subway restaurant. The membership center is about one mile from the BJ’s large-scale construction site on Alice Drive. Early membership registration runs through Dec. 11 and is at a discounted rate, according to a news release. The Club Card Membership for one year is \$40, instead of the regular \$60 price. The Club+ Card Membership is \$80, instead of the regular rate of \$120 and offers additional perks. Membership center hours are Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Early registration before the club opens can also be done online at [BJs.com/Sumter](https://www.bjs.com/Sumter). Currently, BJ’s lists that the new store on Alice Drive across the street from Walmart Supercenter plans to open this winter. A membership is needed to shop at the club. The only exception is a one-day shopping pass, which applies to online shopping only, according to the company’s website. BJ’s does offer a 100% money-back guarantee on memberships. If an individual is not satisfied with their membership, they can cancel and receive a refund on membership fees.



PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Ukrainian refugee’s train stabbing death becomes early flashpoint in 2026 North Carolina Senate race

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Republicans in North Carolina and beyond are making a concerted effort to turn the stabbing death of a Ukrainian woman on a Charlotte commuter train into a political liability for Democratic former Gov. Roy Cooper in his bid to win a key U.S. Senate race that is still more than a year away.

GOP candidate Michael Whatley has said Cooper bears “direct responsibility” for the deadly Aug. 22 attack on Iryna Zarutska because of a commission he created in June 2020 to address racial inequity in the criminal justice system. The panel’s unveiling occurred weeks following the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police.

But Cooper’s campaign said Whatley, a recent Republican National Committee chairman, was lying about the task force. Cooper “knows North Carolinians need to be safe in their communities,” the campaign wrote in a statement, and his career has included “keeping thousands of criminals off the streets and behind bars.” It cites Cooper signing a 2023 law that toughened pretrial release rules.

The clash has sent early signals of just how heated the North Carolina Senate race will be. It already was anticipated to be a key 2026 Senate race for Democrats seeking to claim a Senate majority in next year’s midterm elections and now could be among the most expensive Senate campaigns in U.S. history.

Democrats see the popular former governor’s bid for the open North Carolina seat as one of their best pickup opportunities in a landscape that largely favors Republicans. They need four Senate seats to claim a majority.

A TRAGIC FLASHPOINT

Both candidates have expressed sorrow over the death of the 23-year-old Zarutska, whose horrific attack was caught on camera. But public outrage that suspect Decarlos Brown Jr. had been previously arrested more than a dozen times and had been recently released on a charge without bond prompted accusations by Whatley and allies that Cooper has pushed soft-on-crime policies.

“It’s pretty simple: A vote for Roy Cooper is a vote for more crime, more violence, more criminals,” Whatley said in the first days after the release of the surveillance video.

Cooper pushed back hard. “I’ve been Attorney General and Governor, dedicating my career to putting violent criminals behind bars and keeping them there,” Cooper, who was the state attorney general for 16 years before eight as governor, wrote on X. In turn, he accused Whatley, also a recent state GOP chairman whom President Donald Trump encouraged to enter the race, of looking to take advantage of Zarutska’s death.

“Only a cynical DC insider would think it’s acceptable to use her death for political

points,” he said on X.

More Republicans soon chimed in on social media, including Vice President JD Vance and Trump, who posted that “her blood is on the hands of the Democrats” and named Cooper specifically.

The killing, which fit neatly into Trump’s tough-on-crime agenda in big cities, gave Whatley a clear opening, said Chris Cooper, a political science professor at Western Carolina University.

“People don’t know who he is. He doesn’t have high name recognition,” said Cooper, who is not related to the former governor. “So he is trying to define himself for North Carolinians, and he’s trying to redefine Roy Cooper.”

2 HIGH-PROFILE CANDIDATES SQUARE OFF

Both Cooper and Whatley got in the race this summer, within weeks of GOP Sen. Thom Tillis announcing that he would not seek reelection. Cooper had always been considered a potential Senate candidate in 2026. Whatley announced when Lara Trump, the president’s daughter-in-law, declined to jump in.

With no other high-profile candidates currently in the race, the parties’ primaries seem unlikely to head off a Cooper-Whatley general election battle.

Some pundits think spending in next year’s race could reach \$1 billion, blowing past the \$515.5 million spent overall on a U.S. Senate race in Georgia in 2020 won by Democrat Jon Ossoff in a runoff, according to data from Open Secrets, which tracks political spending.

The campaign pits Cooper, a proven winner for Democrats in a Southern state, against first-time candidate Whatley. Whatley’s deep loyalty to Trump — who won the state’s electoral votes all three times he ran for president — and fundraising skills make him a formidable opponent in the closely divided state.

SUSPECT’S CRIMINAL HISTORY AND RELEASE IGNITE CRITICISM

Brown, who was indicted for first-degree murder this month in state criminal court, also faces a federal charge in Zarutska’s death. He could face the death penalty if convicted. Calls to the Mecklenburg County public defender’s office, seeking someone who could comment on Brown’s behalf, previously were unanswered.

A magistrate earlier this year allowed Brown, who in September 2020 completed more than five years in prison for robbery with a dangerous weapon, to be released without bond on a nonviolent misdemeanor charge, according to court records. Brown was ordered to undergo a mental health evaluation after his latest arrest.

The panel then-Gov. Cooper established in June 2020, the Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice, offered dozens of recommendations, including eliminating the need for people accused of most misdemeanors to post a cash bond unless doing so would endanger someone else.

But Cooper wasn’t a task force member, and the panel had no authority to enact cash bail recommendations or release people from prison. And the task force’s December 2020 recommendations — most of which were ignored by Republican lawmakers — were released after Brown left prison.

State Senate leader Phil Berger said at a news conference with Whatley earlier this month that task force recommendations reflected “an atti-

tude on criminal justice” that informs magistrates to make bond decisions like the one Brown received. The GOP-controlled General Assembly is expected to take up criminal justice reform this week.

Whatley also criticized Cooper for a 2021 lawsuit settlement that required his administration to release 3,500 offenders within state custody over several months. The state NAACP, the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina and others had sued to address prison conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COOPER PUSHES BACK ON CANCELED FEDERAL GRANTS

Fighting back, Cooper’s campaign has tried to link Whatley to April’s cancellation of hundreds of U.S. Department of Justice grants for programs supporting violence reduction and crime victims. Whatley has expressed broad support for government efficiency efforts in the Trump administration, although there’s nothing to indicate he actively backed these cancellations.

Chris Cooper, the Western Carolina professor, said Whatley’s strategy on crime is likely to be repeated — attempting to connect any order or action in Roy Cooper’s long career to a negative outcome.

It should make for a long, drawn-out contest.

“We live in a time of essentially a constant campaign,” Chris Cooper said. “And if anything, the temperature is only going to rise between now and next November.”



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Christopher R. Hilditch
Sumter County ADA Compliance Coordinator
13 East Canal Street
Sumter, SC 29150
Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Individuals who need auxiliary aids for effective communication in programs and services of Sumter County are invited to make their needs and preferences known to the ADA Compliance Coordinator.

Load up your wagon at the Fall Plant and Flower Festival set for Oct. 3-5

STAFF REPORT

Seasons are changing, and if you have the itch to change out your hanging baskets and add pumpkins and mums to your porch, don't miss the South Carolina State Farmers Market's Fall Plant and Flower Festival set for Friday-Sunday, Oct. 3-5, at the market, 3483 Charleston Highway, West Columbia.

Besides fall plants, flowers and gourds, visitors can choose from a variety of home, yard, garden decor and crafts from numerous vendors. And don't forget the Certified SC Grown fall produce. Master Gardeners will also be available to answer questions on fall planting.

The three-day event runs Friday and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Admission and parking are free. Visitors are encouraged to bring their own wagon, though a limited amount will be available on a first-come, first-served basis.

For more information about the Fall Plant and Flower Festival and the South Carolina State Farmers Market, contact Market Manager Brad Boozer at bboozer@scda.sc.gov or (803) 737-4664, or visit scstatefarmersmarket.com. Find the market on Facebook at @SCFarmersMarket.



CLUB DIGEST

SUMTER ART ASSOCIATION

The September meeting of the Sumter Art Association was held in the Parrish Hall of the Church of the Holy Comforter on Sept. 16. President Karen Ingram welcomed members and acknowledged the seven new members.

Ginger Jones presented an uplifting devotional pointing to the importance of being deeply rooted in a foundation secured by faith in Christ and a reliance on God. During the storms of life, it is especially crucial to be anchored to God through His word.

Marian Shaw reported on a number of cultural events that are currently or will soon be available in the Sumter area.

Ginger Barwick intro-

duced the guest speaker, Glen Ward, a gifted speaker and humorist. Ward presented a lighthearted program titled "A Time to Laugh." Many stories from Ward's past were recounted, through both word and song, as he reminded the group of simpler days gone by.

Following the delightful program, Ingram invited the women to the tea table. She thanked the hostesses for the beautiful centerpiece and for the lovely array of refreshments. The co-hostesses were Nancy McCreight and Katharine Rauch, assisted by Barbara Burchstead, Kathy Ardis, Dee Dailey, Karla Dickerson, Catharine Frerichs, Anne Walton and Mary Catharine Williams.

Transform your houseplants into art with this Japanese gardening technique

BY JESSICA DAMIANO
Associated Press

Kokedama, the Japanese method of growing plants in a living planter made of a moss-covered ball of soil, is a simple, DIY project that elevates common houseplants into works of art. They make great gifts, too.

Because roots growing in exposed soil dry out more quickly than potted ones, plants with low-water needs are ideal for kokedama. I make mine with spider plant "pups," but you might also consider pothos or philodendron for low-light areas, or succulents for brighter spots.

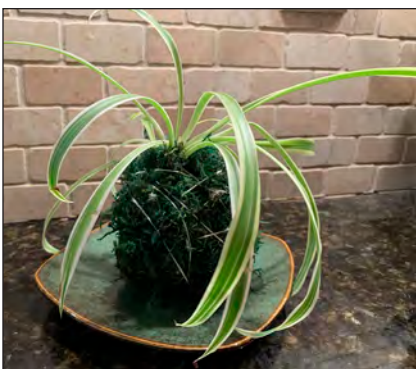
What you'll need

- 2 large bowls
- Peat moss
- Bonsai soil (or ordinary potting mix that contains peat moss and perlite)
- Water
- Preserved moss sheets (available at craft stores)
- Scissors
- Waxed thread or fishing line
- A small plant

Start by placing a sheet of preserved moss into a bowl. Add warm water to cover it.

Take your plant out of its pot and gently remove excess soil from its roots. Set it aside.

Make your potting mix in the second bowl by combining 7 parts peat moss with 3 parts soil. Slowly and gradually add water to the mixture, combining it with your hands until you can form a firm ball large enough to contain your plant's roots. Pack the ball tightly as if making a snowball. Toss it gently into the air and catch it; if it doesn't break apart, you've achieved the right consistency.



JESSICA DAMIANO VIA AP
Seen is a kokedama displayed on a decorative plate.

Cut or split the ball in half, then place one half on either side of your plant's roots, molding it back into a ball.

Next, remove the sheet of preserved moss from its water bath and place it face down on your work surface. Place your plant, right-side up, on the sheet, and wrap the sheet around the plant's mud ball-encased roots. Use scissors to trim off any excess moss.

Secure the moss by wrapping waxed thread or fishing line around the ball in all directions, then tie it into place. Avoid using cotton or jute twine, as they will wear out over time.

Water your kokedama immediately by soaking the ball in a bowl of water for 15 minutes, or until it is fully saturated. Squeeze it gently, then place it in a colander in the sink until the water stops draining.

Feel the weight of the soaked ball, and when it feels light by comparison, water the plant again in the same fashion. Depending on the type of plant and the humidity in your home, you may need to water it anywhere from twice a week to once a month.

CARING FOR THE PLANT

Display your kokedama on a decorative plate or suspend it from a plant hook (tie three lengths of waxed thread or fishing line to the string on three sides of the ball, then tie them together at the top to make a hanger). Grouping several

kokedama plants together on a tray makes for an interesting centerpiece. Use your imagination!

To prevent kokedamas from drying out in arid climates or during winter when indoor heating is in use, consider running a humidifier nearby or placing them in a bathroom where daily showers provide humidity.

Prune the plant by up to half its size every spring to prevent it from outgrowing its kokedama, which would stress and ultimately kill it. It is possible to replant it into a larger ball, but only once, as a kokedama won't be able to support larger roots.

Fertilize only once a year, in spring, by adding a quarter teaspoon of soluble organic fertilizer to the bowl when watering.

Siblings not interested in sister's vengeful 'party'

DEAR ABBY: My father was a terrible person. He was physically abusive to his wife and kids, and he sexually abused both of my sisters. He was a vicious bully who took every opportunity to humiliate his children and took pleasure in destroying things we worked hard for. No one in the family is sad that he's no longer with us; most of us are happy to move on.

One of my sisters, however, wants to have a big party to celebrate the 10th anniversary of his death. She envisions a celebratory dinner at a fancy restaurant followed by a party at her house, complete with a contest for throwing darts at his picture.

I don't miss our father any more than she does, and I understand her raw hatred of him. But I also don't have any interest in going to that kind of an event, nor do any of our other siblings. We think it's past time to move on, and celebrating his death is not moving on.

My sister has made clear that if we don't attend, she will view it as not being supportive of her and won't ever speak to us again. What do you think about all of this? Must the rest of us go to her event, or should we take a pass, knowing she most likely will cut us out of her life?

BEYOND THAT IN FLORIDA



Dear Abby
ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR BEYOND THAT: You and your siblings are fortunate to have been able to move forward from the trauma you suffered at the hands of your father. Your sister obviously hasn't been so fortunate. She's wrong to threaten you with excommunication if you refuse her invitation to a "death day" party for the abuser. I hope none of you knuckle under. As a victim of abuse, she could use intensive counseling, and I hope at some point she'll reach out for it. The way she's headed now, she will soon isolate herself completely from the family.

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Pediatric experts at Prisma Health warn about dangerous rise in counterfeit car seats

BY PRISMA HEALTH

GREENVILLE — Pediatric safety experts with Prisma Health Children’s Hospitals in Greenville and Columbia are sounding the alarm about the growing number of counterfeit children’s car seats being sold online to unsuspecting parents.

These fake car seats look legitimate but fail to meet federal safety standards, putting infants and young children at grave risk during crashes. These counterfeit products, sometimes marketed as “dupes” of popular models, do not meet federal safety standards and place children at extreme risk in the event of a crash.

Built with low-quality materials and not crash-tested, the seats can disintegrate in as little as 30 mph collisions.

Within the past year, the hospitals together have discovered at least 25 counterfeit car seats before families get ready to take home their newborns. When that happens, families are educated about the dangers and, when possible, provided with access to safe, low-cost replacements through hospital safety programs.

“For children’s safety, it is critical that caregivers know how to spot a counterfeit,” said Kenisha Golden-Smith, the injury prevention coordinator with Prisma Children’s Hospital-Midlands. “It used to be much easier to spot a counterfeit car seat, but the counterfeiters have made it more difficult,” she said.

“It’s still possible to recognize a counterfeit car seat if you know a few of the tell-tale signs,” said Alex Dupre, the Injury Prevention Program coordinator with Prisma Children’s Hospital-Upstate.

Warning signs that a car seat may be counterfeit:

- Missing or incorrect labels — there is no brand la-

- beling; safety labeling has spelling mistakes
- Absent instructions or registration cards
- Missing retainer clips or faulty harness straps; often the chest clip is missing
- Unusually long shipping times
- Discounts of more than 50 percent
- The leveling indicator is missing

Parents should also check whether the manual and registration card are included with the car seat. Any car seat that is not sold with these required documents is more likely to be non-compliant or counterfeit.

The counterfeit seats, which are frequently modeled after high-end models, are often sold online, including discount retail stores including those from other countries. They are also sold through major retail websites that host third-party sellers.

Safety advocates advise against purchasing car seats from discount retail sites including those from other countries and to be aware that third-party vendors may be operating on some major retailers’ websites.

Experts also advised against buying used or even unopened seats from resale stores. Even if authentic, those seats may be outdated or recalled. Consumers can check the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration website to see if a car seat model has been recalled. A list of approved car seats is also available at [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org).

If consumers think they have purchased a counterfeit car seat, it is best to dispose of the car seat and purchase a compliant car seat through established safety programs or certified retailers. Avoid donating it so someone else does not use it unknowingly.

SCDNR celebrates grand opening of new State Skeet & Trap Facility

BY SCDNR

RICHLAND COUNTY — South Carolina Department of Natural Resources proudly hosted a grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony for its new State Skeet & Trap Facility at Love Farm Wildlife Management Area on Sept. 19.

SCDNR Director Tom Mullikin and staff were joined by state and local leaders for the celebration including Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette, who had the honor of shooting the first clay target, along with Rep. Robert Reece, and Speaker Murrell Smith and former senator Thomas McElveen, both of Sumter, and the DNR Board.

The state-of-the-art complex at the Love Farm Wildlife Management Area features eight skeet and trap fields, a dedicated five-stand, an outdoor pavilion and classroom space, establishing it as one of the premier tournament venues in the Southeast. Situated on 780 acres in Richland County,

STATE SKEET & TRAP FACILITY AT LOVE FARM
WHERE: 1832 Vanbloken Road, Eastover
WHEN: 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and 1-5 p.m. Sunday

Love Farm WMA was purchased from the Love family in 2016 and also includes a 60-acre public dove field and three waterfowl impoundments. In addition to hosting competitive events, the new facility will be open to the public on a daily basis.

Construction of the facility began in 2022 with the support of the South Carolina General Assembly, which provided \$750,000 in funding, matched by more than \$5.7 million in Federal Wildlife Restoration Funds dedicated to expanding public shooting access. The project was also supported by generous donations of \$200,000 from The Boyd Foundation for equipment for the range and an initial \$50,000 from the National Wild Turkey Federa-

tion toward the purchase of the land.

SCDNR remains dedicated to providing safe and accessible shooting opportunities for the public, while also inspiring the next generation of outdoorsmen and women. The facility will also serve as the tournament base for SCDNR’s Scholastic Clay Target Sports program, which currently has approximately 760 middle and high school participants statewide. Since its inception, the program has awarded over \$671,000 in college scholarships to graduating seniors who are involved in youth shotgun sports.

The State Skeet & Trap Facility is open to the public Tuesday-Saturday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sundays from 1 to 5 p.m.

For general information or inquiries about hosting tournaments, call (803) 605-2496. A full list of SCDNR public shooting ranges, along with information about SCTS, is available at www.dnr.sc.gov.

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OPINION

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COMMENTARY

When children walked to school

BY **TERENCE P. JEFFREY**

When I was a boy, my brothers and I walked more than 2 miles every weekday. This was because we lived a little bit more than a mile from the school we attended.

Our home was in the Dominican neighborhood of San Rafael, California, which was named for Dominican College, the then-all-girls Catholic college that was located there. Our school was at St. Raphael Parish, the home of Mission San Rafael, which was founded by Spanish Franciscan missionaries in 1817.

Our route took us through a pleasant residential neighborhood of single-family homes and then into the business center of the town.

Directly across the street from our school and church stood the old Marin County Courthouse, which was built in 1873 and would have looked at home sitting on the mall in Washington, D.C.

On the other side of the courthouse was Fourth Street, which was San Rafael's main street. It was lined with small family-owned businesses and served in 1972 as one of the filming locations for George Lucas' cruising movie "American Graffiti."

As we walked home from school each day, my brothers and I walked past some interesting places. At the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Fifth Street, for example, stood a brown-shingle house that the Grateful Dead used as their office space starting in 1970, when I was still in grammar school.

A block and a half down Lincoln from the Dead's office was a delicatessen owned by one of the families in our parish. They made great sandwiches, using locally baked sourdough bread.

Immediately next door to the Dead's office on Fifth Street was a family-owned grocery store run by the grandfather of one of my classmates.

When we had a nickel to spare, my brothers and I would stop there on the way home from school to buy a pack of baseball cards. One of my younger brothers and I had an annual competition with each other to see who would be the first to collect all of the cards for that year's San Francisco Giants team.

Our experiences walking to and from school were similar to those of most of our classmates. Their parents did not drive them to school or put them on a bus. They let them walk.

That was not unusual in America in the 1960s and

early '70s. But it is today.

An article published in 2011 in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine noted that 47.7% of students in kindergarten through eighth grade walked or biked to school in 1969. By 2009, that had dropped to just 12.7% of students.

A survey published in this same journal in 2019 reported that 16.5% of parents said "their youngest child walks to or from school at least once during a usual week."

Why has there been such a steep decline since the 1960s in the percentage of children walking to school?

"The most common barrier," said the Preventive Medicine article about the survey, "was living too far away (51.3%), followed by traffic-related danger (46.2%), weather (16.6%), 'other' barrier (14.7%), crime (11.3%), and school policy (4.7%)."

The data from this survey showed that among students who lived less than a quarter mile from school in 2017, there were still 47.4% who walked to or from school. But among those who lived between a quarter and a half mile away, only 37.9% walked. Among those who lived between a half mile and a full mile, only 30.8% walked; and among those who lived between 1 mile and 2 miles, it was only 12.5%.

At the end of August, Americans saw a profoundly evil mass shooting take place at a Catholic parish in Minneapolis. A 23-year-old male, who "identified as female," shot up Annunciation Catholic Church while students from the parish school were attending Mass there. This murderer killed an 8-year-old child and a 10-year-old child and injured 18 other children and three adults before taking his own life.

In the wake of this shooting, as reported by Catholic World Report, "Catholic schools around the country have been evaluating their security measures, with some hiring security guards and others allowing teachers and staff to be armed."

This is the right thing to do.

But this country needs to do more than just step up the security on our streets and in our schools to make certain that our citizens — and especially our children — are safe there. We need to rebuild the culture we once had where it was safe for children walk to school and be at school.

To find out more about Terence P. Jeffrey and read features by other Creators writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators webpage at www.creators.com.

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COMMENTARY

Evil has a price

It's unfortunate, but evil exists in our world. From rulers waging war in far-off places to domestic terrorists wreaking havoc in our backyard, it feels as though evil is becoming more and more pervasive in our daily lives. The innocence of our youth is far off in the rear-view, replaced with the reality of blood-spattered crowds and murders in real time.

At one point in history, a fulfilling day off from hard labor consisted of gathering in the town square to watch some poor soul be stoned to death. You can imagine the excitement of many in the crowd as the guilty party was pelted over and over until their lifeless body lay bare for all to see. A gruesome and horrific death was considered entertainment.

The past couple of weeks have shone a light on how far we haven't come as a society. Two high-profile murders have taken place, and somehow a united front of condemnation has eluded us. In our politicized America, it's only tragic if the correct person is murdered. More often than not, the correct person is determined by a mix of mass media, various celebrities and extremely wealthy elites.

Adding fuel to the fire is an infantile media conglomerate determined to pander their version of what America should be. Using language like "Nazi" and "fascist" to describe someone or something that clearly doesn't meet all the historical requirements to warrant those definitions is both lazy and careless. It also helps to drive home division and foment anger among a populace that's already foaming at the mouth and out for blood.

We're paying a steep price for the echo chambers we've designed for ourselves. Opening our mouths and having an opinion can now result in being gunned down for all to see. The "he or she deserved it" crowd has no sway here. Breathing a sigh of relief at the Obama-approved mission that killed Osama Bin Laden is one thing, rejoicing in the death of a human being is another thing altogether. It's inhumane, ripping at the very fabric of our soul, creating a demon-like thirst for blood and revenge that's difficult to repackage once it's been unwrapped.

School shootings and assassinations have

become less the exception than the rule. Public places have become war zones with our safety in question each time we step foot out our front door. Other war-torn countries have been dealing with societal conflict for generations. America had always been different, then 9/11 happened and everything changed. That change continues to ripple through our society, like a cancer, unabated in its veracity and strength.

Obvious questions linger: What do we do? Where do we go from here? It may sound silly, but loving one another regardless of skin color, sexual orientation or otherwise is a good start. Removing the barriers that

divide us while blocking out the noise from political leaders and the media is necessary to live a happy and fulfilling life. We all get one life to live. Put down the megaphone and use your voice to whisper softly into the ear of a loved one.

We're living in turbulent times. Just when you think things are getting better, a series of tragic events enters our news feed, leading us down an emotional spiral

of negativity and darkness. Lift your head out of your phone and talk to your neighbors. Having honest and candid conversations about how you're feeling will soothe what ails you and provide a sense of community far greater than anything you'd find on a social media page.

In a letter to William Smith, Thomas Jefferson once said, "the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." The letter was written in 1783; however, it may as well have been written last week. The definition of patriot or tyrant would be different for all of us, but the sentiment continues to ring true.

I yearn for a day when it doesn't.

Patrick lives in Tega Cay with his wife and two daughters. After 25 years working for a Big 4 bank where he held multiple marketing/communication roles, he retired from the corporate world to pursue his passion for writing. An opportunity to develop a local paper proved too enticing to turn down. Patrick is a graduate of Winthrop University where he majored in Communications. Patrick can be reached at patrickbyrne@tegacaysun.com and patrickbyrnencreative.com.



Patrick Byrne

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SUMTER COUNTY COUNCIL

Council meets at 6 p.m. every second and fourth Tuesday at 13 E. Canal St.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

HOPE WON'T FADE THAT ITEM WILL RETURN TO DAILY ROUTINE

Reading *The Sumter Daily Item*, also known to me over the years by other closely related names, was one of my daily routines well over 50 years.

I used to go to the mailbox or the front yard every morning to pick up the paper and read it before I assumed my daily tasks as a biology professor at Morris College.

Now the paper arrives in my mailbox on Wednesdays and Saturdays, a time when I am not available to receive it and get my daily dose of news and information, as I used to do daily. In fact, I really do

not see the paper until the afternoon on Saturdays, and not until I get back from work past 6 p.m. on Wednesdays.

By that time, there is no time slot allocated to leaf through the pages of the paper — and the news contained therein is already old. I know, you will tell me that there is the e-version available on the computer or the smartphone daily! Well, I like to read the PAPER the old-fashioned way, not on an electronic screen (be it small or large)!

Secondly, you will tell me, too, that the *Item* must adapt to technological advances, and the readers should adapt to read it on an electronic format as well! Well and

good for those who like to do that!

Thirdly, you will also tell me that the two-day issues per week of the paper contain more in-depth information and more community coverage than before. That may be the case! However, that takes too long to read, and the coverage of events would have bypassed its utility! It is also economical, and I understand that!

In short, the *Daily Item* used to provide my daily dosage of local information and current events every morning! Now, when it gets to me, most of the items are already passe'!

As an old timer, I also used to follow in the *Daily Item* Dave Peek's

social commentaries that used to tackle societal and community issues with aptness and delicacy! Is there another person who can assume Dave Peek's role?

Dave would have allayed our frustration over those traffic lights at certain city intersections that stay red for one minute and 25 seconds in one direction and turn to green for only 10 seconds for the other direction. Who programmed those lights? What is the purpose of such lopsided time inequity?

Will our beloved *Sumter Daily Item* ever return?

Our hope will never fade!

RADMAN M. ALI
Sumter

South Carolina ETV, Public Radio commemorates 10-year anniversary of 1,000-year flood

BY SC ETV

COLUMBIA — South Carolina ETV and Public Radio (SCETV) will mark the 10-year anniversary of the historic “thousand-year” flood of October 2015 through a special initiative combining community storytelling, broadcast programming and in-depth reporting.

“Voices Collected,” will help preserve the voices and memories of those connected to the flood. This community storytelling project launched earlier in 2025 to collect stories of those impacted by the tragedy at Mother Emanuel church in Charleston and will expand to document the stories of those impacted by the flood. The initiative invites South Carolinians and others across the country to share personal reflections through audio, video or image submissions. These collected stories will be curated for use in broadcasts, podcasts, social media and educational materials. Submissions may be shared online through the SCETV website, <https://www.sctev.org/share-your-story-voices-collected#/rounds/1/gallery>.

As part of the initiative, SCETV will premiere Weathering the Flood: South Carolina 10 Years Later, <https://www.sctev.org/watch/weatheringtheflood>, on Thursday, Oct. 2, at 8 p.m. on ETV. This 30-minute broadcast special revisits the catastrophic event, reflecting on its widespread impact, the recovery efforts that followed and the lessons learned. With rare archival footage, expert analysis from SCETV Chief Meteorolo-

gist Tim Miller and Senior Meteorologist Megan Borowski, and first-hand accounts from survivors, the program explores how the storm reshaped South Carolina.

The initiative also features companion reporting through This Week in South Carolina, <https://tinyurl.com/3etaun8h>, and the South Carolina Lede podcast, <https://tinyurl.com/y2x8rp2m>. Both will provide additional context, examining how the disaster changed emergency operations, infrastructure planning and resilience efforts across the state.

In October 2015, relentless rainfall, fueled in part by Hurricane Joaquin, triggered record flooding that devastated communities across South Carolina. Entire neighborhoods were submerged, critical infrastructure was compromised, and lives were lost. Stories of courage and unity— from neighbors rescuing each other to emergency crews building temporary dams by air— remain lasting reminders of how South Carolinians came together during one of the state’s most destructive natural disasters.

SCETV’s weather-related reporting and emergency response communications efforts extend across the state. SCETV closely monitors evolving weather conditions, ensuring timely updates during weather events through statewide, multiplatform coverage. Leveraging the South Carolina Emergency Information Network (SCEIN), a partnership with WUFT in Gainesville, Florida, SCETV regularly delivers critical updates across its broad-



Firefighters rescue a driver on Liberty Street in front of Swan Lake Iris Gardens during the flood of October 2015.

cast television and radio networks, on social media and online. Additionally, in collaboration with the South Carolina Emergency Management Division (SCEMD) and the Governor’s Office, SCETV broadcasts and livestreams statewide press conferences and provides the latest information on state government office closings. For weather updates and preparedness resources, visit SCETV’s dedicated weather page at [SCETV.org/weather](https://www.sctev.org/weather).

To learn more about how to submit a story to the “Voices Collected” initiative or to explore upcoming SCETV programming around the “thousand-year” flood, visit [SCETV.org/1000yearflood](https://www.sctev.org/1000yearflood).

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Are you a survivor?

or do you know someone who fought breast cancer?

The Sumter Item is asking for names of these brave people to appear in our special publication, Health Matters 2025, on October 11th, 2025.

Deadline: October 1, 2025

Submitted By _____ Phone _____

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Survivors Name _____

Number of years cancer free _____

*Please provide a contact number for any surviving honorees for verification

Contact
Karen Cave
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PHOTOS BY ALAYSHA MAPLE / THE SUMTER ITEM

Truett Pekuri, 1, the 2025 March for Babies ambassador baby for Sumter, rides in his stroller at the annual March for Babies on Sept. 20.

TRUETT

FROM PAGE A1

For her and her husband, Aaron, this was their first child. The couple was excited about expanding their family, eager to hear high-pitched giggles filling their home. It was a “smooth pregnancy,” Kaitlin said. Then came the third trimester.

At her 28-week appointment, Kaitlin’s routine visit came with the diagnosis of gestational hypertension, which is when one’s blood pressure is greater than or equal to 140/90 and begins during the latter half of pregnancy. It was a cause for concern which is why her doctor advised a plan to monitor her closely and conduct weekly non-stress tests to monitor health and well-being of the baby. Kaitlin would continue on with her pregnancy, hyperaware of this new diagnosis and her baby’s well-being.

Fast forward, Kaitlin was 31 weeks when she was spending a normal Sunday afternoon with family. They were grabbing a bite to eat after church when something felt very wrong.

“He [Truett] was typically a pretty active baby, and he was just not moving a whole lot. It just made me really uncomfortable,” Kaitlin said.

Having a mother who worked in labor and delivery, she assured Kaitlin that if she felt something was wrong then it was best to go to labor and delivery. “Best case scenario, they tell you everything’s fine and they send you home,” Kaitlin recalled her words.

And that’s what Kaitlin expected to happen. She would go to hospital, get hooked up to a monitor, Truett would begin to move and everything would be fine. And that’s what happened – except, her blood pressure was too high for comfort; it was critical, they told her. When Dr. Joel Snipe entered the room, she came with news Kaitlin was not expecting: the possibility of Kaitlin delivering early was likely. And she wouldn’t be able to do it at Prisma Health Tuomey Hospital.

Kaitlin is a military child and though she moved around quite a bit, following her high school graduation, she decided



Truett, Kaitlin and Aaron Pekuri, center, are surrounded by family, friends and Prisma Health Tuomey Hospital staff as the 2025 Ambassador Family for the annual March for Babies in Sumter on Sept. 20, hosted by March of Dimes. Kaitlin gave birth to Truett at 31 weeks and though unexpected, her journey with the local NICU led to friendship that the family holds near and dear to today.

to come back to Sumter for college. It was a place that had grown on her, so much so that she married here and was ready to raise a family. So, the idea of not being able to deliver her baby in the local hospital didn’t fit her plan. Everything moved quickly, giving her little time to process what was happening.

On her second day at Prisma Health Richland, she was diagnosed with severe preeclampsia – a pregnancy complication characterized by high blood pressure. A more serious form of preeclampsia, severe preeclampsia can lead to serious complications for both the mother and baby. The new plan was to hospitalize Kaitlin until she was 34 weeks.

Kaitlin battled with whether to stay or leave. On the one hand, she felt her blood pressure and symptoms could be monitored at home. On the other hand, doctors advised against it as she’d be two hours away from a Level 3 NICU capable of caring for Truett. After much thinking and an intuitive feeling, she decided to stay at Richland. Lo and behold, that very afternoon, she started to experience significant pain and her blood pressure skyrocketed.

Her Richland doctor, residents, nurses – the room filled quickly with medical personnel and their jargon. Kaitlin knew something was wrong and that it was serious. The doctor walked to her bedside with news Kaitlyn was not prepared to hear.

“We’re going to have a birthday today,” Kaitlin recalled the doctor’s words.

“I immediately panicked. I’m like, ‘We cannot do that. I am not 32 weeks. This cannot happen. It’s not safe, you guys even told me that it wasn’t safe.’”

The doctor grabbed Kaitlin’s hand, looked her in the eye and told her that lab results confirmed a diagnosis of HELLP syndrome. This severe complication includes a breakdown of red

blood cells, increased levels of liver enzymes in the blood and a reduced number of platelets, which are essential for clotting.

“In order to save you and your baby, I have to do surgery now,” Kaitlin was told.

At this time, Kaitlin was alone. Aaron had just left, her parents were back in Sumter. She was in full-blown panic about delivering her baby early and alone. But she wouldn’t. Aaron would make it to the hospital as she was being wheeled into the operating room.

Truett was born on July 25. He came out quiet, throwing his parents into panic. Kaitlin and Aaron shared a look before Aaron was moved to the radiant warmer as the NICU nurse assessed the newborn. Then, a big cry filled the room, a sound that brought great relief to the waiting parents. Truett was born weighing 3 pounds, 5 ounces.

Because of the early birth, Truett’s lungs were significantly underdeveloped, meaning he was unable to breathe on his own. He was intubated while still in the OR and then immediately taken to the NICU. And because of medication prescribed to treat the preeclampsia and HELLP diagnosis, Kaitlin would not see Truett until a day and half later. Aaron served as a bridge between mother and son, Facetiming Kaitlin from the NICU to show her their son.

“That was really difficult,” she shared. “I did not even get to hold him or touch him or anything until he was 2 days old.”

Truett would stay in the NICU for two weeks. One afternoon as Kaitlin, who had been discharged from the hospital, was making her way from Sumter to Columbia, she got a call from the Richland hospital pediatrician. Truett was improving so much that a transfer back to Tuomey was recommended. It was a great relief to Kaitlin and their family.

She received a call from Truett’s

nurse that he had arrived safely and the family was welcomed to see him anytime. Kaitlin would visit the NICU for the first time shortly after the call and was welcomed by its staff with open arms, given the tour, introduced to the staff who he would be in contact with and got to see her son for the first time in an open crib; no shield or distance that could separate them. Throughout the six-and-a-half weeks Truett spent in the NICU, Kaitlin had a village of supportive family and hospital staff surrounding her. Nurses became more than caregivers. They became confidants who checked on her as much as they did her son.

“I had to grieve a lot of things that I didn’t expect. I had to grieve my pregnancy, and I had to grieve a lot of milestones that I didn’t get. Whenever he was first born, I wasn’t able to be the one to give him his first bath or change him for the first time or put clothes on him for the first time or even be the first person to touch him or hold him or speak to him,” she shared. “To me, being surrounded by the people that I was, I think they absolutely saved my mental health during that time.”

“I think that they did a lot as far as not only explaining things about Truett’s care, but they did a lot in checking on me personally and making sure that I was OK, keeping me involved in his care and decisions and things like that. I had never done this and it was really difficult to navigate, and I feel the team that we had absolutely did a wonderful job helping us navigate that.”

That village didn’t end when Truett was discharged. Today, Kaitlin walks the halls of Tuomey not as a patient’s mother but as a colleague. Some of the same nurses who stayed by her son’s bedside and encouraged her through late night phone calls and warm hugs are now coworkers and friends. The proof of such a bond was clear at this year’s March of Dimes March for Babies on Saturday, Sept. 20. The walk through Dillion Park was filled with community support and Prisma Health Tuomey Hospital staff, who Kaitlin stood shoulder to shoulder with just as they once stood by Truett’s bedside.

Kaitlin’s pregnancy didn’t go the way she planned. But what came of it was not only a baby boy, but beautiful friendships and a testimony of how God can turn the hardest season into stories of hope and healing.

“In hindsight, I can definitely see God’s hand over every aspect of that journey,” Kaitlin expressed. “I definitely think that He used that journey and that season of our life to really open our minds and our hearts and just open doors, lead us into relationships that we otherwise would not have had. I think that that’s been a really amazing thing.”

POST 15

FROM PAGE A1

on Aug. 4 to present their evidence.

On July 29, a special meeting was held by Custer and other post members to discuss the 2025 fair and the conduct of Lyons, Brunson, the Klopfleisches and a fifth executive member, Jack McCall. After the Custers had been removed from their roles and duties by the executive committee members, in a unanimous vote by other members, they were reinstated, given back their membership privileges and status and removed the trespass warning placed upon them by Quint Klopffleisch.

On Aug. 13, State American Legion Department’s executive committee met to discuss the CIC’s findings and unanimously voted to revoke Post 15’s charter “effective immediately.” The post was notified of this revocation in person and in a letter on Aug. 14 at its meeting, according to court records.

At this same meeting, Post 15 members elected Cecil McCaskill as acting commander, Larry Gamble as acting 1st vice commander and Shawn Custer as acting adjutant. These three are serving as third-party intervenors on behalf of the post in the civil suit.

In August, *The Item* obtained video footage of legionnaires at the meeting being told by State Commander James Rabon to leave the building or face arrest. As legionnaires shouted, “Why can’t we know what’s going on?” Rabon said he would not make any statements, take any statements or allow any questions. The Boy Scouts meeting in the memorial building was also told to stop and attendees to leave by Cleo Klopffleisch.

“This post is now the property of the American

Legion Department of South Carolina,” Rabon said in the video.

The state Legion stated that without judicial intervention, “Post 15’s assets remain at risk of loss” and other wrongdoings, requesting a temporary restraining order for declaratory judgment, or a binding decision that defines the legal rights and obligations between two parties, and preliminary and permanent injunctive order to maintain the current affairs of post until the case is determined.

In an affidavit dated Aug. 28 by Gamble, he alleged the state Legion “failed to provide a show cause hearing date, time and place that the Post 15 could defend itself” before revoking its charter, in accordance with the American Legion Department of South Carolina constitution. Because of this, the post would not be able to conduct business or honor contractual obligations, putting them in breach of contracts and liable for lawsuits that “allow for penalties with treble damages and attorney’s fees as an award to the aggrieved party.”

Had the fair not run as scheduled Sept. 9-14, the post could’ve lost expected income of \$200,000 for carnival rides, \$30,000 for entertainment and \$7,000 per vendor with an estimate of 20 vendors, according to the affidavit. That totaled about \$370,000.

That would’ve been over half of the post’s 2023 revenue of \$504,800, according to the post’s income tax return.

The post sought an emergency restraining order that would restrict the state Legion from revoking its charter and seizing all assets as well as order the state Legion to recognize Post 15’s change in leadership until the next election in May 2026

and show cause of why it failed to follow its own constitution and procedures for revocation. This would restore all assets to the current elected leaders and prompt a show cause hearing by the state Legion or allow the post to get in compliance with the Legion constitution.

Judge George McFaddin granted the state Legion’s temporary restraining order on Aug. 28, restricting Post 15 from transferring, disposing, destructing, hindering or converting any of its real property, records, bank accounts or other assets as well as allowing the state Legion access to monitor its bank accounts, property, which includes the post’s \$4 million buildings on South Artillery Drive, and provide an accounting of its financial information.

An affidavit filed Sept. 18 by Jim Hawk, the interim adjutant for state Legion, stated the post was granted permission to hold the annual fair in an attempt to reduce the number of lawsuits that may occur due to breach of contract. The only condition was that the Sumter County Sheriff’s Office would provide security, with the sheriff’s office affirming “there will be no civilian or military security people walking around with guns.”

During the fair’s unexpected second week Sept. 15-21, “the only security was a post member, not authorized law enforcement personnel.”

Court proceedings took place at Sumter County Judicial Center on Monday, Sept. 22.

Shawn Custer told *The Item* on Tuesday, Sept. 23, that the state Legion has agreed to recognize him, Gamble and McCaskill in their elected roles as well as agreed to a trial on Nov. 15 to allow the post to defend itself against the charter revocation. The charter is currently suspended and not re-

voked as the state Legion did not follow proper procedures.

Shawn added that operations at Post 15 will continue as usual as “we have contracts to fulfill.”

FINANCES AND THE FARMERS MARKET

While the state Legion was court-ordered to monitor the local post’s finances and other assets, it received a notice that a bank account for the “Fair” had been opened at a different bank than the one normally used by the post, without Post or state Legion authority.

The bank was informed by the state Legion that a committee had been appointed as oversight for the post. The bank responded that there were “several conflicting contacts with the office” and that an authorized contact needed to stop by the office.

Multiple individuals also attempted to gain access to the Sumter U.S. Post Office box to the point the locks were changed to “safeguard the mail.” Inside were vendor invoices, due checks and a new credit card for the post that could not be accessed.

In the same timeframe, vendors of the American Legion Farmer’s Market made the decision to stop selling and remove all their items “due to continued harassment and threats.” In Hawk’s affidavit, it was stated that the farmer’s market manager, Deborah Hurd, attempted to open the doors of the market to find out the locks had been changed. After asking about the locks, Shawn Custer came to open the doors and “started yelling and demanding money from sales.” Hurd called the police.

Since Aug. 29, Sumter American Legion Farmers Market Facebook posts stated there will be no farmers market until further notice.

BOARD

FROM PAGE A1

on Monday. After returning to open session, the trustees voted 8-0 to hire the firm. Canty was not present at the meeting.

A contract has not been signed yet.

BWP is the only group the board interviewed, and Ragin said in an email to *The Item* on Tuesday the board was not obligated to interview multiple firms before moving forward.

“The board reached a clear consensus in choosing BWP,” he said, “and we look forward to building a strong working relationship with them. It is also important to note that at least five of our current board members already have prior experience working with BWP, which further strengthens our confidence in their ability to guide us through a thorough and effective superintendent search.”

Ragin added that the board’s timeline will be guided by the quality of candidates identified through the search process but that a final selection of the next superintendent will hopefully be made by late January to mid-February.

He added that the trustees will keep the public informed as they progress and will provide updates as key milestones are achieved.

The district’s last superintendent, William Wright Jr., resigned on Aug. 14. One week later, he received a settlement agreement of \$220,000 as part of his resignation.

District Chief of Schools Shirley Gamble has served as acting superintendent since Wright’s departure.

INTERNET OUTAGE MONDAY NIGHT

Due to an internet outage at the district office and other parts of Sumter late Monday afternoon, the board voted to postpone the superintendent’s report that included reports from the Office of Student Support Services and the Office of Finance.

Ragin said the agenda items will be moved to the next scheduled board meeting on Oct. 6 or to a special-called meeting if those items are deemed pressing.

PUBLIC AGENDA

SUMTER CITY-COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
Wednesday, Sept. 24, at 3 p.m., fourth floor, Sumter Opera House, Council Chambers

CITY OF MANNING PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
Wednesday, Sept. 24, 6:30 p.m., 29 W. Boyce St., City Hall Chambers, Manning

SUMTER COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Thursday, Sept. 25, at 7:45 a.m., 10 E. Liberty St.

LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Thursday, Sept. 25, at 6:30 p.m., District Administration Complex Quadplex, 310 Roland St., Bishopville.

SUMTER SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Monday, Oct. 6, 6 p.m., 1345 Wilson Hall Road

SANTEE-LYNCHES REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Monday, Oct. 6, 6 p.m., Central Carolina Technical College, 506 N. Guignard Drive, Building M400, Room 401

AROUND TOWN

To correct any information or to make a submission to Around Town, email pressrelease@theitem.com with Around Town in subject line.

City of Sumter is inviting the public to help shape the **Annual Action plan** for using Community Development Block Grant money to improve neighborhoods and support low- to moderate-income residents. Meeting attendees can share how they would like the money to be spent. Examples include housing rehabilitation, sewer improvements and youth programs. The next meetings is Tuesday, Sept. 30, 2025, 6 p.m., South HOPE Center, 1125 S. Lafayette Drive

Entry to all meeting places is handicapped accessible. Hearing impaired or deaf persons may call (803) 774-1649 for assistance. People needing an interpreter may call the same number for assistance.

In observance of **Child Passenger Safety Week**, Sept. 22-27, the South Carolina Department of Public Health is emphasizing the critical importance of proper car seat use and hosting a series of educational events. In Sumter, a seat check will be held at Shaw Air Force Base, 411 Polifka Drive, from 3 to 5 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 25, and at Jones Chevrolet, 1230 Broad St., from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Sept. 27. Call (803) 250-6713 to sign up for the Jones event.

The Evening Optimist Club is accepting **applications for the annual Sumter Christmas Parade** which will be held at 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 7. The theme for the 2025 Christmas Parade is "A Candy Cane Christmas." If your school, civic club, church, or business would like an application, please contact Gail Hyatt at (803) 983-3916, or via email, gailhyatt@sc.rr.com. Deadline for entry is Friday, Nov. 14.

Join the South Carolina Toastmaster D58 for the **Sumter Community Open House** on Saturday, Sept. 27, from 2 to 3:30 p.m. at North HOPE Center. You'll discover more about Toastmasters, strengthen leadership, elevate communication and ignite confidence. Keynote speakers will be Lefford Fate, DTM, and Douglas Wilson, DTM PDG. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/2mpwamkz>. The center is at 904 N. Main St. For more information, contact club growth director Mary Lee at cgd@d58tm.org.

A **City of Sumter Tire Buyback** will be held on Saturday, Sept. 27, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Sumter County Civic Center. During the buyback, city residents can receive \$2 for each tire brought for recycling. This event is limited to residents; businesses are not eligible to participate. There is a limit of 20 car tires per vehicle, and no tires with rims will be allowed. A valid S.C. ID is required. This buyback is sponsored by Palmetto Pride and Walmart Sumter. Call (803) 305-5266 or visit www.sumtersc.gov/litter to learn more about litter control in Sumter.



Crosswell Home for Children is celebrating 90 years and is in search of alumni who spent time at the home to celebrate at the Alumni BBQ on Saturday, Oct. 25. Crosswell, established in 1935 by the estate of John K. Crosswell, has served as a home for more than 1,000 local children. If you are interested in attending or for more information, email sallred@crosswellhome.org or scan the QR code.

Sumter S.C. Combat Veterans Group supports veterans and their families through various initiatives. Members have a chance to contribute to causes that directly impact veterans' lives, join in on community events, network with fellow vets and supporters and help shape the future of veteran support in the Sumter area, according to the group's website. Members have the chance to give back, stay connected and make a difference in the lives of those who served our country. Anyone interested in joining can attend one of the regular group meetings on the third Friday of each month at 10 a.m. at 529 N. Wise Drive. The application at <https://sumtercombatveterans.org/membership> can be downloaded, printed and completed beforehand.

WEATHER

AccuWeather® five-day forecast for Sumter

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TODAY	TONIGHT	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Hot	Mainly clear and humid	A t-storm around in the p.m.	A shower and t-storm; humid	A couple of showers possible	Humid; a stray a.m. t-shower
93°	70°	93° / 71°	85° / 69°	85° / 68°	83° / 66°
Chance of rain: 5%	Chance of rain: 5%	Chance of rain: 55%	Chance of rain: 90%	Chance of rain: 30%	Chance of rain: 55%
SSW 4-8 mph	S 4-8 mph	SW 6-12 mph	WSW 3-6 mph	WSW 3-6 mph	NNE 6-12 mph

TODAY'S SOUTH CAROLINA WEATHER

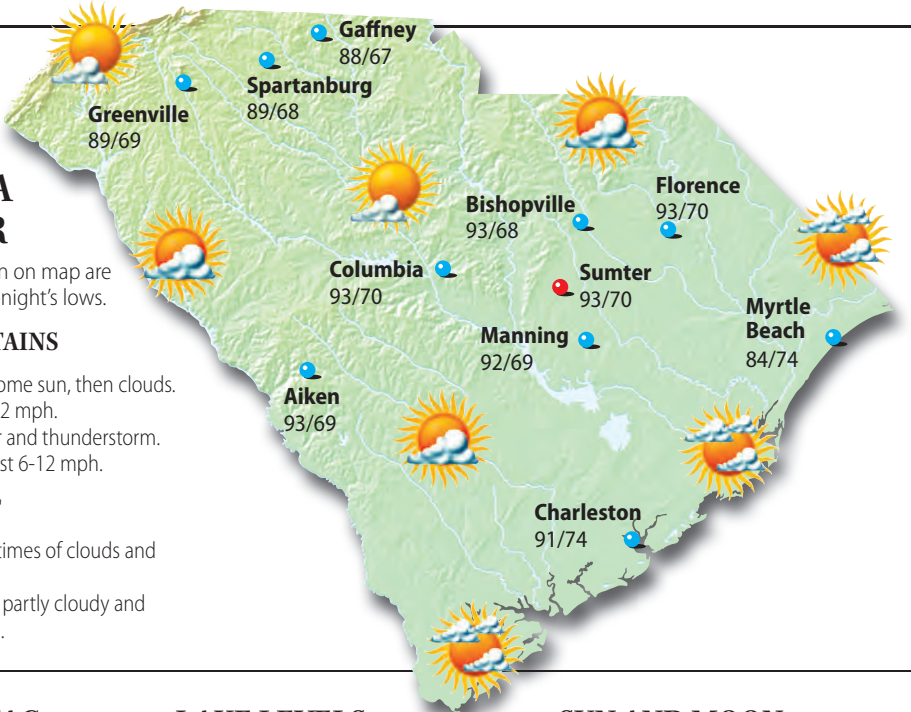
Temperatures shown on map are today's highs and tonight's lows.

IN THE MOUNTAINS

Today: Warm with some sun, then clouds. Winds southwest 6-12 mph.
Thursday: A shower and thunderstorm. Winds west-southwest 6-12 mph.

ON THE COAST

Today: Humid with times of clouds and sun. High 84 to 93.
Thursday: Sunny to partly cloudy and humid. High 83 to 93.



LOCAL ALMANAC

SUMTER MONDAY	
Temperature	
High	89°
Low	62°
Normal high	82°
Normal low	61°
Record high	98° in 2022
Record low	47° in 2020
Precipitation	
Monday	0.00"
Month to date	0.16"
Normal month to date	3.08"
Year to date	25.29"
Last year to date	29.02"
Normal year to date	36.90"

LAKE LEVELS

Lake	Full pool	7 a.m. yest.	24-hr chg
Murray	360	357.28	-0.03
Marion	76.8	74.88	-0.03
Moultrie	75.5	74.82	-0.03
Wateree	100	96.82	-0.05

RIVER STAGES

River	Flood stage	7 a.m. yest.	24-hr chg
Black River	12	1.99	-0.03
Congaree River	19	2.88	none
Lynchies River	14	1.93	-0.02
Saluda River	14	2.09	+0.16
Up. Santee River	80	N.A.	N.A.
Wateree River	24	5.04	-1.03

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise	7:11 a.m.	Sunset	7:16 p.m.
Moonrise	9:46 a.m.	Moonset	8:31 p.m.
First	Full	Last	New
Sep. 29	Oct. 6	Oct. 13	Oct. 21

TIDES

AT MYRTLE BEACH			
	High	Ht.	Low
Today	11:27 a.m.	3.3	5:44 a.m.
	11:31 p.m.	3.0	6:19 p.m.
Thu.	12:03 p.m.	3.3	6:16 a.m.
	---	---	6:58 p.m.

NATIONAL CITIES

City	Today Hi/Low/W	Thu. Hi/Low/W
Atlanta	92/71/s	77/68/t
Chicago	70/57/sh	72/58/c
Dallas	80/66/t	83/62/s
Detroit	70/63/t	73/57/sh
Houston	93/73/t	90/68/s
Los Angeles	85/67/pc	80/66/pc
New Orleans	90/76/t	82/72/t
New York	79/68/c	75/69/t
Orlando	94/75/t	92/75/t
Philadelphia	84/68/c	81/69/t
Phoenix	108/86/s	109/80/s
San Francisco	73/61/pc	72/57/pc
Wash., DC	83/72/t	84/70/t

REGIONAL CITIES

City	Today Hi/Low/W	Thu. Hi/Low/W
Asheville	81/67/t	76/65/t
Athens	90/68/pc	81/67/t
Augusta	93/68/pc	92/70/t
Beaufort	93/73/pc	93/75/s
Cape Hatteras	83/74/pc	82/73/pc
Charleston	91/74/c	90/74/s
Charlotte	91/72/pc	87/69/t
Clemson	88/69/pc	76/66/t
Columbia	93/70/pc	92/72/t
Darlington	94/70/pc	93/71/c
Elizabeth City	87/71/pc	90/72/c
Elizabethtown	92/71/pc	90/71/pc
Fayetteville	93/70/pc	92/71/c

City	Today Hi/Low/W	Thu. Hi/Low/W
Florence	93/70/pc	93/72/pc
Gainesville	93/70/t	90/72/t
Gastonia	89/69/pc	82/69/t
Goldsboro	93/71/pc	93/70/c
Goose Creek	92/72/pc	92/72/s
Greensboro	86/68/c	82/65/t
Greenville	89/69/pc	81/67/t
Hickory	86/68/t	79/66/t
Hilton Head	86/75/pc	85/75/s
Jacksonville, FL	93/73/pc	92/72/t
La Grange	92/71/pc	79/68/t
Macon	95/68/pc	87/68/t
Marietta	91/71/pc	79/66/t

City	Today Hi/Low/W	Thu. Hi/Low/W
Marion	82/65/t	74/63/t
Mt. Pleasant	88/75/pc	88/74/s
Myrtle Beach	84/74/pc	86/74/s
Orangeburg	93/70/pc	92/70/c
Port Royal	89/73/c	90/74/s
Raleigh	92/71/pc	89/71/t
Rock Hill	90/68/pc	84/69/t
Rockingham	93/69/pc	90/70/t
Savannah	92/74/pc	91/73/pc
Spartanburg	89/68/pc	81/65/t
Summerville	91/71/pc	91/73/pc
Wilmington	88/71/pc	90/73/pc
Winston-Salem	88/70/pc	83/67/t

Weather(W): s=sunny, pc=partly cloudy, c=cloudy, sh=showers, t=thunderstorms, r=rain, sf=snow flurries, sn=snow, l=ice

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SUMTER SPCA PETS OF THE WEEK

ABOVE: Meet Moon, a 4-year-old pit mix. She is housebroken and good with kids and other dogs, too. She's spayed and ready to find a new home. Come check her out at the Sumter SPCA.



BELOW: Meet Star, a 5-year-old pit mix. She is housebroken and good with kids and other dogs, too. She's spayed and ready to find a new home. Come check her out at the Sumter SPCA.



The Sumter SPCA is located at 1140 S. Guignard Drive, (803) 773-9292, and is open 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. every day except Wednesday and Sunday. Visit the website at www.sumterscspca.com.

SUMTER ANIMAL CONTROL PETS OF THE WEEK

ABOVE: Meet Sammy! Sammy came to the shelter with his sister, Sissy, and has been patiently waiting for a family to choose him. This adorable 6-month-old, 27-pound boy is full of love and personality. Sammy is active, playful and enjoys spending time with the other dogs at the shelter. He's a total love bug who can't wait to share his sweet personality with his very own family.



BELOW: Meet Sissy! Sweet little Sissy is a 6-month-old, 25-pound bundle of love who has been waiting patiently in the shelter for 2 months — without a single application. This adorable girl is growing up in a kennel, but she deserves to grow up in a loving home. Sissy still has some of that fun puppy energy, loves to run and play outside, and absolutely adores attention from people. She's gentle, sweet, and ready to be someone's best friend. Let's help Sissy find the family she's been dreaming of!



If you're interested in meeting one of these pets at Sumter Animal Control, 1240 Winkles Road, call (803) 774-3232 or email sumterstrays@gmail.com. As with all of our adoptable pets, a spay or neuter agreement is required, and it is strictly enforced. Proof of spay/neuter after adoption will be required. Visit Sumter Animal Control online at www.savingsumterstrays.com or find them on Facebook.

The SPCA relies heavily on community support and donations. Currently, the biggest needs are for dry puppy and kitten food, wet cat food, cat litter and cleaning supplies. The following are also appreciated:

Newspapers, stuffed animals, heavy duty trash bags (30 gallon or larger), dishwashing liquid, laundry detergent, bleach, paper towels, sheets and comforters, baby blankets, canned dog and cat food, dry dog food, treats, leashes and collars, disinfectant spray, all-purpose cleaner, air freshener, no scratch scrubbers, two-sided sponges for dishes, litter freshener and, of course, monetary donations are also gratefully accepted.

SUMTER ANIMAL CONTROL NEEDS YOUR HELP. We are looking for people to walk dogs, foster or help with transport. We desperately need 9 a.m. Monday – Friday walkers. Message us if interested. Must be at least 18 years old. Don't have extra time to be a volunteer? We gladly accept donations of the following: newspapers, puppy pads, canned and dry puppy food, paper towels, Clorox wipes and heavy duty slip leashes. You can also donate from our Amazon Wishlist under Saving Sumter's Strays at <https://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/10Q422KA0MI19>. All donations go toward helping Sumter County dogs. Our all-volunteer organization is making a big difference in the lives of so many homeless pets. Please help us continue to save animals.



Manning senior Jontavious Canty dislocated his hip during the Monarchs' first preseason game, but he's been hard at work to get back on the field in time for region play.

PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Manning's Canty ready to hit the field after hip injury in preseason



For a video interview with Canty, hover your phone's camera over the code and click on the link that pops up.

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

Manning senior Jontavious Canty learned first-hand just how cruel the game of football can be sometimes.

Coming into his senior year, Jontavious was on top of the world. He and the Monarchs made a run to the SCHSL 2A lower state championship a year ago, and he was ready to lead the way back to the promised land. Jon started to catch the attention of the state-wide football community, being placed on the Move The Chains preseason Mr. Football watch list, among others.

When Manning's first scrimmage came, everything changed. Jon was pulled down by the head on a tackle and twisted his body weirdly. He eventually learned that he dislocated his hip, taking away at least the start of his senior year before it even started.

After weeks of hard work, Jontavious is on the brink of

his return. He's hoping to play on Friday night against East Clarendon, at least in a limited capacity, as the Monarchs begin their march through region play.

"It was tough," Jon said of his injury. "It's my senior year, I'm gonna miss my first game and I know I let my team down. My mindset got bigger and better during rehab."

STAR TURN

Football is a team game, so one player doesn't always define wins and losses, but Jontavious was an important puzzle piece for the Monarchs.

A year ago, Jon jumped onto the scene as a two-way star. On defense, he was the team's leading tackler, racking up 97 stops on the season. He added two sacks and 15 tackles for a loss, while chipping in a defensive touchdown. He also got his first shot at running back, where he led the team with 769 yards, forming a dynamic thunder and lightning combo with Jalynn Coard, who is now suiting up for

SEE GRIND, PAGE B6

It's his work ethic that impresses me more than anything. He puts in extra time in the weight room; he gets to the weight room early, he'll leave late. Same with practice.'

MANNING HEAD COACH REGGIE KENNEDY

Describing what makes Jontavious Canty a special player



Jontavious stands next to his locker in the Monarch locker room after practice on Thursday, Sept. 18.

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Sumter High obliterates Spring Valley to open region play

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

The Sumter High football team kicked off region play with a bang on Friday, dominating Spring Valley from beginning to end in a 54-0 win on homecoming.

“We had a good night,” head coach Mark Barnes said. “If you go back to the second half of the Myrtle Beach game and the Crestwood game, then (Spring Valley), our defense hasn’t given up a point. It’s hard to lose when you don’t get scored on. Our defense played really well. I think we held them to about four first downs and well under 100 yards of total offense, so it was a great night for our defense. They were flying around and being physical, and offensively, we had six different people score touchdowns, 535 yards of total offense.”

It was about as lopsided as a football game could be. Sumter High outgained Spring Valley 535 to 56 on the night, as the Gamecock defense lived in the backfield. Sumter High had 13 tackles for a loss, seven of which came from Javonte Brown, who also finished with 10 tackles. Cleveland Pinkney added a forced fumble and a recovery, while SHS also broke up a total of seven pass attempts.

“Our defensive front has played extremely hard all year. We’re not as big, maybe, as we’ve been in the past, but we do have great team speed on defense and they’re aggressive,” Barnes said. “I haven’t been able to get on our defense this year about playing hard, and that’s where defense starts is chasing the ball and being aggressive and being physical. We’re just getting better at it every week, and I think we’re growing confidence-wise, as well.”

Offensively, everyone got involved. Frank Richardson finished 7-9 through the air for 84 yards and a touchdown, while adding six carries for 14 yards and two touchdowns. Jamirh Bey caught five passes

for 57 yards and a touchdown, while taking his lone carry 59 yards to the house. Jacori Jackson caught two passes for 27 yards. Seven players got at least one carry in the win. Cayon Gordon led the way with seven totes for 148 yards and a score. Pinkney added six carries for 118 yards and a touchdown, while Reggie Shannon had eight carries for 63 yards. Edward Tiller chipped in with nine carries for 49 yards and a score.

“We know (Richardson) can throw. It’s not that we have doubt in him, we just haven’t put it together on a Friday night yet. That was a good night for him throwing the football; play action and some screens, getting the ball in athletes’ hands out in space. He did a good job reading that,” Barnes said. “We had a good night on the ground, did a good job in the option game. Both the dive and the pitch were good for us.”

Injuries early in the season helped Sumter High build some great depth, which is now turning into some real competition, especially on defense. Barnes likes the hunger his team is playing with as they fight for their spot on the field.

“We think we have some depth on defense and offense, so we were going to play three corners all night long, three safeties all night long, same thing at defensive line to get people in a competitive situation,” Barnes said. “They understand that they’re out there fighting for playing time. We created some competition at certain positions and that’s always good for team morale and effort level, too. Our guys did a good job of that, especially defensively, competing.”

Barnes really likes the way his team responded to a 28-6 loss to White Knoll in Week 2, and he expects that momentum to keep growing as they get deeper into region play. The Gamecocks hit the road to Lugoff-Elgin next week before hosting West Florence. After that, SHS has a bye



Sumter High’s Cayon Gordon (11) carries the ball against Spring Valley on Friday.

PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

week before closing out the regular season with games against Blythewood, Ridge View and Westwood.

“We’re going to be competitive at practice with each other. If you’re fighting for a job, you can’t take days off,” Barnes said about getting stronger as the season progresses. “We’ve been pretty adamant since we got our tail kicked earlier in the year that we’ve got to stack great days and great series and great plays on top of each other and keep trying to get better every day and every play and every rep. Our guys have kinda bought into that.”

“I’m really proud of the jump we’ve made in three weeks; from the low early with us getting beat and how we’ve responded to it. I think that’s a big indicator of the type of team you’ve got.”



Sumter High’s Frank Richardson carries the ball on Friday.



Sumter High’s Jamirh Bey (1) dodges a pair of Spring Valley defenders on Friday.



Sumter High’s Se-renity Woods, left, is crowned homecoming queen by 2024 queen Jada Wright at halftime on Friday.

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Wilson Hall's Milling Galloway (8) ran for a touchdown and caught another in the Barons' 42-14 win over Camden Military on Friday.

Wilson Hall makes quick work of Camden Military in 42-14 romp

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

Wilson Hall traveled to Camden Military on Friday looking for a bounce back game. Coming off a 14-13 loss to rival Laurence Manning, the Barons wanted to get back to the offensive explosions that dominated the early portion of their schedule.

Mission accomplished.

The Barons were unstoppable on offense and played smothering defense all night long. They carried a 42-0 lead into the half and coasted after the break to a 42-14 win.

“That’s the biggest thing to take from it,” head coach Adam Jarecki said of getting back on track. “All week it was, ‘How are we going to respond?’ And it’s a region game and we have to take care of our region games.”

Wilson Hall immediately hit the ground running, scoring on their first offensive play as Milling Galloway got loose for a 21-yard score. A few minutes later, Ford Wilder found Galloway for an eight-yard touchdown before Cameron Wilsey broke away for a 33-yard score to stretch the lead to 21-0 at the end of the first quarter. Wilder ran in an eight-yard score early in the fourth quarter, before another Wilsey touchdown. Matthew Behmer capped off the scoring by returning his third

interception for a touchdown.

Galloway finished with 74 yards on just five carries, while catching two passes for 30 yards and a score. Wilsey needed just four carries to go 43 yards. Wilder finished 6-6 passing for 73 yards and a score.

Defensively, Behmer led the way with his three interceptions. Peyton Gilley had three tackles and a tackle for a loss, while Griffin Jones added three tackles.

The win comes at the right time for the Barons, who now begin a stretch of three critically important home games. They start with Florence Christian for homecoming for a matchup that will likely determine the region title. They follow that with a rematch of last year’s SCISA 3A state championship against Pinewood Prep before another region contest with Trinity Collegiate. After that stretch, the Barons hit their bye week and road trips to Thomas Sumter and First Baptist to close the regular season.

“It was a region game, so you have to take care of it, and coming out of the Laurence Manning game, we really wanted to clean things up,” Jarecki said. “We needed a positive after last week. We’ve got a bear of a next three weeks. We’re going to see the best three teams on our schedule these next three weeks.”

Lee Central holds off Hardeeville for 26-21 win heading into bye week

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

The Lee Central football team was desperate to get back on track when they made the trip to Hardeeville on Friday. After losing two consecutive games, the Stallions had no interest in entering their bye week with a third. After grabbing an early lead, Lee Central never trailed, sealing a tense 26-21 win with a pick by Xavier Reed in the fourth quarter.

“It was huge for us to get going in the right direction. You don’t want to stumble into conference play, and that was our goal for the entire week, to find a way to get the W,” head coach Justin Danner said. “It wasn’t a perfect football game and never is, but we found a way to pull it out.”

Lee Central never trailed, but it wasn’t a stress-free night. The Stallions put the ball on the ground three times, losing two of them. One of those fumbles helped Hardeeville close the gap after Lee Central stretched their lead back out to two scores in the second half. In the end, Reed was able to snag the Stallions’ long turnover on defense to hold off a furious comeback attempt.

“It had gotten dangerous at that point because they were on the drive and they have a really good kicker, too, so the score would’ve done it,” Danner said of the game-sealing interceptions. “Xavier Reed does a lot for us; he’s been our MVP. He does a lot for us running the football, playing in the defensive secondary. It’s not like we didn’t know he was capable of doing it. He’s been making plays for us, and we hope he continues to make those plays to lead our football team.”

Offensively, LCHS did what they do best and pounded the rock. A stable of Stallions combined to run for 321 yards on 37 carries. Zion Hannibal handled business in short yardage, carrying the ball five times for 17 yards and two scores. Nyser Henry was the leader of the pack with 13 totes for 119 yards and a touchdown, though he had two explosive touchdown runs negated by holding calls. Jaylen Williams added seven carries for 77 yards, while Reed carried the ball eight times for 76 yards. Ezekiel Blake chipped in with 26 yards and a touchdown on six carries.

“We came out wanting (to throw the ball), and they blitzed us all night. They sent eight people and that can be more dangerous than you think,” Danner said. “With them blitzing, we were still averaging a lot of yards per run. (If they blitz in the wrong spot), we’re gone and that was a big play for us a few times, so



Lee Central's Xavier Reed ran for 76 yards and had the game-sealing interception against Hardeeville on Friday.

we felt like we had to stand pat and take our chances when we take them. Our offensive line did a real good job, and our coaches had a real good plan.”

Defensively, the Stallions were stout for most of the night despite playing without a critical defensive leader, Shadrach Williams. Stalwarts like Savion Williams (4.5 tackles) and Blake (three tackles) helped fill in some gaps, while some new faces stepped up. Jaquaze Sweetenburg had three tackles and a tackle for a loss in the win. Jordan Rufus led the team with 5.5 tackles, while Hannibal teamed up with Teriek Miller for both a sack and a tackle for a loss. Javon Jenkins added a forced fumble and 3.5 tackles.

“We’ve had big performances over the last several games from Jaquaze Sweetenburg, he has really stepped up as a guy on our defense,” Danner said. “He’s been doing a really good job alongside Jordan Rufus and some big performances from Savion.”

While it was a big win, Lee Central still has plenty to clean up. Penalties kept the Stallions from breaking away multiple times, so that will be a major point of emphasis during their bye week as they prepare for a gauntlet of region games. The first one up is homecoming against Great Falls on Oct. 3.

“Just cutting down the mental mistakes, because that’s who’s stopping us is us,” Danner said of his focus during the bye. “If we can cut those mental mistakes down, I think we can play a pretty good brand of football. Taking care of the football is going to be a must, not giving the ball away and putting us in compromising situations. We have to take care of that if we’re going to have a chance in our region.”

CROSSWORD

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65											66			
68											69			

- Across**
- 1 Home of the Colosseum
5 Muffin fiber
9 Actor Omar
13 Cut off
14 In __ parentis
15 “Star Wars” heroine
16 Battle over a board
18 Performed at a karaoke party
19 Broadcasts
20 Super-
21 Pt. of some school names
22 Places for plugs
24 “Peyton Place” and “Diamonds Are Forever” actress
27 Filming location
28 “__ go time!”
30 Sigh, say
31 School administrator
33 Tiny bit
36 Summers on the Seine
37 Semester-long writing assignment
40 Be rife (with)
43 Bump from office
44 Baseball feature
47 __ film
49 Apropos
51 Plead
53 Film hitman played by Keanu Reeves
56 Dog star
58 Shift key toggle
59 Increase
61 17-time WWE champion
62 Spa treatment, for short
63 Place for a nonurgent issue, and what can be found at the end of 16-, 24-, 37-, or 53-Across?
- Down**
- 69 Home for a heron
70 Fencing blade

- Down**
- 1 Brought back on board
2 Took in too much
3 World Cup superstar Lionel
4 Hosp. areas
5 Squeal
6 Canned brand often used in chili con queso
7 Ghana’s capital
8 Japanese drama
9 Some other place
10 Woolen outer layer
11 Small puncture
12 Droop
13 Oodles
17 “You __ be joking”
21 Price addition
23 Cloud
25 Kind of tide
26 __ Moines, Iowa
29 Liu of “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings”
32 Sign at a convenience store
34 Curtailed missions?
35 “Bye-bye!”
38 Rice-A-
39 Spanish “this”
40 Blues guitarist __ Mahal
41 Green vehicles
42 Gas additive
45 Attendance record spoiler
46 “Trust your keys with ...” car care chain
48 Be in debt
50 Commoner
52 Clock innards
54 Origami figure
55 Shoes, casually
57 Consign to the dustbin
60 Three-player card game
62 “Heart on My Sleeve” singer Ella __
63 Block
64 Purpose

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

ENUQE
□□□□□

MWPSA
□□□□□

TNYOKT
□□□□□

OITTPE
□□□□□

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THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Kurek

What are you doing? Really? I thought you quit.
What? I just had this one.

HER ATTEMPT TO QUIT CIGARETTES ---

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

□□□□□ □□ □□ □□□□□

SUDOKU

		4		9	6	3	2	
8	6	9						
7			5					
9				2			7	
	4		6	7	8		3	
	7			1				4
					4			3
						8	9	2
	9	7	1	8		5		

HOW TO PLAY:
Each row, column and set of 3-by-3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 through 9 without repetition.

SOLUTIONS

E	E	E	P	E	T	S	E	N	E	T	S	I
S	O	K	S	V	K	N	V	D	O	H	A	R
H	E	N	U	B	K	O	V	B	I	N	V	M
E	N	E	O	E	S	I	S	E	C	A	V	O
E	I	S	S	L	K	C	I	M	N	H	O	J
G	B	E	T	A	P	T	V	N	O	I	T	A
M	W	S	E	T	S	U	O	M	E	E	T	
S	E	T	E	A	T	O	I	N	E	A	D	
E	T	H	X	E	S	T	I	T	E	S		
D	O	O	M	A	N	V	T	S	N	I	V	R
D	H	E	C	T	H	E	B	U	M	S	H	I
G	N	V	S	H	O	L	V	U	S	S	E	H
L	I	E	L	O	O	L	O	R	E	L	E	S
S	P	E	N	B	R	A	N	E	M	O	R	

9	4	5	2	8	1	7	6	3
2	6	8	3	9	7	5	1	4
3	1	7	4	5	6	2	8	9
4	9	2	6	1	3	8	7	5
5	3	6	8	7	9	1	4	2
8	7	1	5	2	4	9	3	6
6	8	9	1	4	5	3	2	7
1	5	4	7	3	2	6	9	8
7	2	3	9	6	8	4	5	1

Jumbles: QUEEN SWAMP
Answer: Her attempt to quit cigarettes — WENT UP IN SMOKE

TIPTOE
KNOTTY
SWAMP

Generals hold off Lee Academy for 12-0 win

BY TIM LEIBLE
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The Thomas Sumter football team is on a two-game winning streak, but they couldn't have landed their victories in two more different ways.

Last week, the Generals won a shootout with Spartanburg Christian 55-52 on a night where defensive stops were few and far between. On Friday, TSA welcomed Lee Academy and fought through a game dotted by mistakes on both sides to take home a 12-0 victory. TSA head coach Stacy Bell said it doesn't matter how they come as long as the Generals end up on the right side of things, but that may just be because he doesn't have any hair left to pull out.

"I'm very proud of them. We played a very good defensive game. They look like they're having fun, don't they?" Bell said, gesturing to his celebrating squad. "We want to win, 3-0, 55-52, we'll take whatever. Offensively, we moved the ball, but we have to finish. The defense played really well tonight."

It was a frustrating night for the Cavaliers, who have been ravaged by injuries this fall. Lee Academy lost Andrew Bowers, who plays everything from quarterback and running back to defensive back, to an ankle injury last week. They already had to move Brayden Davis from quarterback to receiver to fill in for the injured Paxton Greene. Luckily, the Cavaliers' new transfer, Aiden Fitzgerald, was eligible to make his debut on Friday but the Cavs made too many mistakes in a 12-0 loss.

"We've just got to keep pressing. I'm proud of my team, they fought until the end," Lee Academy head coach Justin Logan said. "We had our chances; we had our plays and just beat ourselves a lot of times with penalties. We've just got to find a way to break through. We've got some players hurt, we're breaking in some new personnel, so we have some growing pains, but everything is still in front of us. We haven't played a region game yet, so we have to show up every week and keep working at it."

Both teams experienced some wild swings, where high highs were followed by rough stretches that would stop them in their tracks. Thomas Sumter struck first, as Jace Williams tried to find a receiver in the end zone for a short score on the Generals' first possession. A few different hands

touched the ball before the tipped pass landed softly into the mitts of Christian Williams, who was patiently waiting in the back of the end zone. With a missed extra point, TSA led 6-0. That score remained unchanged until midway through the fourth quarter.

Lee Academy's next drive stalled out thanks in part to an errant snap and a holding call, which negated a long run down the sideline by Landon Olson. TSA gained a couple of first downs on their next possession thanks to a scramble by J. Williams and a 17-yard pass to Joseph Andrade, but Davis was able to jump a route and snag an interception by the goal line to stop the Gener-



Thomas Sumter's Jace Williams (9) throws against Lee Academy.

als in their tracks. Lee held onto the ball for just four plays, punting the ball away to open the second quarter in a 6-0 hole.

Thomas Sumter started moving the ball again on their next possession, but the Cavs turned up the heat with a pair of sacks, setting up third-and-13. A scramble from J. Williams set up a manageable fourth down attempt, but a turnover gave the ball right back to Lee.

The Cavaliers finally seemed to catch a break when Thomas Sumter was flagged for a facemask on a sack of Fitzgerald. After a first down, Lee Academy had some issues with their snaps, catching Fitzgerald off guard with a couple of early deliveries. He managed to gain yards despite the blunders on consecutive plays, but another errant snap on second-and-10 led to a loss of 11 yards and an eventual failed fourth down attempt.

Thomas Sumter got the ball rolling with a pair of completions to Sam Petrauschke, but J. Williams had the ball poked loose on a scramble attempt and the Cavs were able to



Thomas Sumter's Christian Williams holds the ball up in celebration after a touchdown catch against Lee Academy on Friday.

PHOTOS BY TIM LEIBLE / THE SUMTER ITEM



Thomas Sumter's Jace Williams (9) throws against Lee Academy.

jump on the loose ball. Lee had less than a minute to try to score before the half and took a pair of sacks to go into the half down 6-0.

The third quarter mirrored the second, as any momentum either team gained was squashed by a negative play. The Generals needed just two plays for a first down on their opening possession of the half, but J. Williams was flagged for intentional grounding when trying to avoid a sack on first-and-10, pushing TSA back 15 yards. They managed to get a first down when J. Williams connected with Andrade for a 30-yard gain, though a fumble tried to eliminate their excitement. Andrade was able to jump on the loose ball to avoid a turnover, but a sack and a failed fourth down attempt left TSA without points yet again.

Olson and Fitzgerald found some success on the ground before the Cavaliers' new QB faked a keeper and found Davis for a 30-yard connection to move Lee Academy into TSA territory. Fitzgerald then got loose for 19 yards for another first down, but a hold on the next play stopped the Cavs in their tracks, as a fourth down shot for the end zone was just out of reach for Davis for a turnover on downs.

As the third quarter came to an end, TSA stalled out offensively and punted, pinning Lee at their own 35. Two plays later, Fitzgerald found Cain June for a 31-yard strike to flip the field, but another holding penalty pushed them back to first-and-21. After getting 15 yards back on a completion to Olson, another hold erased a 20-yard run from Fitzgerald. Facing third-and-10, the Cavs ran into a brick wall and turned the ball over on downs



Lee Academy's Aiden Fitzgerald rolls out of the pocket on Friday.

two plays later.

The final explosive play of the night came midway through the fourth, as J. Williams found C. Williams open down the left sideline for what looked like a 43-yard touchdown. The speedy receiver was ruled out of bounds at the six. Despite a sack that cost the Generals nine yards, J. Williams was able to connect with Carter Hill for a 15-yard touchdown to ice the game with 6:17 to play.

"Christian is playing really well," Bell said. "I think he sees the field really well, he's big and strong. He's a good player."

Davis caught a slant and took it 35 yards on the first play of the ensuing Lee possession, but the Cavs turned the ball over with four consecutive incomplete passes. Thomas Sumter was able to chew most of the remaining clock, though Lee Academy got one more possession with about a minute and a half left in the game. Two sacks and two incomplete passes led to yet another turnover on downs, allowing the Generals to run out the clock with a kneel down.

J. Williams finished 22-29 for 310 yards and two touchdowns in coordinator Rip Blackstone's offense. C. Williams caught 10 passes for 126 yards and a score to lead the TSA passing attack. Zion Williams carried the ball 11 times for 41 yards.

A week after allowing 52 points to Spartanburg Christian, the Generals pitched a shutout on defense. Bell was impressed with the way his unit responded after a tough week. Ryan Cintron-Black led the defense with 10 tackles, three sacks and two tackles for a loss.

"Ryan Black, Colvin (Lin-

ville) at middle linebacker, Andrew (Conyers) at corner, Clay (Team) and everyone were just really great," Bell said of his defense, while also crediting his defensive coaching staff of David Decker, Chris Pate and Osmond Oliver. "We simplified what we were trying to do, added a little bit of something on the back end, but we really challenged them. They don't realize how good they can be. I'm old, I've been around a lot, they're a good group of kids."

Lee Academy also had a strong night on the defensive end and put a ton of pressure on J. Williams in the backfield.

"At the end of the day, I'm proud of my team. They never gave up," Logan said. "To begin with, we weren't getting any pressure, so we made some adjustments to our defensive front. Kudos to our coaches, collectively, for figuring out what to do to get pressure on them. The defense held up a lot of the night. Our offense didn't do our defense favors a lot of the night, giving them some short fields. They still hung in there and fought to the end."

Thomas Sumter will try to keep this winning streak alive, something they haven't done since 2022. TSA will host American Leadership Academy next week before a trip to Clarendon Hall.

"We're going to go back to work," Bell said. "In the morning, the coaching staff goes back to work, and we'll get ready for the next one."

Lee Academy heads to Pee Dee Academy next week before opening region play at home against Dorchester Academy.



Lee Academy's Landon Olson carries the ball against Thomas Sumter.

Baron swim team wins Panther Invitational

STAFF REPORT

The Wilson Hall swim team traveled to Aiken to take part in the Panther Invitational at Mead Hall on Saturday. The Barons won the event with a combined boys and girls score of 183. The Wilson Hall boys absolutely dominated with 122 team points, topping second-place North Augusta by 25.

The Barons toppled another school record in the meet, as the 200-yard freestyle relay team of Cliff Bath, Jacob Hewett, Ryan Brown and Banks Smith claimed the new mark with a time of 1:35.00. They won the race by more than 13 seconds. The Lady Barons also won the 200 free relay with a team of Campbell Wylie, Paige Sanders, Ariel James and Lilly Schortmann



PHOTO PROVIDED

The Wilson Hall swim team poses after winning the Panther Invitational on Saturday.

finishing with a time of 2:30.04. Both Barons relays finished second among SCISA schools in the 200 medley relay. The boys team of J.T. Reimer, Smith, Asher Parrott

and Ethan Wilson touched with a time of 2:09.68, while the girls team of Sanders, Angela Agno, Cat Bowman and Mary Ellen Thorne finished with a time of 2:45.63.

Wilson Hall claimed the top four spots in the SCISA 200 free. Hewett won with a time of 1:50.66, followed by Brown's time of 1:59.22, Gentry Flowers' time of 2:12.56 and Ethan Wilson's time of 2:15.32. The Barons also took the top three spots in the 50 free. Bath won in 23.54, while Smith took second in 24.28 followed by Joey Robertson in 26.94. Wilson Hall again had the top three finishes in the 100 free, as Bath won in 52.06. Reimer followed in 57.18, while Wilson finished in 57.35. Ethan Bentley rounded out the top five with a time of 1:05.75. Robertson was the only SCISA boys 500 free swimmer, finishing with a time of 6:41.59. Hewett and Brown also took the top two spots in the 100 backstroke with times of 57.75 and

1:04.22. Gavin Hendren finished second in the 200 individual medley with a time of 2:56.69, while Parrott finished third in 3:02.56.

Bowman won the 50 free with a time of 29.94. Bowman and Clare McArthur were the only two SCISA 500 free swimmers. Bowman won in 6:57.69, while McArthur finished in 8:50.10. Thorne finished second in the SCISA 200 free with a time of 2:44.94. Campbell and Schortmann finished second and third in the 100 free with times of 1:10.41 and 1:10.88. Campbell and Schortmann finished third and fourth in the 100 backstroke with times of 1:24.41 and 1:25.34.

The meet was rained out before swimming the 100 breaststroke and 400 free relays.

Scott's Branch senior Nazaiah Richardson (33) had 13 tackles and a 93-yard fumble return for a touchdown in the Eagles' win over Branchville on Friday.

PHOTOS BY NICH PITTS / ITEM CONTRIBUTOR



Eagles stay hot with 26-8 region win over Branchville

BY TIM LEIBLE
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The Scott's Branch football team kicked off region play on the right note on Friday with a commanding 26-8 win over Branchville, claiming their third-consecutive victory in the process.

"Anytime you open up region play 1-0 it's a good thing," head coach Pat Fleming said. "We still haven't peaked yet. We're getting better every day and finding ways to continue to push ourselves in the right direction. It's a good feeling that all the hard work and dedication these guys have put in is paying off."

The Eagles played lights out defensively all night long. Nazaiah Richardson scooped up a fumble and returned it 93 yards for a score to go along with his team-high 13 tackles. Danny Ragin lived in the backfield, with five tackles for a loss and 13 total tackles.

"Once we got that first stop, I knew it was going to be a good night," Fleming said. We pride ourselves in being a physical ball team, playing with effort and playing smart."

Offensively, Jaiven Conyers had an efficient night, going 17-22 for 237 yards and three touchdowns. He added 38 rushing yards on five carries. Nyren Bowman had five catches for 87 yards and a score, while Keith Rogers added five catches for 44 yards and a touchdown and Christian Green chipped in with three catches for 55 yards and another score.

The Eagles have St. John's next before their bye week. They'll return from that week off with a trip to Cross that will likely decide the region title. Fleming is trying to strike the balance of confidence and overconfidence with his team. They're feeling good after three consecutive wins, but they want much more out of the fall than a short winning streak.

"Our goal is to be playing on Thanksgiving, so I always harp on that," Fleming said. "I remind the guys when I



Scott's Branch senior Christian Green (1) carries the ball against Branchville on Friday.



Scott's Branch quarterback Jaiven Conyers rolls out of the pocket against Branchville.



Scott's Branch receiver Keith Rogers carries the ball on Friday.

feel like they're getting a little too loose, and they respond well to it. We're really learning how to practice, do all the little things in the weight room, film study, so

it's all coming together. We're still in the process of building the program the way we want to, but we're heading in the right direction. It just feels good."

SHS girls golf hosts annual Gamecock Invitational; Barons, 'Cats swing away

STAFF REPORT

The Sumter High girls golf team welcomed 22 teams from across the state to Beech Creek on Monday for the annual Gamecock Invitational. Locally, Wilson Hall and Laurence Manning joined in on the fun.

Conway took home the team championship shooting 320 as a unit. They were led by Austen Deal and Reese Richardson, who shot 75 and 78, respectively. Conway beat Carolina Forest by just two strokes. The medalist for the tournament was Lexington's Taryn Smoak, who shot 73.

Locally, Wilson Hall had the low round as a team, shooting 368. Mary Kather Dutcher led the charge by shooting 80, while Aviana Hicks shot 83. Anna Kate Aronson shot 97 and Angela Carter rounded things out with 108.

Sumter High shot 394 as a team, led by Jaylen Berry's 88. Selah Berry was close behind with 91, while Mia Turner shot 96. Emme Bauer shot 119 and Katelyn Makowske shot 128.

Laurence Manning had the lowest individ-



ADAM FLASH / SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Laurence Manning's Summer Carey shot 78 to lead all local golfers when the Sumter High girls golf team hosted the Gamecocks Invitational on Monday.

ual finish locally, as Summer Carey shot 76. LMA shot 448 as a team with Ryanne Lynch shooting 109, Allie Geddings shooting 126, Sadie Gardner shooting 137 and Madison Berry shooting 140.



Wilson Hall's Caulder Williamson finished 12th at the Lake Murray Invitational on Saturday.

ADAM FLASH / SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Local XC teams shine at Lake Marion Invite, Pee Dee Classic

STAFF REPORT

Cross country teams from across the tri-county were busy this weekend, splitting up across two meets ahead of the Wilson Hall/Thomas Sumter Invitational at Patriot Park on Wednesday. Wilson Hall and Thomas Sumter ran in the Lake Murray Invitational on Saturday, while Laurence Manning, Sumter High and Clarendon Hall ran in the Pee Dee Classic.

The Wilson Hall boys finished fourth in the 33-team field at Lake Murray. They were led by Caulder Williamson, who placed 12th with a time of 16:17.98. Abel Ayers finished 24th with a time of 16:40.54, while Trip Hunt took 30th in 16:55.81. Gavin Getz placed 37th in 17:08.69 and Ben Rabon rounded out the scoring lineup in 49th with a time of 17:25.65.

The Lady Barons finished eight in the 32-team field. They too were led by a Williamson, as Emmie finished 20th with a time of 19:50.86. Mary Ellen Thorne finished 28th in 20:05.83, while Jane and Mary Foley were close behind in 31st and 46th with times of 20:09.04 and 20:28.55, respectively. Elisa Getz rounded out the scoring lineup in 113th with a time of 22:39.18, though Cecilia Ayers was close behind in 115th.

Thomas Sumter only sent their boys squad on

Saturday. Nate Livingston led the way for the Generals, placing 82nd with a time of 18:07.45. Ashton and Aiden Pierce finished 94th and 101st with times of 18:24.13 and 18:40.33. Henry Sturkey finished 168th while Wade Johnson rounded out the scoring lineup in 191st.

Laurence Manning had some stellar performances at the Pee Dee Classic, though they did not bring enough runners for team scores. Drew Beard finished the boys race in third with a time of 17:43.12. Ben Clegg finished 15th with a time of 19:14.34. Andrew Thompson and Kole Squires finished 105th and 108th. On the girls side, Meredith Coffey finished ninth with a time of 22:27.74. Morgan Conklin finished 25th with a time of 24:08.73.

The Sumter High boys were led by Tyler Metzger and Christian Ingram, who finished 22nd and 23rd with times of 19:44.50 and 19:45.22. Jordan Freeman was close behind in 28th with a time of 19:50.92, while Gavin Kirkman finished 51st and Jack Butters rounded out the scoring lineup in 74th. SHS only had one female runner, as Camdyn Osteen finished 22nd with a time of 23:35.84.

Clarendon Hall had just one runner, as Willson Epps finished 99th with a time of 26:12.14.



TIM LEIBLE / SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Wilson Hall's Natalie Hawkey had 27 assists and five aces during their quad with Williamsburg Academy, Calhoun Academy and Georgetown on Saturday.

Wilson Hall, Sumter High volleyball thrive in weekend tournaments

STAFF REPORT

The Wilson Hall and Sumter High volleyball teams were both busy this weekend. The Barons hosted three schools for a day of matches, sweeping the day, while the Lady Gamecocks went 3-2 in the Panther Invitational at Batesburg-Leesville.

The Barons faced off with Williamsburg Academy, Calhoun Academy and Georgetown on Saturday, winning 2-0 in all three matches. They beat Georgetown 25-12, 25-9, Williamsburg 25-14, 25-20 and Calhoun 25-6, 25-14.

McKinley Bath led the offense with 16 kills, while Beaty Zeigler had 10 kills and three blocks. Bath added 16 digs, while Savannah Wells had 21 digs to go with five assists. Natalie Hawkey dished out 27 assists and five aces. Kira Stelle led the team with eight aces on the day.

The Lady Gamecocks got out to a slow start at Bates-

burg-Leesville. They dropped their opener against Clinton 11-25, 25-23, 12-25 before a 10-25, 16-25 loss to Cardinal Newman. After that, they settled in, ripping off three sweeps. The Lady Gamecocks beat Cheraw 25-11, 25-14 before a 25-22, 25-17 win over former region foe Socastee. Sumter High closed the day with a 25-21, 25-10 win over Brookland-Cayce.

Laila Stanton led Sumter High with 39 kills on the day, adding four blocks and two digs. Mia Amore had 32 kills, two aces, two block, two assists and three digs. Zila Berry dished out 68 assists to go with eight aces, a kill and 36 digs. Remy Shauf had 41 receptions, 37 digs, five aces, a kill and an assist. Lillie Ivey had eight kills, six receptions, an assist and 11 digs. McLean Reynolds had six aces, two receptions, three digs and an assist. Arail Lowder chipped in with five aces, 29 receptions, a kill and 20 digs.



Manning's Jontavious Canty has been on a detailed workout regiment to prepare for his return to play. Off the field, he works with elastic bands to build strength in his hip, while his on-field work is focused on things like cutting and ladder drills.

PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

GRIND FROM PAGE B1

South Carolina State.

When you ask Manning head coach Reggie Kennedy why Jontavious was able to jump into the scene a year ago, his answer was simple.

"It's his work ethic that impresses me more than anything," Reggie said. "He puts in extra time in the weight room; he gets to the weight room early, he'll leave late. Same with practice. Last year was his first year playing running back for us, and he just got better and better each week. We had a lot of people keying in on Jalynn Coard back there, and he was a great compliment."

It helps to have a workout partner under the same roof, too. Jontavious and his twin brother, Dontavious, have been inseparable since birth. After years of playing together in the backyard, they got to high school and committed their time to success on and off the field.

"(Don) supports him 1,000%," their mother, Cornelia Wheeler, said. "And when he was out, he was telling Don what to do on the field. Don would go out on that field on Friday and do what he told him to do. Don was right there with him, saying, 'Alright twin, you'll be back 100%, we'll be back together.' He's been amping him up."

The two Canty brothers line up together on defense, locking down the middle of the field at linebacker. Reggie appreciates having a hive mind in his linebacking core.

"It's kinda like having two Jons or two Dons out there, to be honest," Reggie said. "They're so much a like and both young men are real coachable, and they're really good kids away from the field. They're definitely twins, because their work ethic and everything is identical. It's good to have that."

EXPECTATIONS GROWING

Jontavious played an important role on last year's run to the lower state championship, but he was far from the Monarchs' only star. Players like Jeffery Ceasar, Coard and JaRae Mitchell were central leaders for Manning. They were also a part of a massive senior class. After losing 27 seniors from last year's squad, Jon knew he had to step up.

"There was a lot on my shoulders. I knew I had to become a leader on this team," he said. "Watching the older guys graduate, I knew I had to step up."

So, Jon and the Monarchs went to work. The summer was spent perfecting their craft, especially with new players stepping into new roles across the offense and defense.

"We were hyped. All summer, we were working, working, working; every day, all day," Jon said. "We were so excited, but we knew we had some younger people coming up, so we had to get them right so they can play."

INJURY STRIKES

Manning opened their preseason

scrimmages against Orangeburg-Wilkinson on Aug. 7. Jon was playing on both sides of the ball, just like he did all fall. Somewhat early in the festivities, the Monarchs lined up in shotgun, with Jon standing next to Manning's new starting quarterback, Lovell Stevenson. Jon took a handoff and tried to bounce a run to the outside when his head was yanked down by a defender. His body twisted and he landed hard.

"I tried to get back up and play it off, but when I tried to get back up, I couldn't move," Jon said.

Reggie was on the opposite sideline and thought his senior back simply twisted his ankle. When he made his way across the field, he realized things were more serious.

"At first, I thought it was just a turned ankle until I got over there," Reggie said. "The way he was screaming, I knew it was a serious injury."

Cornelia is a football mom through and through, but this was the one scrimmage she decided not to attend. She was getting her nails done when she got a call from the school, though she didn't know exactly what was going on.

"As soon as I decide not to go, look what happened," she quipped. "When I got the call, they said, 'Come down to the school, something happened with Jon.' Somebody else called me, too, and I didn't let my nails dry or nothing. I was off. People kept calling me, and I knew it was something serious."

Reggie was heartbroken for his senior. While they didn't know the severity of the injury at the time, he knew that Jon was going to miss some precious time.

"A kid like him who puts in all that hard work, you hate to see it go to waste in your first preseason scrimmage," Reggie said. "We were about to take him out. I started second-guessing myself, but that's part of the game."

Luckily, Jontavious was surrounded by people who were ready to help.

"Jon has a great support system in his place with his mom, brother and family, along with us with the coaching staff and the team. Jon is well-loved," Reggie said. "When he came back to school after the injury, he was really positive. The type of kid Jon is, he's going to do the extra to get back and he's done that. He's worked his butt off to get back."

Jon felt the love from his brother throughout the process.

"We talk about everything, push (each other) every day. When I got hurt, I looked in his eyes and he was hurting. I knew I was something special to him, and I knew he was missing me playing right beside him on the football field."

WATCHING FROM THE SIDELINE

With a dislocated hip, Jontavious knew he was going to miss at least the first four games, completely erasing the non-region schedule from his calendar. Making matters worse, Manning struggled out of the gate.



Cornelia Wheeler is flanked by her sons, Dontavious, left, and Jontavious Canty after a football game last season.

Crestwood handing the Monarchs a 48-14 loss to open the season before Manning traveled to county rival Scott's Branch in Week 2 and suffered a 40-38 loss, breaking a decades-long streak of dominance against the Eagles. All Jon could do was watch.

"I was hurting because I (wanted) to be out there with my team and I knew if I was out there, it would be a whole different ball game," Jontavious said. "That night (of the injury), I was just laying in my bed thinking, 'Why did this happen to me?' I knew my first game, I would be missed. We lost that first game to Crestwood and that really hurt me. As we keep going and I get back to practice, I realized football is just family to me."

Cornelia's emotions swirled for the first month of the season. She had to balance being proud of Dontavious, while trying to keep Jon's frustrations at bay.

"I told him, 'Do not blame yourself; God doesn't make mistakes. God gave you this because He knows what He has in store for you. The only crying I want to see is happy tears, not because you lost a game. God is going to make sure you do your thing,'" Cornelia said. "Seeing him on that sideline had me down because my star is out of the game. But I couldn't be down because I had another one playing too."

If there was one blessing for Manning during the first month of the season, it was the layout of their schedule. Not only was the first month entirely non-region games, but their bye week came last week and provided Jontavious with his first chance to formally practice. While Jon was on the sideline, the Monarchs had a chance to try out a few different players in the backfield and at linebacker, which Reggie hopes can pay off down the line.

"Losing your leading tackler on defense and your leading rusher on offense, it was tough. He's hard to replace," Reggie said. "We were trying to do it by committee at linebacker and running back. It gave some guys some opportunities to get some experience and gives us an opportunity to see some guys who can fill in. That's the benefit of non-region play."

While Jon was watching from the sideline, Reggie saw a senior leader continuing to make his teammates better.

"He was right there cheering our guys on," Reggie said. "I encouraged him to get mental reps every day and stay with his position groups every day. I told him he needs to lead from the sideline, and he did a great job of doing that. He told things he learned playing running back and linebacker last year. He was kind of our off the field coach for us."

BACK ON THE FIELD

After weeks of watching, Jontavious was able to take part in practices last week. He wasn't back 100%, but the simple act of putting his helmet on lifted his spirits, especially with Dontavious by his side.

"It feels good being back in my helmet. I still have to work, work, work," Jon said. "It feels good being beside a person that looks just like me, plays just like me."

Jontavious hopes to be back on the field against East Clarendon on Friday night, though the decision on his workload hasn't been finalized. Even if he only plays one snap, there will be one fan in the crowd eager to see No. 0 back on the field.

"I am ready," Cornelia said excitedly. "I'm ready to see my babies together on that field together. I am one proud and excited mom to have to kids on the field doing their thing."

ACC moving to 9-game football schedule starting next year, aligning with rest of Power Four peers

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE — The Atlantic Coast Conference is moving to a nine-game league schedule for football while having teams play at least 10 games against power-conference opponents, though there will be variables due to the league's odd number of football-playing member schools.

Commissioner Jim Phillips announced the decision in a statement Monday, saying athletic directors had “overwhelmingly supported” the move after “incredibly intentional” discussions about scheduling options.

Going from an eight- to a nine-game model would align the ACC with its power-conference peers in the Big 12, Big Ten and Southeastern conferences after unbalanced scheduling between the conferences had been a topic of discussion, and disagreement, when it came to access for the College Football Playoff.

The ACC would join the SEC — which announced its move from eight to nine last month — as the only leagues play-



PHILLIPS

ing 10 games against Power Four opponents as a baseline in the so-called “9+1 model.”

Still, the ACC being the only power conference with an odd number of football-playing members (17) means there are wrinkles.

A person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press that most league teams will transition to the nine-game slate next year, though multiple teams will play eight league games and two against Power Four opponents — an “8+2 model” — to accommodate nonconference games already on the books.

By 2027, the person said, 16 of the 17 teams will play a “9+1 schedule,” while one team will have to play an “8+2” slate.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the league hasn't publicized specifics of the model. Phillips said the league will present the plan to its faculty athletic representatives for formal adoption.

“There will be additional discussions and more details to be determined, but Monday's decision showcases the commitment and leadership of our ADs in balancing what is best for strengthening the conference and for their respective

programs,” Phillips said in his statement.

The ACC had used an eight-game football schedule since Florida State's arrival for the 1992 season, the outlier being a 10-game schedule in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. That included Notre Dame giving up its cherished independent status for one year and playing a full ACC schedule, losing to Clemson in the league championship game.

The Fighting Irish, a member of all other league sports, typically play four to six football games per year against ACC schools and those would fit into the nonconference column in the “9+1” or “8+2” scheduling models.

Phillips had discussed the possibility of going to a nine-game schedule publicly in July during the ACC's preseason football media days, noting it had been discussed internally multiple times. He said then that he “liked where our league is” and that playing marquee nonconference matchups had been good for the league, but added: “We'll adjust if we have to.”

The change could theoretically get trickier now with one less spot available for teams to schedule outside of league play, though ensuring 10 games against power-conference opponents — either

inside or outside the ACC schedule — would add another selling point when it came to teams' CFP résumés.

Some teams had already been hitting that 10-game target through traditional means, such as Clemson playing non-conference games against now-No. 4 LSU to open the year and its annual in-state rivalry game with South Carolina out of the SEC to cap the regular season.

Others had taken some creative routes to 10, such as N.C. State scheduling a nonconference game against longtime ACC member Virginia this month to go with next month's trip to Notre Dame as part of the league's scheduling partnership with the Irish.

Playing nine league games and 10 against power-conference teams could potentially lead to a financial boost with the league's revenue-distribution model being revised to factor TV viewership ratings into the payouts. That change offers the league's biggest brands in football and men's basketball to make more money with higher ratings against top-tier opponents, coming as the league has spent years battling a revenue gap behind the Big Ten and SEC.

No. 23 Missouri's ground game, stout defense secure 29-20 win over South Carolina

BY DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Ahmad Hardy bounced his way for 138 yards rushing and a touchdown, Beau Pribula led No. 23 Missouri downfield for a go-ahead score in the fourth quarter and the Tigers beat South Carolina 29-20 on Saturday night.

Pribula threw for 171 yards with a touchdown pass, and Jamal Roberts had a nifty touchdown jaunt of his own with 9:32 left to give the Tigers (4-0, 1-0 SEC) the lead, ultimately helping them to their 14th consecutive home win.

“That was a heck of a battle,” Missouri coach Eli Drinkwitz said. “You could tell they were ticked off about last week's performance and came in and fought. Really proud of our team for not really flinching. ... We just kept hammering away.”

LaNorris Sellers had 302 yards passing and two touchdowns for the Gamecocks (2-2, 0-2), but their star quarterback missed a couple of open receivers in the fourth quarter when the game was on the line. South Carolina twice went three-and-out down the stretch, giving the powerful Missouri ground



ASSOCIATED PRESS

South Carolina quarterback LaNorris Sellers (16) runs past Missouri's Nicholas Rodriguez, right, on Saturday, Sept. 20, 2025, in Columbia, Missouri.

game the chance to close out the win.

The Tigers finished with 285 yards rushing. South Carolina had minus-9 on the ground.

“When you're in the red zone like we were and go backwards, it's going to be hard to win,” South Carolina coach Shane Beamer said. “When you have opportunities to make plays and we don't get it done, it's going to be hard to win. And having said all that, we had the lead going into the fourth quarter and couldn't finish.”

Missouri rolled into the game

amid a perfect start that included a win over rival Kansas, while the Gamecocks limped into town following a lopsided loss to Vanderbilt in which Sellers missed the second half after a hard blow to the head.

There were questions about whether he would play early in the week. By game time, Sellers was off the injury report entirely.

South Carolina needed his magic. The Tigers struck first with a 99-yard drive — their third full-field march of the season — before Sellers an-

swered with a 49-yard touchdown throw to Vandrevius Jacobs to give the Gamecocks a 7-6 lead.

Sellers hit Brian Rowe Jr. with his second touchdown throw later in the half, and South Carolina led 14-12 at the break.

Hardy carried the Tigers in the second half, bouncing off defenders like a pinball. The highlight may have been his TD run, when it looked as if he was stood up at the line of scrimmage, spun off the pile and scored to give Missouri an 18-16 lead.

“I didn't even know I was off the ground until I started spinning and my legs started kicking,” Hardy said. “I just kept running.”

It always felt as if the game was destined to be decided in the fourth quarter, though, just like last November, when Sellers capped a 353-yard, five-touchdown performance by rallying the Gamecocks for a 34-30 win in the Palmetto State.

This time, South Carolina had regained the lead when Pribula led the Tigers downfield in the fourth quarter. And after Hardy had checked out for a breather, Roberts did his best impersonation of him,

bouncing off tackles on a 16-yard sprint to the pylon for a touchdown; Pribula added the 2-point conversion to give Missouri a 26-20 lead with 9:36 to go.

Then it was the Tigers defense that stepped up, forcing South Carolina into a pair of three-and-outs before Robert Meyer kicked a clinching 40-yard field goal with 1:34 left on the clock.

“We don't look down the road. We don't look behind us. It's one week at a time,” Pribula said. “We did a good job of focusing on this week, focusing on them. We'll enjoy this tonight and then focus on UMass.”

THE TAKEAWAY

South Carolina was penalized 12 times for 88 yards. One of them was a 15-yarder as the Tigers were trying to run out the clock.

Missouri's defense spent the game in the South Carolina backfield, piling up eight tackles-for-loss. That included five sacks.

UP NEXT

South Carolina plays Kentucky next Saturday.

Missouri plays UMass the same day.

Clemson's Swinney says Tigers must reset goals following 1-3 start to the season

BY STEVE REED
Associated Press

CLEMSON — Still stinging from a devastating 34-21 home loss to Syracuse that dropped his team to 1-3 on the season, Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said it's time to reset season goals heading into the bye week. He added that he doesn't anticipate making a change at quarterback or firing any of his coaching staff.

“We're not going to win the national championship, but that doesn't mean we can't win the season,” a subdued Swinney said Monday night on a Zoom call.

The Tigers began the season ranked No. 4 in the nation, were selected as the overwhelming favorite to win another Atlantic Coast Conference championship and one of the favorites to win a fourth national championship. The Tigers were returning the most experienced team in the country, which included first-team preseason Associated Press All-American quarterback Cade Klubnik.

But Klubnik and the rest of the Tigers have been awful.

After losses to LSU, Georgia Tech and Syracuse, the Tigers find themselves 0-2 in league play and all but out of the national championship picture. The Tigers were 17 1/2-point home favorites against the Orange, but were completely outplayed and trailed most of the game by double digits.

Television cameras showed Swinney fighting back tears as he stood with his players on the field at Memorial Stadium on Saturday as the Clemson band played the school's alma mater.

“Disappointed, painful, hurt,” Swinney said in his postgame media session Saturday. “I'm human. I'm not a cyborg. This is my life. I've been here 23 years. I love this place. I give this place the best I've got every single day.”

Swinney said Monday that the Tigers will spend the week reevaluating the issues that have led to slow starts in all four games, including in their lone victory over Troy. Klubnik's starting job is safe for now, although Swinney emphasized that he and other players have to be better.

This is the first time Clemson has started 1-3 under its star coach and only a few thousand fans stuck around to watch the final few minutes of the Syracuse game.

“This is a tough moment for us, but it will make us better,” Swinney said. “... We will rally. The open date is coming at a really good time for us.”

Swinney, who has led Clemson to eight of the past 10 ACC championships and is 181-50 in 18 seasons, was much more subdued than a week ago when he lashed out during a 14-minute rant that including talk of his future as Clemson's coach.

“If Clemson's tired of winning, they can send me on my way,” he said after his team's road loss to Georgia Tech. “I'll go somewhere else and coach. I ain't going to the beach. Hell, I'm 55. I got a long way to go.”

The Tigers next game is Oct. 4 against North Carolina, another team that has failed to live up to expectations.

The Swinney-Bill Belichick contest was billed as one of the biggest on the college slate this season, but the game was recently listed in the noon Eastern time slot — something few could have imagined a few months ago — a reflection of each team's struggles.

The ACC normally saves its better games for prime time programming.

Swinney said he hadn't heard about Syracuse being fined \$25,000 and publicly reprimanded for feigning injuries in the win over Clemson. He refused to comment on the news, saying that is something that is up to the officials.

Pearl, winningest men's basketball coach in Auburn history, announces retirement

AUBURN, Ala. (AP) — Auburn coach Bruce Pearl announced his retirement Monday less than six months after finishing the Tigers' best season in program history with another trip to the Final Four.

Pearl's 38-year-old son Steven Pearl, who has been on his father's coaching staff for all 11 seasons at Auburn, will take over as coach.

“I just feel when I can't give 100% it's time to pass the torch,” Bruce Pearl said in a 14-minute video posted on social media.

Pearl, 65, is the school's winningest men's coach and took the Tigers to their only two Final Four appearances. He will move into an ambassador role as an assistant to Auburn's athletic director, and isn't going into politics after rumors had circulated about a potential senate run.

“Many of you know that I thought and prayed about maybe running for United States Senate, maybe to be the next great senator from the state of Alabama,” said Pearl, who was a college head coach for over 30 seasons with four schools. “That would have required leaving Auburn, and instead the university has given me the opportunity to stay here and be Auburn's senator. I need to focus now

on being a great husband, being a great father, being the best grandfather I possibly can be.”

Pearl advanced the Tigers to their first Final Four in 2019, defeating Kansas, North Carolina and Kentucky in successive games. They lost to eventual-champion Virginia by one point. Last season, led by All-American Johni Broome, the Tigers earned the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Tournament and had a school-record 32 wins before losing to Southeastern Conference rival Florida in the national semifinal.

SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey credited Pearl with helping to elevate the competitive level and popularity of men's basketball in the league with his “dynamic leadership and relentless energy.”

“While his on-court achievements are well documented, it is his genuine connection with fans, media and the broader community that truly distinguishes his impact,” Sankey said.

Pearl and Rick Pitino, who ushered in a quick turnaround at St. John's, last season shared The Associated Press men's college basketball coach of the year award. It was the first tie in the 58-year history of the award.

Falcons place too much pressure on Penix by failing to rely on Robinson in runaway loss at Carolina

BY CHARLES ODUM
Associated Press

ATLANTA — Raheem Morris usually offers generous doses of words and smiles in his sessions with reporters.

The second-year Atlanta Falcons coach was not in a smiling mode following Sunday’s 30-0 loss at Carolina. He offered only one word — a terse “No” — when asked if he was opening the quarterback position for competition this week.

Morris may not have liked the question, which became relevant after Michael Penix Jr. was removed from the game in the fourth quarter and replaced by former starter Kirk Cousins. The coach definitely did not like the two interceptions thrown by Penix, including one returned for a touchdown, which contributed to the blowout loss.

Morris said Penix, the 2024 first-round pick in his first full season as Atlanta’s starter, didn’t deserve full blame for the Falcons’ loss.

“We did not play well on any phase and he did not play well as well,” Morris said. “We didn’t play well around him and we’ve got to play better across the board.”

Morris took action on Monday by firing wide receivers coach Ike Hilliard. Passing game coordinator T.J. Yates will now coach the receivers.

The staff changes came after Morris, when asked about the slow start by wide receiver Darnell Mooney, said: “We’ve got to get to the point that we’ve got to go out there and play the right way. But, no, he’s not playing, we’re not playing the brand of football we need to play with Mooney, and we’re capable of so much more, without a doubt.”

The Falcons (1-2) should rely on their strength, the running game led by Bijan Robinson. Three turnovers forced the offense to lose its balance and rely on Penix to navigate a play-from-behind plan, which is not suited to his short passing game.

For the second time in three weeks, the Falcons lost when too much of the offensive burden was placed on Penix. The loss left Atlanta 0-2 in the NFC South while providing another reminder the passing game should be a complement to Robinson and Tyler Allgeier.

Penix completed 18 of 36 passes for 172 yards with the two interceptions. The Falcons trailed 27-0 when Cousins entered the game.

Morris said his decision to take Penix out was tied to him also bringing in backups at running back and



Atlanta Falcons running back Bijan Robinson runs against the Carolina Panthers on Sunday, Sept. 21, 2025, in Charlotte.

from carving a path for Bijan Robinson to match his 22 carries for 143 yards in Atlanta’s 22-6 win at Minnesota on Sept. 14.

Bijan Robinson had 12 and 13 carries in Atlanta’s two losses. The obvious challenge is to find a way to utilize Robinson as the clear strength of Atlanta’s offense despite defenses gearing their game plans to stop the run and make the Falcons win with Penix.

The Falcons must not rely on defensive schemes to set the pace for how they run their offense. Instead of the standard “take what they give us” philosophy, the Falcons should force defenses to take what they give them.

Robinson is the strength of the Falcons’ offense. If they can’t rely on that strength, their chances of success are diminished. If Robinson is to held to fewer than 15 carries, it seems more likely the Falcons’ run of seven straight losing seasons will be extended.

WHAT NEEDS HELP

The Falcons were shut out for the first time since a 25-0 loss to the New England Patriots on Nov. 18, 2021.

Penix was plagued by a lack of accuracy and an admitted inability to recognize tight coverages. On his pick-6, Penix looked right, then back left, and had ample time to identify Carolina’s Chau Smith-Wade but still forced an ill-advised sidearm throw intended for Robinson. Smith-Wade’s 11-yard interception return gave the Panthers a 17-0 lead.

“I didn’t see him,” Penix said of Smith-Wade. “Good play.”

STOCK UP

Linebacker Kaden Ellis tied for the team lead with nine tackles and had the team’s only sack. Ellis also had three tackles for loss in one of the few bright spots for a defense too often placed in bad situations by three turnovers.

Panthers’ victory over Falcons a needed one for a struggling franchise going forward

BY STEVE REED
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE — It wasn't necessarily a surprise that the Carolina Panthers beat the Atlanta Falcons for their first win of the season on Sunday.

The manner in which they did it, however, was rather stunning.

The Panthers completely dominated their NFC South rivals in every facet of the game, winning 30-0 in what was clearly the most impressive win of the Dave Canales era.

Carolina entered as a 5 1/2-point home underdog, but finally was on the right side of the turnover battle (plus-2).

The offense didn't do a lot and was actually outgained by the Falcons, but it scored on Bryce Young's touchdown run on the opening possession and that set the tone for the game. Carolina's defense repeatedly stymied Michael Penix Jr., forcing him into bad decisions while intercepting the second-year QB twice, one of which was returned for an 11-yard touchdown by Chau Smith-Wade. And, aside from one fumbled punt, Carolina's special teams outplayed Atlanta with difficult-to-handle knuckleball kickoffs while making three field goals against Atlanta's two misses, a 15-point swing.

“Collectively as a group we’ve been pushing on and really striving for playing good football,” said Canales, who received a game ball from his players.

The victory couldn't come at a better time for the Panthers.

Carolina had dropped its first two games on the road to start 0-2 for the third straight season under quarterback Young and the morale was getting low. A loss at home would have seriously impeded the team's chances of making the playoffs and likely kept fans away in droves.

Instead, the playoff-starved crowd got what it wanted — a reason to believe.

Carolina hasn't been to the postseason since 2017, the year before owner David Tepper purchased the team so the cynicism is high outside of the organization and confidence was in need of a shot in the arm inside the walls of Bank of America Stadium.

Sunday may have just given it to the Panthers.

Now the next challenge will be carrying that momentum forward and proving that Week 3 was no fluke.

WHAT'S WORKING

It's becoming overwhelmingly apparent the Panthers have found themselves a kicker in rookie Ryan Fitzger-

ald just months after parting ways with Eddie Pineiro, the third-most accurate kicker in NFL history.

Not only has the former Florida State kicker been perfect on field goals and extra points, but Fitzgerald appears to have mastered the art of kicking a knuckleball on kickoffs, which proved extremely difficult for the Falcons to handle.

On several occasions Falcons returners failed to corral the football on the first attempt, allowing the Panthers coverage team time to get downfield.

Atlanta's average starting field position following Carolina's seven kickoffs was its 19. Twice the Falcons started at their 10.

"Great job by those guys," Falcons coach Raheem Morris said of the Panthers special teams. "Their knuckleball kick we knew about, prepared for and didn't handle that situation well at all. And they took advantage of it all day."

WHAT NEEDS HELP

The Panthers still need to get better against the run. They allowed the Falcons to run for 132 yards, but all things considered they did well considering they played without defensive tackle Turk Wharton and outside linebacker Pat Jones, two of the team's top free agent acquisitions. Bijan Robinson is difficult to handle, but the Panthers kept him out of the end zone and pitched its first shutout since Nov. 22, 2020.

STOCK UP

CB Jaycee Horn. The Panthers \$100 million cornerback is off a great start and opposing teams are taking notice, purposely avoiding throwing in his direction. When they do, they aren't having much luck. The Panthers mainly kept Horn on the same side of the field, not specifically matching him up with Falcons star Drake London. The biggest thing moving forward for Horn will be staying healthy, which he has struggled to do during his career.

STOCK DOWN

RB/PR Trevor Etienne fumbled an easy punt in the first quarter and the Falcons recovered at Carolina 33. But the Panthers defense bailed out the rookie, forcing a three-and-out and a missed field goal. But it's a mistake that Etienne cannot make moving forward if he hopes to retain a spot on a active roster. David Moore replaced Etienne on the Falcons next punt and made a fair catch.

OBITUARIES

JESSE JEROME MCQUILLER

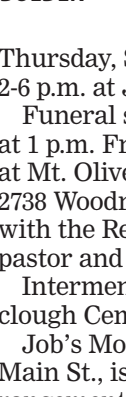
Jesse Jerome McQuiller, 65, son of the late James H. McQuiller and Scottie Ford McQuiller, was born on May 25, 1960, in Brooklyn, New York. He departed this life on Friday, Sept. 19, 2025, in Sumter.

Family will receive friends at the home of his sister, 630 Curlew Circle, Sumter.

Job’s Mortuary Inc., 312 S. Main St., Sumter, is in charge of arrangements.

OLLIE KNOX BOLDEN

Ollie Knox Bolden, 67, wife of Terry Bolden Sr. and daughter of the late James B. Simmons Sr. and Carolyn Knox, was born April 6, 1958, in Sumter. She departed this life on Saturday, Sept. 20, 2025, at her residence.



Public viewing will be held on Thursday, Sept. 25, 2025, from 2-6 p.m. at Job’s Mortuary Inc.

Funeral service will be held at 1 p.m. Friday, Sept. 26, 2025, at Mt. Olive AME Church, 2738 Woodrow Road, Sumter, with the Rev. Dr. R.L. Brown, pastor and eulogist.

Interment will follow in Colclough Cemetery, Sumter.

Job’s Mortuary Inc., 312 S. Main St., is in charge of arrangements.

Online memorials may be sent to the family at jobsmortuaryinc@gmail.com or visit us on the web at www.jobsmortuary.net.

MARY IDA ROBINSON

Mary Ida Robinson, 81, daughter of the late Simon Robinson and Sarah Ragin Robinson, was born on Feb.

29, 1944, in Clarendon County. She departed this life on Friday, Sept. 19, 2025, at McLeod Regional Medical Center of the Pee Dee, Florence.

Family will receive friends at the home, 3311 Hwy 260, Manning, from 2-5 p.m. daily.

Job’s Mortuary Inc., 312 S. Main St., Sumter, is in charge of arrangements.

CALVIN COOLIDGE SHARPE JR.

Calvin Coolidge "BOCAT" Sharpe Jr., husband of JoAnn Burgess Sharpe and son of the late Calvin Coolidge Sharpe Sr. and Hattie Williams Sharpe, was born on Sept. 28, 1952, in Sumter. He departed this life on Wednesday, Sept. 17, 2025, at Prisma Health Tuomey Hospital, Sumter.

Family will receive friends at 3250 Lauderdale Lane, Sumter, daily from 3-9 p.m.

Job’s Mortuary Inc., 312 S. Main St., Sumter, is in charge of arrangements.

DAVID ALAN BROWN

David Alan Brown passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on Wednesday, Sept. 17, 2025, at the age of 42.

He was born on March 30, 1983, in West Columbia. He was the second child and oldest son of Kenneth Brown and Terry Hutcheon née Rowell.

He grew up in Sumter and was an excellent guitarist who could play by ear. He enjoyed writing songs, teaching guitar lessons and sharing music with everyone in his life. He played in several bands and loved to sing. He was a kind and loving person with a great sense of humor.

He is preceded in death by

his father, Kenneth Neil Brown.

He is survived by his three children, Gage (16), Gracelyn (15) and Emma (10); his mother, Terry (Gordon) Hutcheon; and his siblings, Franky Brown-Gubler (Tyrone Gubler), Robert (Janet) Brown and Katharine (Michael) Stinton.

Visitation will be held Thursday, Sept. 25, 2025, from 1 to 2 p.m., immediately followed by a funeral service at 2 p.m. in the Elmore-Canon-Stephens Funeral Home chapel located at 515 Miller Road, Sumter.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (N.A.M.I.) or planting a tree in David's honor.

Elmore-Cannon-Stephens Funeral Home and Crematorium of Sumter is in charge of the arrangements.

WILLIE "BILL" ELLIOTT JR.

Willie “Bill” Elliott Jr., 81, widower of Barbara Jean Pugh Elliott and son of the late Willie Elliott Sr. and Eva Mae Dinkins Elliott, was born on Aug. 4, 1944, in Sumter. He departed this life on Monday, Sept. 15, 2025, at Sumter East Health and Rehabilitation Center, Sumter.

Public viewing will be held on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2025, from 2-6 p.m. at Job’s Mortuary Inc.

Graveside services will be held at noon Thursday, Sept. 25, 2025, at Fort Jackson National Cemetery, 4170 Percival Road, Columbia, with the Rev. Dr. Ralph W. Canty Sr. officiating.

Job’s Mortuary Inc., 312 S. Main St., is in charge of arrangements.

Online memorials may be sent to the family at jobsmortuaryinc@gmail.com or visit us on the web at www.jobsmortuary.net.

RODNEY ALLEN ADGER

Rodney Allen Adger, 49, husband of Doneka Vann Adger and son of Juanita McCants Adger and the late John Earl Adger, was born on May 24, 1976, in Sumter. He departed this life on Sunday, Sept. 21, 2025, at Prisma Health Richland Hospital, Columbia.

Family will receive friends at 955 Edgar Drive, Sumter, beginning at 2 p.m. daily.

Job’s Mortuary Inc., 312 S. Main St., is in charge of arrangements.

ALBERT JACOBS

Albert Jacobs, 65, son of the late Charlie Jacobs and Catherine Sinkler Jacobs, was born on Dec. 23, 1959, in Sumter. He departed this life on Sunday, Sept. 21, 2025, at Oak Hollow of Sumter Rehabilitation Center.

Public viewing will be held on Thursday, Sept. 25, 2025, from 2-6 p.m. at Job’s Mortuary Inc.

Funeral services will be held at 11 a.m. Friday, Sept. 26, 2025, at Salem Chapel & Heritage Center, 101 S. Salem Ave., Sumter, with Apostle Dorothy Maple officiating.

Interment will follow in Community Church of Praise Cemetery, Sumter.

Family will receive friends at the home of his daughter, 3295 Mitchum Lane, Sumter, daily from 1-8 p.m.

Job’s Mortuary Inc., 312 S. Main St., is in charge of arrangements.

Online memorials may be sent to the family at jobsmortuaryinc@gmail.com or visit us on the web at www.jobsmortuary.net.

LEONARD SCOTT

Leonard Scott, the youngest of five children of the late Helen Capers and the Rev. Brooks Sanders Scott, was born on Aug. 7, 1950, in Allendale. At an early age, he accepted Christ as his Savior and joined Virgin Mary Baptist Church in Allendale.

Later in life, he recommitted his walk with the Lord and became a devoted member of Grant Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Rembert.

He graduated from Allendale-Fairfax High School and went on to earn a B.A. in Political Science from Voorhees University in Denmark, South Carolina.

On Thursday, Sept. 18, 2025, with family members by his side, Leonard peacefully entered eternal rest.

He leaves to cherish his memory, his devoted wife, family members and friends.

Funeral services were held at noon Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2025, at Grant Hill Missionary Baptist Church, 5401 Black River Road, Rembert, with the Rev. Clifton N. Witherspoon, pastor.

Burial followed in the Grant Hill Missionary Baptist Church Cemetery.

Services directed by the management and staff of Williams Funeral Home Inc., 821N. Main St., Sumter. Online memorial messages may be sent to the family at williamsfuneralhome@sc.rr.com. Visit us on the web at www.WilliamsFuneralHomeInc.com.

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LEGAL NOTICES

Legal Notice

Harmoni Towers LLC proposes to build a 283-foot self-support communications tower at the approx. vicinity of Camden Highway, Rembert, Sumter County, SC 29128 [Lat.: 34-4-2.5869, Long.: -80-30-34.8467]. Public comments regarding potential effects from this site on historic properties may be submitted within 30 days from the date of this publication to: Trileaf Corp., Hannah Dell, h.dell@trileaf.com, 1775 The Exchange SE, Suite 525, Atlanta, GA 30339, 706-362-1745.

Abandon Vehicle / Boat

To all persons claiming an interest in: 1980 - 11'1" - FIBERGLASS - TWOMAN-NO HULL ID# - NO REG # THADDEUS JONES II will apply to SCDNR for title on watercraft. If you have any claims to the watercraft, contact SCDNR at (803) 734-3699. Upon thirty days after the date of the last advertisement if no claim of interest is made and the watercraft has not been reported stolen, SCDNR shall issue clear title. Case No.: 20250512950340

Summons & Notice

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA, IN THE PROBATE COURT COUNTY OF SUMTER FILE NO. 2025ES43602 SUMMONS IN THE MATTER OF: SEAVIE EASTERLING, a/k/a SEVIA EASTERLING, Decedent

ODESSA ELDER, Petitioner, vs.

JOHN DOE, A FICTITIOUS NAME REPRESENTING ANY UNKNOWN PERSONS IN WHO ARE OR MIGHT CLAIM TO BE HEIRS OF THE DECEDENT, INCLUDING ANY UNKNOWN PERSONS IN THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ANY MINORS, ANY PERSONS NON COMPOS MENTIS, AND ANY PERSONS UNDER A DISABILITY OF ANY KIND OR NATURE, Respondents.

TO THE RESPONDENTS ABOVE-NAMED: YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and required to answer the petition herein, a copy of which is herewith served upon you, and to serve a copy of your answer to this petition upon the subscriber, at the address shown below, within thirty (30) days after service hereof, exclusive of the day of such service, and if you fail to answer the petition, judgment by default will be rendered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.

TO MINOR(S) OVER FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE AND/OR MINOR(S) UNDER FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE AND THE PERSON WITH WHOM THE MINOR(S) RESIDES, AND/OR PERSONS UNDER SOME LEGAL DISABILITY: YOU ARE FURTHER SUMMONED AND NOTIFIED that Plaintiff has made application and the Probate Court has appointed James A. Stoddard, Esquire, of 314-A N Magnolia Street, Sumter, SC 29150 guardian ad litem in this matter.

YOUNG & WARR, LLC

By: Kenneth R. Young, Jr.
South Carolina Bar No. 5741
Attorney for the Plaintiff
23 West Calhoun Street
Sumter, South Carolina 29150
(803) 773-4371 (telephone)
(803) 773-4374 (facsimile)
Sumter, South Carolina
July 18, 2025

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF SUMTER IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS C/A No.: 2025-CP-43-01353 NewRez LLC d/b/a Shellpoint Mortgage Servicing, Plaintiff, vs Soleil M. Strong, Defendant(s). SUMMONS AND NOTICES (Non-Jury) FORECLOSURE OF REAL ESTATE MORTGAGE TO THE DEFENDANT(S) ABOVE NAMED: YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and required to appear and defend by answering the Complaint in this action, a copy of which is hereby served upon you, and to serve a copy of your Answer on the subscribers at their offices at 339 Heyward Street, 2nd Floor, Columbia, SC 29201, within thirty (30) days after the service hereof, exclusive of the day of such service; except that the United States of America, if named, shall have sixty (60) days to answer after the service hereof, exclusive of the day of such service; and if you fail to do so, judgment by default will be rendered against you for the relief demanded in the Complaint. YOU WILL ALSO TAKE NOTICE that Plaintiff will move for an Order of Reference or the Court may issue a general Order of Reference of this action to a Master-in-Equity/Special Referee, pursuant to Rule 53 of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure. TO MINOR(S) OVER FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE, AND/OR TO MINOR(S) UNDER FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE AND THE PERSON WITH WHOM THE MINOR(S) RESIDES, AND/OR TO PERSONS UNDER SOME LEGAL DISABILITY: YOU ARE FURTHER SUMMONED AND NOTIFIED to apply for the appointment of a guardian ad litem within thirty (30) days after the service of this Summons and Notice upon you. If you fail to do so, application for such appointment will be made by Attorney for the Plaintiff. NOTICE OF FILING OF COMPLAINT TO THE DEFENDANTS ABOVE NAMED: YOU WILL PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the original Complaint, Lis Pendens, and Certificate of Exemption from ADR in the above entitled action was filed in the Office of the Clerk of Court for Sumter County on July 30, 2025. J. Martin Page, Esq. (SC Bar: 100200) Morgan Ames, Esq. (SC Bar: 106058) Bell Carrington Price & Gregg, LLC 339 Heyward Street, 2nd Floor Columbia, SC 29201 Phone (803) 509-5078 BCP No.: 25-43751 7211

Summons & Notice

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA, IN THE PROBATE COURT COUNTY OF SUMTER FILE NO. 2025ES43600 SUMMONS IN THE MATTER OF: JOE EASTERLING, a/k/a JOSEPH LEE EASTERLING, Decedent

ODESSA ELDER, Petitioner, vs.

JOHN DOE, A FICTITIOUS NAME REPRESENTING ANY UNKNOWN PERSONS IN WHO ARE OR MIGHT CLAIM TO BE HEIRS OF THE DECEDENT, INCLUDING ANY UNKNOWN PERSONS IN THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ANY MINORS, ANY PERSONS NON COMPOS MENTIS, AND ANY PERSONS UNDER A DISABILITY OF ANY KIND OR NATURE, Respondents.

TO THE RESPONDENTS ABOVE-NAMED: YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and required to answer the petition herein, a copy of which is herewith served upon you, and to serve a copy of your answer to this petition upon the subscriber, at the address shown below, within thirty (30) days after service hereof, exclusive of the day of such service, and if you fail to answer the petition, judgment by default will be rendered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.

TO MINOR(S) OVER FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE AND/OR MINOR(S) UNDER FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE AND THE PERSON WITH WHOM THE MINOR(S) RESIDES, AND/OR PERSONS UNDER SOME LEGAL DISABILITY: YOU ARE FURTHER SUMMONED AND NOTIFIED that Plaintiff has made application and the Probate Court has appointed James A. Stoddard, Esquire, of 314-A N Magnolia Street, Sumter, SC 29150 guardian ad litem in this matter.

YOUNG & WARR, LLC

By: Kenneth R. Young, Jr.
South Carolina Bar No. 5741
Attorney for the Plaintiff
23 West Calhoun Street
Sumter, South Carolina 29150
(803) 773-4371 (telephone)
(803) 773-4374 (facsimile)
Sumter, South Carolina
July 18, 2025

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF SUMTER IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS FOR THE THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT Case No. 2025CP4301468 NOTICE OF FILING

Skyler Bean, Plaintiff, vs.

Lois G. Kota or her heirs, John Doe, a fictitious name representing all other persons or corporations unknown claiming any right, title, estate, interest in or lien upon the real estate described herein, any unknown adults as a class; and Richard Roe a fictitious name representing any unknown infants or persons under disability or persons in the military designated as a class. Defendants.

NOTICE OF FILING TO THE DEFENDANTS ABOVE NAMED:

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the original Summons and Complaint in the above captioned matter was filed in the office of the Clerk of Court for Sumter County, SC on August 15, 2025. The Complaint is a quiet title action.

STUCKEY FATA & SEGARS, LLC

s/Creighton M. Segars
CREIGHTON M. SEGARS (SC Bar No. 103922)
csegars@sfsllawfirm.com
115 East Church Street
Bishopville, South Carolina
Phone: (803) 484-5409
Fax: (803) 484-9239
ATTORNEYS FOR PLAINTIFF

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF SUMTER IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS CASE NO. 2025-CP-43-01298 SUMMONS (Mortgage Foreclosure) Non-Jury

Brookland Enterprises LLC, Plaintiff, -vs- Angelica Singleton Defendant

TO THE DEFENDANT(S), Angelica Singleton

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and required to answer the Complaint in this action, and to serve a copy of your Answer on the subscribers at their office, 1640 St. Julian Place, Columbia, SC 29204, within (30) days after service hereof, exclusive of the day of such service; and if you fail to answer to Complaint within the time aforesaid, the Plaintiff in this action will apply to the Court for a judgment by default granting the relief demanded in the Complaint.

TO MINOR(S) OVER FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE, AND/OR TO MINOR(S) UNDER FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE AND THE PERSON WITH WHOM THE MINOR(S) RESIDES(S), AND/OR TO PERSON UNDER SOME LEGAL DISABILITY, INCOMPLETEMENTS AND PERSONS CONFINED AND PEERSON IN THE MILITARY: YOU ARE FURTHER SUMMONED AND NOTIFIED to apply for the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem within (30) days after service of this Summons and Notice upon you. If you fail to do so, application for such appointment will be made by the Plaintiff.

NOTICE OF FILING COMPLAINT YOU WILL PLEASE TAKE NOTICE THAT the Summons and Complaint in the above-captioned action were filed on July 18, 2025, in the Office of the Clerk of Court for Sumter, South Carolina.

Crawford & von Keller, LLC
1640 St. Julian Place (29204)
PO Box 4216 (29240)
Columbia, SC
Phone: 803-790-2626
Email: court@crawfordvk.com
Attorneys for Plaintiff

Summons & Notice

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF SUMTER IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS FOR THE THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT Case No. 2025CP4301468 SUMMONS

Skyler Bean, Plaintiff, vs.

Lois G. Kota or her heirs, John Doe, a fictitious name representing all other persons or corporations unknown claiming any right, title, estate, interest in or lien upon the real estate described herein, any unknown adults as a class; and Richard Roe a fictitious name representing any unknown infants or persons under disability or persons in the military designated as a class. Defendants.

TO THE DEFENDANTS ABOVE NAMED:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and required to answer the Complaint herein, a copy of which is herewith served upon you, and to serve a copy of your answer to said Complaint upon the subscriber, at his office at 115 E. Church Street, Bishopville, South Carolina 29010, within thirty (30) days after the service hereof, exclusive of the day of such service, and if you fail to answer the Complaint within the time aforesaid, Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief demanded in the Complaint and judgment by default will be rendered against you for the relief demanded in the Complaint. You will also take notice that E. Thompson Kinney has been appointed to serve as Guardian ad Litem and he may be reached at 17 E. Calhoun Street, Sumter, South Carolina 29150, Telephone Number (803) 676-1040.

STUCKEY FATA & SEGARS, LLC s/Creighton M. Segars
CREIGHTON M. SEGARS (SC Bar No. 103922)
csegars@sfsllawfirm.com
115 East Church Street
Bishopville, South Carolina
Phone: (803) 484-5409
Fax: (803) 484-9239
ATTORNEYS FOR PLAINTIFF

Estate Notice Sumter County

NOTICE TO CREDITORS OF ESTATES

Persons having claim against the following estates are required to deliver or mail their claims to the indicated Personal Representatives, appointed to administer these estates, and to file their claims on Form #371PC with the Probate Court of Sumter County Courthouse, N. Main Street, Sumter, SC, 29150, on or before the date that is eight months after the date of the first publication of this Notice to Creditors, (unless previously barred by operation of Section 62-3-803), or such persons shall be forever barred as to their claims. All claims are required to be presented in written statements, indicating the name and the address of the claimant, the basis of the claim, the amount claimed, the date when the claim will become due, the nature of any uncertainty as to the amount claimed and the date when due, and a description of any security as to the claim.

Estate: Sammie Edward Sanders 2025ES4300613

Personal Representative:

Marla Sanders
5105 Dais Road
Rembert, SC 29128

Jasmine D. Smith
Attorney at Law
PO Box 11449
Columbia, SC 29211

Estate: Carmen Victoria Elmendorf 2025ES4300637

Personal Representative:

Diane Duff Davis
POB 191341
Dallas, TX 75219

Estate: Carol E. Hallgren 2025ES4300612

Personal Representative:

Carrie P. McCloud
3740 Winfield Dr.
Sumter, SC 29153

Estate: John Wesley Walker 2025ES4300636

Personal Representative:

Stephanie Walker
6150 Tarleton Road
Dalzell, SC 29040

Estate: William L. Galloway 2025ES4300601

Personal Representative:

Ronnie W. Galloway
34 Anne Park
Sumter, SC 29150

Estate: Regis Vincent Madine 2025ES4300629

Personal Representative:

Donna Madine
1120 Oriole Circle
Sumter, SC 29150

Estate: Devin J. Wilson 2025ES4300611

Personal Representative:

Silessa Wilson
695 Brewington Road
Sumter, SC 29153

A. Bennett Evers
Attorney at Law
PO Box 11262
Columbia, SC 29211

Estate: Connie Edwards Dais 2025ES4300635

Personal Representative:

Quinshan Gregory Dais
205 Louis Cir.
Rembert, SC 29128

Estate: Beatrice Knox 2025ES4300625

Personal Representative:

Amy Roberta Danner
815 Legare St.
Sumter, SC 29150

Audrey Danner
819 Legare St
Sumter, SC 29150

Estate: Furman Tucker, Sr. 2025ES4300627

Personal Representative:

Deandrea Tucker Scott
125 Cavershan Dr.
Mooreville, NC 28115

Estate Notice Sumter County

NOTICE TO CREDITORS OF ESTATES

Persons having claim against the following estates are required to deliver or mail their claims to the indicated Personal Representatives, appointed to administer these estates, and to file their claims on Form #371PC with the Probate Court of Sumter County Courthouse, N. Main Street, Sumter, SC, 29150, on or before the date that is eight months after the date of the first publication of this Notice to Creditors, (unless previously barred by operation of Section 62-3-803), or such persons shall be forever barred as to their claims. All claims are required to be presented in written statements, indicating the name and the address of the claimant, the basis of the claim, the amount claimed, the date when the claim will become due, the nature of any uncertainty as to the amount claimed and the date when due, and a description of any security as to the claim.

Estate: Hugh McFaddin McLaurin, III 2025ES4300622

Personal Representative:

Hugh M. McLaurin, IV
220 Haynsworth St.
Sumter, SC 29150

Jack W. Erter, Jr.
Attorney at Law
PO Box 580
Sumter, SC 29151

Estate: Jessie Lee Jefferson 2025ES4300230

Personal Representative:

Patricia Ann Jefferson
1305 Narrow Paved Road
Lynchburg, SC 29080

Estate: James Theo Pringels 2025ES4300606

Personal Representative:

Susan Pringels Horton
686 Mattison Ave
Sumter, SC 29154

Estate: Alma Diggs Alston 2025ES4300614

Personal Representative:

Frances E. Waterman
4520 Leslie Dr.
Rembert, SC 29128

Estate: Anne Elizabeth Roper 2025ES4300621

Personal Representative:

Robert L. Benson
256 Doral Dr.
Pawley's Is., SC 29585

Jack W. Erter, Jr.
Attorney at Law
PO Box 580
Sumter, SC 29151

Estate: Harmon Eugene Rogers, Jr. 2025ES4300610

Personal Representative:

Melanie Miller
418 Branch Forest Way
Stockbridge, GA 30281

J. David Weeks
Attorney at Law
PO Box 370
Sumter, SC 29151

Estate: Bobby Gene Ramsey 2025ES4300630

Personal Representative:

Shante Fluker
140 Shellbark Dr.
McDonough, GA 30252

Notice of Sale

MASTER IN EQUITY'S SALE 2025-CP-43-00501 BY VIRTUE of a decree heretofore granted in the case of: Wilmington Savings Fund Society, FSB, not in its individual capacity, but solely as Delaware Trustee of Saluda Grade Alternative Mortgage Trust 2024-FIG5 against Jamie Moten, I, the undersigned Master in Equity for Sumter County, will sell on October 6, 2025 at 12 o'clock noon, at the Sumter County Courthouse, 141 N. Main Street, Sumter, South Carolina to the highest bidder: The following real property is situated in the County of Sumter, State of South Carolina, and is described further as follows: Lot 6 of Block 6 on the subdivision of lots on that certain plat recorded in the office of the RMC of Sumter County in Plat Book Z-6 on Page 2. This being the same property conveyed to Jamie Moten by deed from Jamie Moten and Martha Moore dated May 10, 2016 and recorded on May 11, 2016 in the Office of the Register of Deeds for Sumter County, South Carolina, in Book 1221 at Page 3589. TMS # 227-11-05-006 Property Address: 234 W Williams Street, Sumter, SC 29150 TERMS OF SALE: The successful bidder, other than the plaintiff, will deposit with the Master in Equity, at conclusion of the bidding, five percent (5%) of his bid, in cash or equivalent, as evidence of good faith, same to be applied to purchase price in case of compliance, but to be forfeited and applied first to costs and then to plaintiff's debt in the case of non-compliance. If the Plaintiffs representative is not in attendance at the scheduled time of sale, the sale shall be cancelled and the property sold on some subsequent sales day after due advertisement. Should the last and highest bidder fail or refuse to make the required deposit at the time of bid or comply with the other terms of the bid within twenty (20) days, then the Master in Equity may re-sell the property on the same terms and conditions on some subsequent Sales Day (at risk of the said highest bidder). As a deficiency judgment is being Demanded, the bidding will remain open thirty (30) days after the date of sale. Purchaser to pay for documentary stamps on the deed and recording of the deed. The successful bidder will be required to pay interest on the amount of the balance of the bid from date of sale to date of compliance with the bid at the rate of 13.15% per annum. SAVE AND EXCEPT ANY RELEASES, DEEDS OF RELEASE, OR PRIOR CONVEYANCES OF RECORD. SUBJECT TO ASSESSMENTS, COUNTY TAXES, EXISTING EASEMENTS, EASEMENTS AND RESTRICTIONS OF RECORD, AND OTHER SENIOR ENCUMBRANCES NOTICE: This sale will occur outdoors, on the front steps of the historical courthouse, facing N. Main St. All persons in attendance are subject to having their temperature taken (non-touch or temple touch). Anyone that is visually or audibly symptomatic (fever, cough, shortness of breath, nasal or throat congestion, etc.) may be denied in person participation. Anyone that is otherwise

Notice of Sale

symptomatic (loss of taste or smell, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, etc.) should not attend. Masks or facial coverings are not required but may be worn. Social distancing will be observed with at least six foot distancing between participants. The Honorable Michael M. Jordan Master in Equity for Sumter County Bell Carrington Price & Gregg, LLC 339 Heyward Street, 2nd Floor Columbia, SC 29201 803-509-5078 / File# 25-41353 Attorney for Plaintiff 7188

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcements

Notice of Intention to Establish an Employment Agency

Notice is hereby given that Infinite Care Solutions, LLC, with offices at 5550 Tally Yates Dr, Rembert, SC 29128, intends to apply to the South Carolina Secretary of State for a license to operate as an employment agency under the provisions of Section 41-25-30 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976.

Signed: s/Shavon Mitchell, CEO

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Auctions

PUBLIC AUCTION. Sat., Oct. 4. 110 Mill Street, Brunson, SC 29911. Welding and machine shop has closed! Everything must go! Multiple welders, lathes, shredders, tons of fabrication equipment, presses, drills, saws, shop equipment, forklift, backhoe, tools, welding tables, industrial bolt bins, machinist chests, calipers, grinders, micrometers, torches, gauges, jacks, industrial shelving, plasma cutters, cylinders, steel rollers, sand blasters, bush hog, tons of electrical and plumbing fittings, jackhammers, and so much more! Approved consignments are accepted. Preview: Fri., Oct. 3 from 9 AM 6 PM. Browse web at www.cogb. urnauction.com. 803-860-0712.

Garage, Yard & Estate Sales

Garage Sale Sat. Sept 27th. 8-12 pm 2860 Porcher Dr CASH ONLY!! No early birds!

2970 S. Wise Dr. Sat.Sept 27th, 8-12. Miscellaneous household items. EVERYTHING MUST GO!!

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