

JUNE / JULY 2026

1 SECTION, 24 PAGES | VOL. 3, NO. 4



Vampire Penguin is doing cool business in Sumter already

A6

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ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Eric and Erin Prince and Whitney Moss, the family behind Waterworks, a pool and spa business in Sumter, is celebrating 25 years with a renovated showroom on Alice Drive and shared how the business has changed through the years. See page A16.



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With summer comes the return of potential hurricanes

Summer is here, but with it comes the inevitable every year – hurricane season. Because of the expected El Niño weather pattern this year, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has reported a 55% probability of a below-average season.

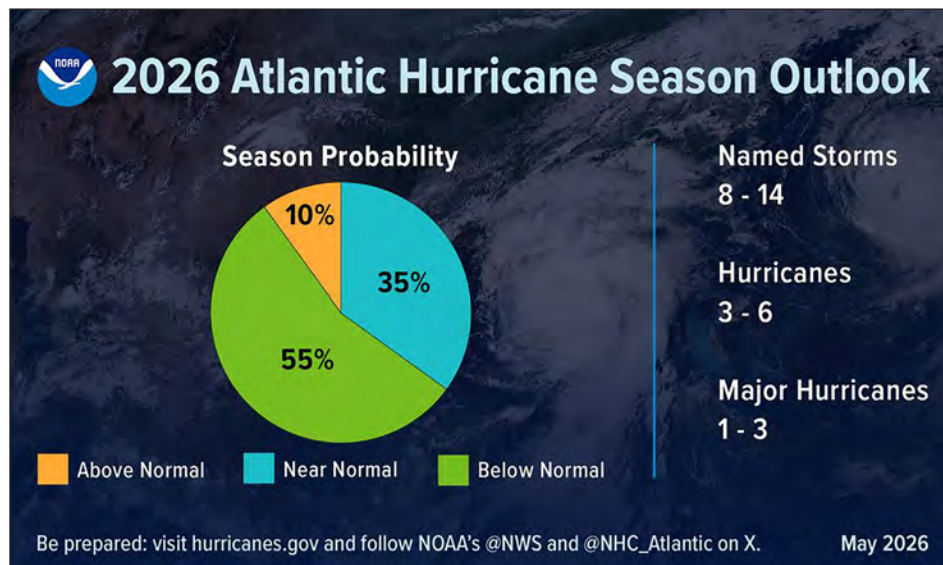


MELANIE SMITH

The El Niño event in the Pacific affects weather worldwide, and in the Atlantic basin, it typically means more wind shear in the atmosphere, which can rip apart storms that encounter it or keep thunderstorms from organizing into a hurricane.

The El Niño event will ramp up later in the summer and lead to wetter, cooler weather through the remainder of the year and into next spring, according to the National Weather Service. Hurricane season runs through Nov. 30.

"El Niño, the warm phase of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation cycle, is a natural climate phenomenon characterized by above-average sea surface



temperatures and weakened trade winds over the tropical Pacific Ocean," according to the Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory. "However, its impact is far-reaching, resulting in the global redistribution of temperature and precipitation, and thus the occurrence of high-impact extreme weather events like floods and droughts.

However, a less active Atlantic hurricane season is also a resulting factor."

This doesn't mean we will get no big storms this year, and it only takes one to cause extensive damage and interruption to daily life, so being prepared is still important. Going to the store to stock up on canned goods, bottled water and anything else you may need

when everyone else is also out right before bad weather moves in means you may not find everything on your list.

This year's hurricane names have been set and are: Arthur, Bertha, Cristobal, Dolly, Edouard, Fay, Gonzalo, Hanna, Isaias, Josephine, Kyle, Leah, Marco, Nana, Omar, Paulette, Rene, Sally, Teddy, Vicky and Wilfred.

Inside this edition of *The Sumter Item Impact*, you'll find more summer-related articles, including about a pool company that's been in Sumter for decades, safety tips from Sumter Fire Department and a list of events your family can enjoy despite the heat. We hope your summer is a memorable one this year.

If you'd like to pick up a free Hurricane Guide, visit our office at 36 W. Liberty St. from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday. The guide will tell you what to do in advance of any storms that do come our way, what items to have on hand to protect your loved ones and what you can do after the storm clears out, including how to be safe with generators and medical needs. You can also find more hurricane info on A12.

OSTEEN

PUBLISHING COMPANY
Established 1894

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The Sumter Item is published each Wednesday and Saturday by Osteen Publishing Co., 36 W. Liberty St., Sumter, SC 29150, and delivered via USPS. Major holiday delivery may be altered due to USPS schedule.

Periodical postage paid at Sumter, SC 29150.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Osteen Publishing Co., 36 W. Liberty St., Sumter, SC 29150.

Publication No. USPS 525-900

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Government

3 recent headlines from City of Sumter and city council

BY KYLIE CORDELL

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CITY, USC SUMTER, NATIONAL FITNESS CAMPAIGN JOIN TO OPEN FREE FITNESS COURT TO COMMUNITY

City of Sumter, University of South Carolina Sumter and National Fitness Campaign recently announced a partnership to bring an outdoor Fitness Court and digital wellness programming to Sumter. The Fitness Court, at 199 University Drive, opened June 9 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

According to a news release from the city, the Fitness Court was developed to expand free access to high-quality workouts and create equitable access to exercise for communities across the region. The court is the world's best outdoor gym that lets users leverage their own body weight to get a complete workout using seven exercise stations.

"This project is an important investment in the health, wellness and quality of life of our community," Mayor David Merchant said in the release. "Partnerships like this demonstrate what we can accomplish when organizations come together with a shared vision of building a stronger, healthier Sumter for generations to come."

Fitness Court workouts are adaptable for all fitness levels for ages 14 and older, allowing participants to move at their own pace, according to the release. Use of the court is free. Users can download the free Fitness Court App, which acts as a coach in your pocket and enhances the outdoor gym into a digitally supported wellness experience. Sumter is one of the first Campaign Partners building a network of Fitness Courts across the region, with the help of Williams-Brice-Edwards Charitable Trust.

CITY LEADER ENCOURAGES BUSINESSES TO GET INVOLVED WITH CITY'S SUMMER PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS

Lefford Fate, support services director for City of Sumter, encouraged businesses to partner with the city to potentially expand the Youth Corps and Youth Co-Op summer programs. Youth Corps places students in various city departments, while Youth Co-Op partners with local businesses to provide hands-



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

USC Sumter's new Fitness Court opened to the public on June 9. It is open to anyone who wants to get in a free workout at 199 University Drive.

on work experience. Participating businesses pay half of each student's salary and provide job training, while the city covers the remaining half.



FATE

In addition to employment opportunities, participants receive weekly professional development training.

"We work with Palmetto Pride and the Sumter Litter Patrol. These kids cleaned up all of Lafayette

[Drive]. The program is a testament to how we can come together not only to help make young people better, but to make the city better," Fate said.

The program also emphasizes family involvement and community engagement. Parents or guardians are required to attend workshops alongside their children, and participants take part in community service projects throughout the summer.

During Sumter City Council discussion at its meeting Tuesday, June 2, city leaders emphasized the importance of partnerships with local businesses and organizations in sustaining and expanding the programs.

"Every year, people from the county

are trying to get their kids into the program, but we can only serve 35 students within the city limits," Fate said. "With more support and more resources, we could expand the program in Sumter and even across South Carolina."

COMMUNITY CONCERNS ON CELL TOWER SITING

During council's public comment period at its regular meeting Tuesday, May 26, Sita Henson, a resident of the Rembert community, raised objections to a proposed 400-foot cell communica-

tion tower being built on private land at 261 Dingle's Mill Road.

"The tower will sit on a recognized historic site and will be directly adjacent to the Congaree Land Trust Nature Preserve, known for its wildlife habitats that harbors endangered species," she said.

Henson explained that the trust had visited the site but could not intervene because the tower is not directly on its easement. Even so, she said the trust reportedly stated it would "never allow a cell tower or solar field on conservation land" because of concerns about impacts to natural resources and wildlife habitats.

She also argued that the proposed location raises concerns about children's health and safety, stating the tower would broadcast "toxic radiation" within less than half a mile of a local elementary school where children spend much of their day.

In addition, Henson stated the tower could negatively affect surrounding property values and questioned whether another tower was necessary, citing the presence of three other towers within a few miles of the area. Her comments connected the issue to both community impact and concerns about redundant infrastructure, while also requesting legal guidance from the county.

County Councilman Carlton Washington agreed the matter warranted further review and urged council members to consider the broader implications for nearby residents and the surrounding community.

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Education

Recent headlines show Class of 2026 leaders, state probe findings

BY BRUCE MILLS

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DISTRICT VALEDICTORIANS DISCUSS JOURNEYS, FUTURE PLANS

At the conclusion of the school year, Sumter School District named its three valedictorians, who are Emma Ketchum from Crestwood High School, Peyton Harvin from Lakewood and Ben Nock from Sumter High.

The top seniors of the Class of 2026 spoke after graduation to *The Sumter Item* and shared about their journeys so far and their immediate plans moving forward.

Ketchum ranked No. 1 in a class of 237 students at Crestwood with a 5.066 weighted GPA, which was over a 3.9 on the 4.0 scale.

A City of Sumter resident, Ketchum chose to attend Crestwood for high school because of the school's chorus program led at the time by Debra Horton. She got to know Horton through the years through the district's summer arts program, REACH, for students gifted in music, visual arts or theater.

Ketchum's talent in the fine arts is music, and in the summer, intensive camp musical students learned and memorized various song pieces, often accompanied by dances for an annual REACH showcase event, she said. In the camp, students also learned the finer aspects of music theory.

Ketchum was All-State Choir every year at Crestwood and was ranked in the top 10 in the state in her voice part — sopranos — her sophomore through senior years.

She plans now to attend Columbia College in Columbia and major in speech language pathology to pursue a career as a school speech pathologist.

At Lakewood, Harvin ranked No. 1 in a class of 194 students with a 5.274 weighted GPA, which was a perfect 4.0 on the 4.0 scale. That means Harvin made all A's in his four years of high school.

Harvin was also active through the years in the district's summer REACH program and is known for his artistic talent, which he inherited from his dad, Russell Harvin Sr., who is an artist, he said.

Since middle school, the Lakewood



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

From left, Crestwood High School valedictorian Emma Ketchum, Lakewood valedictorian Peyton Harvin and Sumter High valedictorian Ben Nock stand at the district office in early June.

valedictorian has participated in art competitions and has sold his art as well, he added.

Likely his most popular acrylic painting of a tiger won a Congressional art competition and was exhibited at the U.S. Capitol in Washington for a year.

He will be taking his "passion" for art to Converse University in Spartanburg, where he has a full scholarship. The private college has an established fine arts program, and Harvin will major in studio arts, he said, and then plans to become a professional artist.

At Sumter High, Nock finished No. 1 in a class of 485 students with a 5.451 weighted GPA, which was also a perfect 4.0 on the 4.0 scale. Like Harvin, he, too, made all A's throughout high school.

Nock was a full International Baccalaureate program student as a junior and senior at the school with seven other students in his graduating class. The program is considered rigorous and is highly regarded by most colleges. It offers higher-level classes in biology, English and history and also includes a theory of knowledge (philosophy) course, community service and an extended essay class. Nock also

took Advanced Placement Calculus as a senior.

Nock said the IB track made for a challenging last two years of high school, but he knew Clemson University looked highly upon the program. He was accepted there and will begin in the fall in the school's honor college with intentions to major in computer engineering and possibly pursue a career in developing and designing computer hardware.

STATE PROBE FINDS 'EXCESSIVE SPENDING OF TAXPAYER FUNDS' WITH CRESTWOOD STADIUM

After a 10-month probe, the state agency that investigates allegations of fraud, waste and mismanagement among public bodies released its report April 17 on whether Sumter School District followed required protocols with two projects.

In its report, the South Carolina Office of the State Inspector General determined that while the funding for Crestwood High School's athletic field construction was permissible, the district failed in the project's management, resulting "in excessive spending of taxpayer funds" and state and local violations.

Numerous project management failures by district administrators resulted in the district exceeding its board of trustees-approved funding for Phase 1 of the Crestwood athletics project by \$1,258,076.69, the report said.

A second part of the state agency's investigation regarded the district's disposal of surplus furniture, and State Inspector General Brian Lamkin determined the district failed to adhere to its own procurement code in the storage and disposal of this inventory, resulting "in wasteful spending of taxpayer funds totaling \$42,000."

Other violations of state law and findings were included in the report. The State Inspector General investigation did not identify any criminal activity or indication of fraudulent activity during the probe, the report said.

The project management failures and violations occurred under the district's previous superintendent, William Wright Jr.

At Sumter school board's April 27 special-called meeting to discuss the report findings, new Superintendent Gerald Gary provided a detailed resolution with corrective actions that was unanimously adopted by the board and effective immediately.

His resolution detailed seven items to include his implementation of progressive discipline and authorized continued personnel actions, consistent with district policy and laws, to address staff violations of procurement and board procedures.

Also, the board affirmed he will implement strengthened internal controls regarding all construction-related expenditures, mandatory documentation and audit trails for procurement activities and centralized oversight of high-value contracts and projects. Additionally, he will ensure all administrators and relevant staff will complete mandatory procurement and compliance training.

In the resolution, the board also authorized Gary after his evaluation — if necessary — to engage an independent third party to conduct a procurement or construction expenditure review to ensure compliance and identify more control improvements.



PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Vampire Penguin recently opened on Bultman Drive in Sumter. The store, a franchise of a California company, sells flavored snow best compared to “snow cream” — the process of taking freshly fallen snow and adding sweetened condensed milk. Vampire Penguin’s menu in Sumter is varied and something you can only order in-person. You have to see the place to try the snow — there is no DoorDash, and the menu options change seasonally.

A cool addition to town: Vampire Penguin serves up a variety of shaved snow desserts

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

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As the summer heat settles over Sumter, a new business on Bultman Drive is offering residents a cold, colorful way to cool down.

Vampire Penguin, owned by Melissa Clark, serves shaved snow desserts in flavors ranging from strawberry cheesecake to chocolate overload.

Clark, a Sumter native, moved away when she was 14 and has lived in different parts of the country before settling down in Aiken for more than 20 years.

When it came time to explore the new business venture, she said Sumter was the right choice because she wanted to bring something different to the community. The location, 661 Bultman Drive, was a prime spot given the traffic and number of businesses already along the corridor.

Since opening, she said Sumter has embraced the shop.

“It’s been phenomenal,” Clark expressed. “Sumter has broken records. I was only open three weeks in April, and I beat out most Vampire Penguins that have been open longer. Sumter has been really, really good to me.”

The Item spoke with Clark about the business, its unique name, its early success and what customers can expect when they walk through the door.

VAMPIRE PENGUIN IS CERTAINLY A UNIQUE NAME. CAN YOU TELL US



Vampire Penguin is owned by Melissa Clark.

THE STORY BEHIND THE NAME AND WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE CONCEPT?

Clark said Vampire Penguin is a franchise based out of California and founded by the San Luis brothers, Paolo and Leo. The name comes from the company’s branding and story of Vampire Penguin, a penguin who lives in the North Pole — a rarity — along with his



“large and lingering” friend, a walrus who also thinks he’s a vampire (though he isn’t). Vampire Penguin is also in love with a “strong and beautiful” polar bear named Paula Bear.

“Stylishly eerie, Vampire Penguin rules the polar skies, but behind his nonchalant eyes, Vampire Penguin truly misses his penguin family, longs to be with them,” the website reads. “Hence, he conjures delicious shaved snow magic to bring friends and families together.”

Inside the Sumter shop, customers can also find books that tell the story of the vampire penguin character.

What drew Clark in were the sweet treats.

“I love their products. You’ll see when you taste it,” she assured. “It’s very, very good.”

FOR READERS WHO HAVEN’T VISITED YET, WHAT DOES VAMPIRE PENGUIN OFFER, AND WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT FROM A TRADITIONAL ICE CREAM OR DESSERT SHOP?

Vampire Penguin serves shaved snow, which Clark described as light,

VAMPIRE PENGUIN

FROM PAGE A6

fluffy and different from a snow cone or traditional ice cream. Though it may be new to residents, the sweet treat reminded Clark of her childhood.

"It used to snow a lot when I was a kid, and my grandma would make us go outside and get snow, bring it in and put vanilla with it. We'd stir it [and call it] snow cream," she shared. "That's why I bought into this, because I love that it reminds me of my childhood [and] of my grandmother."

She said the desserts are light, low calorie and low fat, with gluten-free and dairy-free options available, depending on toppings.

"It's very light and fluffy, so it doesn't feel like when you eat ice cream," she explained. "It's good, yummy, and no matter who you are, you'll love it."

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN OPEN, AND WHAT HAS THE RESPONSE FROM THE COMMUNITY BEEN LIKE SO FAR?

At the time of the interview in early June, Vampire Penguin was in its seventh week of business after a soft opening.

"It's been a whirlwind of craziness," she described.

Still, she said the response has been better than she imagined. Along with breaking records in customer attendance within three weeks of opening in April, she also has reconnected with the place she calls home.

"I could not be happier with people in Sumter."

WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF YOUR MOST POPULAR MENU ITEMS OR CUSTOMER FAVORITES SINCE OPENING?

Just within seven weeks of being fully open and operational, customers have quickly found favorites.

Some of the most popular items include strawberry cheesecake, Carolina Mint Crunch, chocolate overload, Miami Vice Monkey and peach cobbler.

For Clark, her personal favorites are the chocolate-based flavors, especially chocolate overload and peanut butter cup.

She also created, with the help of her staff, Duchess Delight, which includes pineapple and mango snow, granola, or-



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Vampire Penguin is located at 661 Bultman Drive in Sumter.

ange syrup, pineapple and strawberry boba.

For first-timers, Clark said they should decide whether they want something fruity or chocolatey. But her larger recommendation is simple: Come in with an open mind.

"My favorite thing to do is when people come in and say, 'I don't like snow cones,' I go, 'Well, it's not a snow cone.'"

LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE BUSINESS? ARE THERE ANY NEW MENU ITEMS, EVENTS OR FUTURE PLANS CUSTOMERS CAN LOOK FORWARD TO?

Clark said she is working on launch-

ing a Vampire Penguin trailer and hopes to have it ready earlier than originally planned because of the demand for the business at local events.

She also plans to change flavors seasonally, including adding fall options. Because the menu can change, she said the best way for customers to keep up is to come in and see what's available.

She wants the shop to be more than a dessert stop for patrons. She wants it to be an experience.

"No matter what kind of day you're having and what you're going through in your life, when you come in here, you can always be happy," she said. "We all go through our own [things], and sometimes you just need a sweet treat."

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Visit www.SumterMuseum.org for these event details and www.Sumter250.org for more Revolutionary War 250th programs across the county!

TO-DO LIST

1. **June 20th:** Battle in a Box- Reenactment Experience for 4th-8th graders
2. **June 29th:** Poinsett State Park Revolutionary War Hike
3. **June 30th:** See us at the Sumter County Library for Revolutionary War History Day!
4. **July 9th:** Join us back at the Sumter County Library as we "Unearth the Rev War"
5. **July 16th:** Visit our table at the SC7 Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Expo
6. **July 17th:** Poinsett State Park Revolutionary War Hike with SC7



Be a
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Thursday, August 8, 1935

Cut Rate Drug Store Opens Up

A new sanitary soda fountain has been installed from which will be dispensed a complete line of fountain drinks and creams. They will feature Southern Dairies bulk and brick ice cream.

This short article from Aug. 8, 1935, announced the opening of Cut Rate soda fountain in Sumter.



Mamie Brown, who worked at Sumter Cut Rate Drugs on South Main Street for more than 31 years, replenishes the supply of chicken salad in 2004.



A table is reserved for Cpl. Andrew Gillette of Sumter County Sheriff's Office, who was killed in the line of duty, in February 2020.



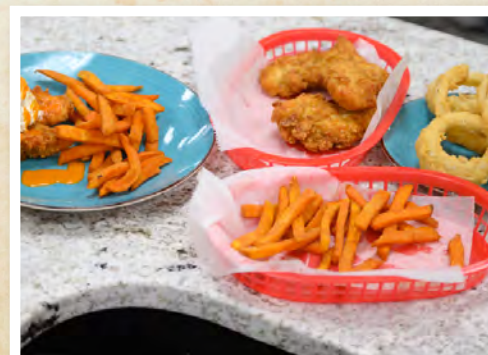
Cut Rate Diner cook Wayne Geddings grills chickens behind the store in January 2005.

CUT RATE

A look back at the diner that was part of Sumter since 1935

The landmark Cut Rate diner in the downtown area has closed, but a newer restaurant will soon take over the space in a move that all parties say is about progress and growth. The diner/soda fountain area at Sumter Cut Rate Drug Store closed Friday, June 5, for good while the pharmacy will remain open. A new rental tenant, Honey Hive on Main, will move into the dining space at the 32 S. Main St. location in early July. Here we take a look back at the diner through the years. It has served as a gathering place for friends and family since 1935.

SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS



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This Cut Rate ad was published in November 1936.

Sumter Fire Department members enjoy a meal at Sumter Cut Rate’s diner/soda fountain in 2015. The dining space closed for good on Friday, June 5, but the pharmacy area will remain open. A new tenant, Honey Hive on Main, will move into the dining space in early July under a lease agreement with Quixote Hospitality, which owns the establishment.

PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM
ABOVE AND BELOW: Cut Rate Diner serves lunch on Thursday in Sumter on June 4, the day before the diner’s last day.

A Cut Rate Diner employee takes a customer’s order during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Geraldine Singleton occupied the same corner stool at Sumter Cut Rate Soda Fountain each weekday morning during the holiday season. People often met her there to give her contributions for the free annual Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners that feed thousands who wouldn’t otherwise have one.

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State agency urges residents to prep for hurricane season

BY MELANIE SMITH

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From the coast to the mountains, South Carolina Emergency Management wants every state resident to be prepared in case a storm makes its way here during hurricane season. Staying informed through emergency alerts, preparing your home before a storm strikes, what to do during a power outage and more are all important to keep top of mind.

The season starts June 1 each year and runs through Nov. 30. While we aren't on the coast, evacuees may seek shelter in our area, which means families should buy what they think they may need in advance when store shelves are stocked.

STAY INFORMED

All residents can download the SC Emergency Management Division's official app to prep for this season and other types of emergencies. It's available for download in the Apple



SCDOT worker Alfonso Green, with the help of Melinda Johnson, cleans up road closure signs after Hurricane Helene passed through Sumter in September 2024. South Carolina Emergency Management Division urges state residents to heed such signs after storms.

SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

site offers these tips to help you and your family stay safe as a storm hits and after during cleanup.

DURING A HURRICANE

- Avoid travel, if possible. If you must travel, notify a friend or family member of your intended route, estimated arrival and final destination.

- Stay indoors in a sturdy structure, away from windows and doors — even if they are covered. Seek shelter in an interior room, closet or under the stairs on the first floor, especially during tornado watches and warnings.

- Hurricanes often spawn tornadoes. If the “eye” of the storm passes over your area, be ready for severe conditions to return quickly.

- Minimize non-emergency calls to reduce network congestion. Keep calls brief and wait at least 10 seconds before redialing. For non-emergencies, consider sending text messages instead.

AFTER A HURRICANE

- Avoid unnecessary travel as threats will continue in the hours after a storm has passed, specifically the chance of downed trees, power lines and flooded roads.

- Be alert for driving restrictions and road conditions. Use the SC Department of Transportation resources available at 511sc.org, on the 511 SC App and the SC Traffic and Road Conditions webpage at <https://tinyurl.com/3w47sbsu>.

- Avoid flooded or washed-out roads, including bridges. If you see a road closed sign, turn around. Remember, it takes only 6 inches of floodwater to cause vehicles to lose control and stall. It takes only 12 inches of floodwater to carry most vehicles away.

- Always follow the instructions of local public safety officials.

App Store and on Google Play. The app will allow you to build a personalized emergency plan, share your locations with emergency contacts and use an emergency alert whistle and strobe light.

The division encourages everyone to have multiple ways to receive alerts, such as Wireless Emergency Alerts on mobile devices, NOAA Weather Radios and local news outlets.

You can also visit *Hurricane.sc* to begin a hurricane safety plan. The South Carolina Hurricane Guide is available in print at *The Sumter Item* office, 36 W. Liberty St., for anyone to pick up and review, or you can find it and additional resources online at *Hurricane.sc*.

HAVE WHAT YOU NEED

A basic disaster supplies kit can include:

- Portable radio with extra batteries
- First aid kit, including prescription medications
- NOAA Weather Radio
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Cash, enough to fill a vehicle with gas
- Mobile device chargers
- Bottle water, 2 gallons per person per day
- Plastic dishes, eating utensils
- Blankets, towels
- Baby supplies
- Hand sanitizer
- Non-perishable food for at least 3 days
- Pet supplies
- Soap, shampoo, other personal hygiene items
- Sunglasses, mosquito repellent, sunscreen
- Important documents

The emergency management web-

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Ryan Millett, a second-generation career firefighter, hoists a hose as Sumter Fire Department volunteer and career firefighting trainees demonstrate skills on June 9. Lt. Selena Smith with the department shared tips for keeping cool during the summer, the same tips firefighters use during their training and work.

PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM



Try to beat the **heat** this summer with tips from Sumter Fire Department

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysha@theitem.com

When South Carolina's humid summer heat starts to settle in, few people know its dangers better than firefighters.

Whether they're battling house fires, responding to emergencies or training in heavy protective gear, firefighters regularly work in temperatures far higher than the weather forecast predicts. They know firsthand how quickly heat can turn from uncomfortable to dangerous.

As temperatures climb and the heat index soars, the same precautions firefighters use to protect themselves can,

too, help residents beat the heat during the hottest months of the year.

Sumter Fire Department's Lt. Selena Smith shared several reminders to help people recognize the signs of heat-related illness, stay hydrated and avoid unnecessary risks while spending time outdoors this summer.

Here are some heat safety tips to keep in mind as the temperatures continue to rise:

Stay hydrated. Whether you're working in the garden, playing a recreational sport or enjoying some quality time outdoors, drink cool water, at least one cup every 20 minutes, even if

SEE **HEAT SAFETY**, PAGE A14

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HEAT SAFETY FROM PAGE A13

you are not thirsty.

Dress for the heat. Smith encouraged light-colored, breathable clothing that can allow ample air flow. Also, wear a hat and sunscreen.

Pace physical activities and take frequent breaks. Take enough time to recover from heat given the temperature, humidity and conditions. Take breaks in a designated shady or cool location.

Do not leave anyone inside a parked vehicle, including pets. Vehicles can reach dangerous temperatures. Young children, infants and pets are particularly vulnerable to heat-related illness and death, as their bodies are less able to adapt to heat than adults.

Check on your neighbors. During this time of year, it's good to keep in contact with friends and neighbors, as everyone deals with heat differently. Older adults, particularly those with pre-existing diseases, take certain medications, are living alone or have limited mobility, who are exposed to extreme heat can experience multiple adverse effects. Those with chronic medical conditions are more likely to have a serious health problem during a heat wave than healthy people. Pregnant women are also at higher risk, as extreme heat has been associated with adverse birth outcomes such as low birth weight, preterm birth, infant mortality and congenital cataracts.



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter Fire Department volunteer and career firefighting trainees dress in their training gear as they demonstrate skills on June 9. Because of the heavy gear and their work around fire, firefighters know how quickly heat can become dangerous.



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Religion

We should celebrate the freedom we may take for granted

As the pastor of a congregation, most of the time I am standing at the front of the church looking out at the worshipers. I face the congregation and lead the prayers



Pastor Stewart Rawson

and read Scripture and preach. In our sanctuary my back is to the choir, the faithful group of our members who offer their incredible musical talents weekly to lead hymn singing and to offer beautiful anthems. My back is also to the one beautiful stained-glass window in our sanctuary.

A few weeks ago, our other pastor was preaching, and so I sat on the second row with my wife. As I worshiped with my fellow congregants, my gaze was fixed upon the powerful stained glass window. I had looked upon it before but had never focused on the details as carefully.

The window depicts Jesus praying to God in the Garden of Gethsemane near the end of his earthly life. He is reclined on a large rock. In our tradition, this was a time of intense prayer when Jesus was struggling with facing what was to come. A few years ago, I had the privilege of taking a pilgrimage to Holy Land. On the eastern side of the walled city of Old Jerusalem, on the slope of the Mount of Olives, there is a basilica built in the 1920s, and it is called The Church of All Nations or the Basilica of the Agony. Many different countries, including the United States, contributed to the building of this amazing church, and each country was able to choose how its section of the church was finished. It is a profound testimony to the unity of all nations. Enshrined at the front of this church is a large piece of bedrock that tradition teaches is the stone that Jesus prayed on (as depicted in our stained glass window). When you visit the Garden of Gethsemane today, you are told that some of the olive trees

that are alive there today date back more than 2,000 years, meaning the trees that are alive today could have been there when Jesus dwelt on this earth.

There are many stories from Scripture that could have been chosen for the window, but this is the one selected by the pastor in the early 1950s when it was added to the sanctuary. It is a powerful image and an important reminder of our physical connection to Jesus. The window was given to First Presbyterian Church in memory of Lt. Col. Frank Clarke. Clarke was the superintendent of the Sunday school at First Presbyterian in Sumter before returning to active duty during World War II. He died in an Army Air Corps plane crash in October 1944, and his wife, Margaret, gave birth to twins, Henry and Finley, three months after his death. The inscription on the window indicates that the window was given in memory of Lt. Col. Clarke by his wife and his parents. A current Sumter resident and civic lead-

er, Ed Bynum, Clarke's great-nephew, recalls from family stories that giving the stained glass window was a financial hardship for Margaret at the time, but she loved the church and wanted to honor the memory of her husband.

Frank Clarke Street in Sumter Historic District was named in honor of Clarke for his service to our country and the ultimate sacrifice that he made for our freedom. As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, it is important for us to remember and give thanks for all of the sacrifices that have been made on our behalf. We stand on the shoulders of all of those who have come before us. We owe a debt of gratitude to our parents and to our community and to the many heroes who have given us the gifts we enjoy. In humility, let us celebrate the freedom that we often take for granted.

The Rev. Dr. Stewart Rawson is the Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in downtown Sumter.

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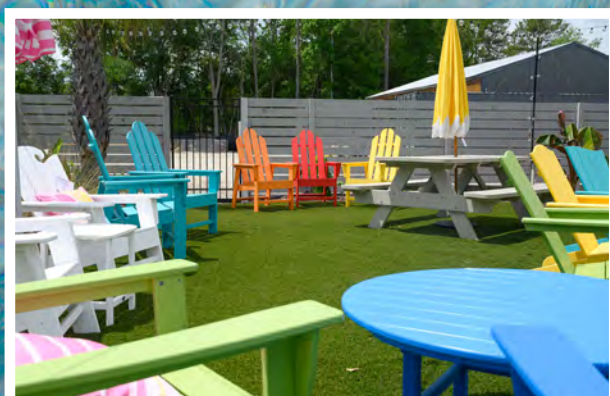
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PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

From left, Whitney Moss, Eric Prince and Erin Prince are the family behind WaterWorks, a pool and spa business in Sumter that has been around for decades and through many changes in the industry. Eric Prince's grandparents started the first pool business in Sumter in 1983, and he started working there for his grandfather in middle school.



Waterworks Pools and Spas has built on family business, blazed its own trail

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

A passion for the pool industry and growing up in the business has allowed a Sumter native to build a business that now is recognized as a leader in the state.

WaterWorks Pools and Spas owner Eric Prince recently discussed his journey to success in the pool and spa industry along with his wife, Erin, and sister Whitney Moss, who form the leadership team that operates the full-service pool business based in Sumter that offers more than many might expect.

Prince's grandparents, Joel and Ramona Merry, were business owners in Sumter dating back 50 years ago to 1976 and started the first pool business

in town in 1983 after Joel Merry got the idea from attending a trade show.

Their business was named Inside-Out on Market Street and initially sold wood-burning fireplaces and did chimney sweeps and expanded to selling swimming pools as a summer, seasonal business to help with sustainability year-round, Prince said.

That new division in the 1980s was Inside-Out Aqua Pools and included an in-ground pool on

WATERWORKS POOLS & SPAS

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PHONE: (803) 469-6617

STORE HOURS: Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; closed Sunday

WEB: waterworkscountry.com

The business carries everything from spas (hot tubs) to pool chairs, towels and much more.

SEE **WATERWORKS**, PAGE A17

BY THE NUMBERS
10,000

Total current square feet of Sumter operation (includes inside and outside)

2004

Year that WaterWorks began installing in-ground pools

1983

Year that Eric Prince's grandparents started a pool business here. It was the first one in Sumter.

115

Pools installed each year; translates to 2 pools per week

110

Days it took to complete facility renovation, beginning last fall.

28

Years that Prince has worked full-time in his family's pool business

25

Years that WaterWorks has been in business (opened in 2001)

3

Phases involved in recent renovation

2

WaterWorks' store locations (Sumter and Florence)

Source: WaterWorks Pools and Spas

WATERWORKS

FROM PAGE A16

site to help customers see the full experience of owning their own pool.

Prince started working for his grandfather in the early 1990s while still in middle school to help pay his school tuition, he added, and those formative years through high school piqued his interest in the pool business for a career.

After graduating high school in 1998, Prince began working for his uncle, Jeff Merry, who ran the pool installation part of Aqua Pools, for about a year. The pool business was still seasonal at the time, and he also continued to work in the family business during the winter months.

In 2001, Prince ventured out on his own and started WaterWorks Pools and Spas, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

Like for any small business owner, Prince's career has experienced twists and turns, but his love for his work and resolve have helped forge his path to success.

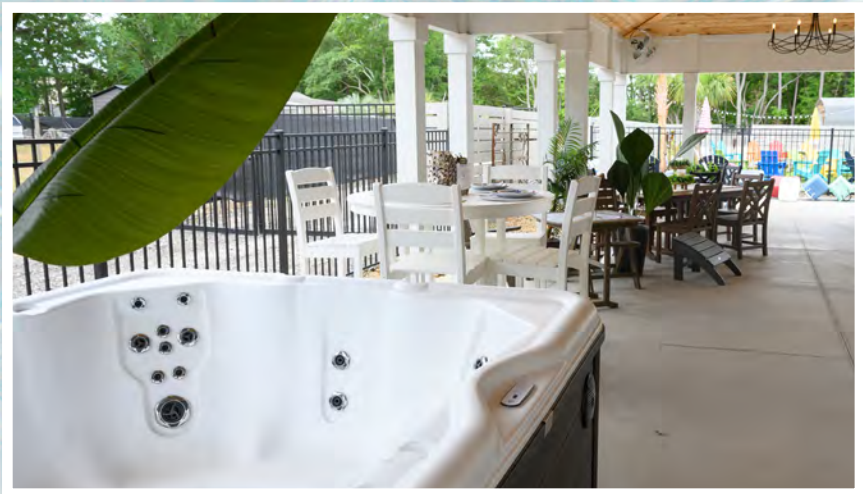
In 2006, he married Erin, who initially handled the office side of the business and now serves as co-owner. Prince's sister, Whitney Moss, has also come on board and serves as a partner and sales manager.

The three partners have guided Waterworks to become a top pool business in the state, even as the pool industry has evolved over time.

POOL INDUSTRY CHANGES

Like any industry, the pool business has changed through the decades. In the 1990s, business was seasonal and limited to the summer months. Now, it is a year-round business, Prince said, and more lucrative, especially given how WaterWorks operates.

Also, above-ground pools were standard in the business even in the



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

A pavilion area for hot tubs was added to the business in 2024 as part of a three-phase renovation.

early 2000s when Prince went out on his own.

Gradually he pivoted to installing more in-ground pools and eventually just in-ground pools.

For several years, WaterWorks' business model included three types of in-ground pools — vinyl, fiberglass and a customized concrete-based pool with a plaster finish under the Gunite brand name, Prince said.

Vinyl and fiberglass in-ground pools were much less expensive than the Gunite pools, but the custom Gunite high-end pool business grew extensively starting in Florence and then up and down the coast from Hilton Head to Myrtle Beach and over to the Midlands, he added.

During COVID-19, getting vinyl and fiberglass materials in stock became more difficult and the price for those pools became the same as Gunite. With that scenario, Prince transitioned to just installing Gunite.

"We decided we were not going to sell a cheaper product that is not equivalent to a Gunite pool for the same price," he said. "So, we cut out fiberglass and vinyl and focused solely on Gunite."

Moss added that the concrete, in-

ground pool is structurally the strongest pool that you can build.

Also, now there is no waiting on manufacturers for product shipments.

OTHER KEYS TO SUCCESS

Through the years, WaterWorks has grown, and Prince said a good reputation and construction and installation of pools within a timeline for customers are keys to success in the industry.

Reputation with customers starts with the staff, good communication and a "show and tell" experience for customers.

A construction timeline for installation is not always common in the industry, but it is with WaterWorks.

"When we start, we don't leave your property until the project is completed," Prince said. "So there is none of this showing up some and then leave. I think that is the biggest thing in this industry.

"We believe in getting it done just as fast as we possibly can to not upset the customer and the neighbors because we know it can be stressful. We want the construction

SEE **WATERWORKS**, PAGE A23

Crestwood's Boults stays humble amid booming recruitment

BY TIM LEIBLE

tim@theitem.com

The last year in the life of Crestwood running back Brayden Boults has been a whirlwind. The rising sophomore received his first college offer on June 25, 2025, before he even played a snap of varsity football. Now, a year and 1,000 all-purpose yards later, his offer tally has risen to 37 and counting.

Boults has offers from just about every big-name program in the country, recently connecting with the likes of Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Penn State and the hometown Gamecocks, to name a few.

As the offers keep piling up, Boults is trying to keep his focus on football. He still has three seasons of high school football in front of him, and he's not going to let a day go by when he's not focused on getting better on the field.

"It's surprising, but also not, because I trained to do this. It's not something that happens overnight, it's daily. You have to work at it every day. So, it's kind of surprising but kind of not. I love the grind, I love the work, so it's just keep grinding for me," Boults said. "It feels good. Right now, I'm just going to the different colleges, getting to know them, getting to know the culture, seeing how they coach, seeing if it's going to be great for me in the long term.

"I'm just keeping my head down, getting one percent better every day



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Crestwood's Brayden Boults is seen on a visit to Tennessee in May.

and just working for my best opportunity."

Scrolling through Boults' feed on X, you'll see proof of a young running back who never stops. Between regular videos of his individual workouts at home – which include everything from weight-lifting to footwork drills – there's a travel itinerary that can be hard to keep up with. He's made visits to programs across the country.

"I'm really just preparing for the op-

portunity," Boults said of his day-to-day schedule during the summer. "I'm working out every day, getting bigger, faster, stronger and trying to perfect my craft. I always have to get one percent better. And then going to colleges, I'm just doing what I've trained to do."

While the flash of high-profile programs is nice, he's more focused on the conversations he's having with coaches. Boults knows what he wants out of a college football program, and



Crestwood's Brayden Boults, right, meets with Georgia head coach Kirby Smart during a visit with the Bulldogs.

he's going to keep his options open until he finds the perfect fit.

"Really just the culture," Boults said of what he's looking at closely when visiting programs. "Someone who is not only going to teach me to be a great football player, but teach me to be a great man, a great family person and someone who is going to teach me the skills of life."

SEE **BOULTS**, PAGE A19



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BOULTS FROM PAGE A18

Boults didn't have to wait long to see his first offer come in. After connecting with the coaching staff at UNC Pembroke, he was officially offered a full two months before his first career carry at Crestwood.

"It was a really exciting experience; I was really grateful for the moment," Boults said. "I always like the ones that believe in me early, so I was really excited, really grateful, and I was really blessed when I got my first offers."

Of course, hearing from the SEC program down the road earlier this month meant the world to Boults. The rising junior was offered by South Carolina on June 10 in the midst of a recent stretch of SEC, Big 10 and ACC programs extending offers.

"It felt great," he said. "I was very blessed. I was waiting for a while, but they just told me they needed to see me in person. I was just thankful to have the opportunity."

Crestwood truly has a unique dynamic in their backfield, as they have two top-flight runners. Boults is one of the most heavily recruited athletes in the state and splits time with Calvin Wofford, who just committed to play at Charlotte on June 7. Wofford led Crestwood with 1,508 all-purpose yards with 13 touchdowns, while Boults added 1,000 all-purpose yards – 743 of which came on the ground – and nine touchdowns in his first season of varsity football. The younger Knight has really embraced the fact that he has a veteran in the room to learn from throughout this process.

"It's really great. I don't have to do all the work," Boults said. "We both worked every day, preparing each other for the next game. Having a one-two combo is really great to have."

Boults is most well-known for his blazing speed. He runs a 4.41 40-yard

dash with elite agility. One of his top priorities this summer is adding some muscle, jumping up from 160 to 187 on the scale so far. Boults is also trying to key in on some of the finer details of the running back position. While every back loves to rip off 70-yard touchdown runs, they have to commit to doing the little things if they want to earn those opportunities.

"I've really been working on my pass protection because you can't play at any level without being able to pass block," Boults said. "I'm also working on my patience. On a fast back, you might be a little faster (than the developing blocks), so you have to keep your patience."

"(My first season on varsity) showed me everything is not about how fast you are or what you can do, it's about knowing the knowledge of the game, so it made me realize I have to get bigger, I have to get stronger and get more knowledge of the game, and not just running side to side."

Throughout his recruitment and development in football, Boults' father, D'juan Boults, has been his right-hand man. The elder Boults coaches running backs for the Knights and helps his son craft his workouts away from the program, as well.

"He taught me that I've always got to be disciplined," Boults said of his father. "Working with him makes me train better. He always has me in the right mindset, so I can do what I can do."

With so much of his high school career in front of him, Boults isn't anywhere close to making a decision on his future in football. He's just trying to keep an open mind as he continues to grow, and the offers keep piling up.

"I don't really have a specific team, I'm just keeping my head down and getting one percent better and working on my next opportunity," Boults said. "The opportunity could come any day from here."

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'Masters of the Universe' could create new generation of He-Man fans

I look back on my formative years cherishing the memories of animated series from the '80s, action figures and remembering all the important lessons classic cartoons of that era instilled in children, which

shaped and molded our sense of worth and navigating our journey into adulthood.

On June 5, a national treasure from that childhood received its theatrical release, "Masters of the Universe." "He-Man and the Masters of the Universe" re-



A REVIEW BY
ISAIAH RIDLEY

mains one of my favorite cartoons from that period of my life. "Thundercats" was at the top of the list with He-Man tied in the same spot. I remember how both my mother and father purchased "He-Man" action figures, including Castle Grayskull, Battlecat and the Magic Sword that transformed Prince Adam into the symbol of heroism in the battle against the evil forces of Skeletor. Memories of socializing with other children playing pretend and wishing they would make an actual film was always the topic of discussion.

An actual live-action version was released in 1987 with Dolph Lundgren playing the titular role. Even at the ripe age of 6, I realized there were important components missing from the '80s version. At the age of 44, there is a sincere appreciation for the effort made to capture the essence of these larger-than-life characters. I can almost guarantee that a significant amount of people from that era who watched that depiction expressed a sense of apathy, with the exception of Frank Langella's performance as Skeletor, looking back at that film with fond memories, especially when one considers it was not ashamed of its fantastical, mystical and larger-than-life elements. I watch it these days gaining a deeper appreciation of the practical effects, set designs and makeup features that gave it organic authenticity. It is worth watching to contrast how far film and technology have



Actors dressed as the characters Skeletor, from left, He-Man and Teela arrive at the premiere of "Masters of the Universe" on Monday, May 17, at TCL Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles.

PHOTO BY ANDREW PARK / INVISION / AP

come along.

Here we are in 2026 with "Masters of the Universe," a highly anticipated theatrical release with more of an embracing of its sword-and-sorcery dynamics. I recognized how it is borrowing concepts from "Thor" while including its own emotional connective tissue to the lore. Prince Adam/He-Man, portrayed by Nicholas Galitzine, is fully aware of his destiny and his home of Eternia after the forces of Skeletor attack the kingdom, leaving nothing except a desolate ruin, for his mother sends him to Earth away from a certain end had he remained in Eternia. Desperate and emotionally plagued by the trauma, he yearns to return to his world. He finds the Magic Sword of Power that will open the gateway of forming an alliance with the protectors of Eternia in battling Skeletor.

Based on what I have watched from the trailer, it appears director Travis Knight is taking inspiration from the classic '80s Filmation Studio Associates establishment combined with elements from the early 2000s version of "He-Man," which had more of a darker, serious, mature tone compared to earlier renditions. Jared Leto portrays the villainous Skeletor, a character repre-

sentation I am eagerly anticipating given past voiceovers/physical portrayals. One reason I am interested in this rendering of Skeletor is the visual accuracy of the menacing nature, second that he is the definitive, classic villain embracing his evil journey and destiny, and lastly, he represents the perfect foil to He-Man. I honestly believe audiences across the world are yearning for a story involving a hero of pure integrity, courage, strength and leadership qualities facing the ultimate evil with no strings attached.

As I was growing up, my father introduced me to the mystical world of sword-and-sorcery novelizations, films, comics and artwork inspired by Greek and Norse mythology. "He-Man and the Masters of the Universe" lore mirrored ancient tales of larger-than-life beings from texts and our imaginations. My only complaint about this upcoming film in retrospect is the appearance of relying too much on computer-generated imagery, and Galitzine should have a more chiseled, toned physique and a deeper voice, differentiating between Prince Adam and He-Man. I have always believed the duality between the two is a critical component within the confines of the story.

Living in a time when I am witnessing He-Man, Man at Arms, Teela, Evil-Lyn, Trapjaw, Castle Grayskull and Battlecat on the theatrical screen is a childhood dream that I can honestly say I never thought would come to fruition. There is a strong feeling for me personally that this film is going to become a sleeper surprise and bring a new generation into becoming fans of He-Man. I can and will also say if I hear the classic He-Man theme from the '80s television series incorporated into this feature presentation I might shed tears of joy. I often find how important it is not to become repetitious with my views. However, I must state once again, I have a strong feeling this is going to be one of those memorable experiences that will have significant legs and bring a wave of audiences in an unexpected fashion. I have already purchased my ticket for premiere night. June 5, 2026, will be a night when I am reverting to being a small child holding up my toy Magic Sword of Power expressing the iconic call, "By the Power of Grayskull."

To watch Isaiah Ridley's movie reviews online, find him @Izzy's Cinematic Escape on YouTube.

Recipes



Grilled Honey and Sesame Seed Chicken Wings are perfect for watching a game

BY METRO

Food features prominently when gathering for a game watch. Perhaps no food is more synonymous with game day than chicken wings. When firing up the grill for the game this season, fans can look to this tasty recipe for Grilled Honey and Sesame Seed Chicken Wings from Lines+Angles.

GRILLED HONEY AND SESAME SEED CHICKEN WINGS

Makes 4 servings

- 1/2 cup dark soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon fresh ginger root, peeled and minced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon chili paste
- 2 pounds chicken wings, tips removed, wings separated into drumettes and flats
- 1/2 cup honey
- 2 teaspoons hoisin sauce

- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds, lightly toasted
- 1 scallion, sliced

Preheat a gas or charcoal grill to a moderate heat, about 375 F.

Stir together the soy sauce, ginger, garlic and chili paste in a large mixing bowl. Add the chicken, turning to coat, and let marinate for 15 minutes.

Spray the grill with cooking spray and then arrange the chicken on it in a single layer. Cover the grill with a lid and cook, turning often, until golden brown, about 10 to 15 minutes.

Whisk together the honey and hoisin in a small bowl and baste the chicken wings with the sauce. Cover with a lid and cook until caramelized, about 3 minutes.

Turn the wings and baste with more honey sauce. Cook uncovered for a further 2 to 3 minutes, taking care not to scorch them.

Transfer the wings to a platter and garnish with a sprinkle of sesame seeds and some sliced scallion. Serve with any remaining honey sauce on the side.

Spice up dinnertime with a traditional Cajun dish

BY METRO

Experimenting in the kitchen is one of the joys of cooking. Trying new recipes or even going off-script and tinkering with an existing recipe based on your own hunch can open eyes and treat taste buds to new flavor profiles.

Home cooks who want to expand their culinary repertoires with some particularly notable flavor can look to Cajun food and its distinct dishes to accomplish that goal. If that sounds like an exciting night in the kitchen, try this recipe for Jambalaya With Sausage and Shrimp from Lines+Angles.

JAMBALAYA WITH SAUSAGE AND SHRIMP

Makes 4 servings

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 8 ounces chorizo or andouille sausage, sliced into 1/4-inch rounds
- 1 pound large raw shell-on shrimp
- 1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 rib of celery, rinsed, trimmed and finely chopped
- 1 small red bell pepper, rinsed; trimmed, seeded, and diced
- 1 small green bell pepper, rinsed, trimmed, seeded, and diced
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and minced
- 1 1/2 cups long grain white rice, rinsed
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon salt



- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves, minced
- 14 ounces canned diced tomatoes, drained, juice reserved
- 4 cups clam juice
- 1 bay leaf
- Fresh parsley, rinsed and chopped (for garnish)

Preheat oven to 325 F. Adjust oven rack to middle position.

In a deep cast iron skillet or Dutch oven, set over medium-high heat, heat oil until shimmering, but not smoking. Add sausage and cook for 3 to 5 minutes, or until browned. Remove sausage from pan using a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Add shrimp to the pan and cook until the shells are browned on both sides, about 1 minute per side. Transfer shrimp to a large bowl and refrigerate.

Add onion, celery, peppers, and garlic to the pan. Reduce heat to medium, and cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables have softened, about 7 to 10 minutes. Add rice, tomato paste, salt,

and thyme; cook until rice is completely coated with oil, about 2 minutes.

Stir in the tomatoes, 1/4 cup reserved tomato juice, clam juice, bay leaf, and sausage. Place a piece of aluminum foil directly on rice. Bring to a boil, cover pan, transfer to oven and bake for about 18 to 20 minutes, or until the rice is almost tender and most of the liquid is absorbed.

Meanwhile, remove the shrimp from the refrigerator; peel and clean, discarding the shells. Remove pan from oven, uncover and remove aluminum foil. Gently stir in the peeled shrimp. Lay the foil back down over the surface of the rice and cover with lid, return to oven, and cook until the rice is tender, all the liquid is absorbed and the shrimp is cooked through, about 5 minutes.

Remove pan from oven, uncover, remove foil and bay leaf. Sprinkle with chopped parsley. Divide between bowls. Serve.

Summer brings plenty to do despite the heat

Take part in Bells Across South Carolina to celebrate 250 years of independence, on June 28 and July 4 at noon. The SC250 Commission invites communities across South Carolina to commemorate our state's pivotal role in securing America's independence by ringing household, community and church bells on Carolina Day and Independence Day 2026. Join the group in creating a chorus of commemoration that honors our revolutionary heritage and enduring spirit of independence. Read more at [SC250.com](https://www.sc250.com).

Kids are invited to take part in Sumter County Library's summer reading program and unearth stories all about dinosaurs. Alongside reading challenges, crafts and activities, participants can look for books and resources. The program runs through July 23, with many fun activities planned, including a visit by S.C. Aquarium. Stop by the library or register through Beanstack to begin the reading challenge. The main library is at 111 N. Harvin St. Find all schedules and much more in the Information Booklet at www.sumtercountylibrary.org.

[org/summer-reading-program](http://www.sumtercountylibrary.org/summer-reading-program). Some activities require registration, so call or visit a library branch holding an activity you'd like to register for.

Fourth Fridays Concert Series returns with country singer Cody Webb at 6:30 pm. Friday, June 26, on the grounds of the Sumter County Courthouse, 141 N. Main St. Later dates include: June 26 – Cody Webb, July 24 – Honey & New Era, Aug. 28 – Level 10 Live Band & Show and Sept. 25 – Sole Purpose. Concert attendance is free, and there will be food and drink available for sale. Downtown restaurants will be open for dine-in and take-out. Palmetto Optimist Club will be back with free books for the kids, as well as popcorn and cotton candy for sale.

Temple Sinai Jewish History Center, 11 Church St., welcomes the public to **if the Windows Could Talk: Children's Bible Stories Series** from 1:30 to 2:15 p.m. on the following dates: Aug. 1, The Burning Bush (featuring Moses); and Sept. 5, The 10 Commandments (featuring Moses). The series "is designed to be a fun experience for your children to hear the stories associated with Temple Sinai's

beautiful and historic stained glass windows."

Out and about with the kids on Wednesday during the summer and need something to do before lunch? **Listen to fun stories by Elise at the Wesmark branch of Sumter County Library.** Each Wednesday from 10:30 to 11 a.m., Elise will read to the children at 180 W. Wesmark Blvd. Storytime will be held throughout the summer and continues into the fall and winter.

Fun for the whole family, **mind-blowing magic by John Tudor and a comedy show by comedian hypnotist Colin Chapman** will be coming to Patriot Hall, 135 Haynsworth St., on Friday, June 26, and Saturday, June 27. The Mental Health Matters Magic Show and Carnival Extravaganza will be held at various times those days. Magic show tickets are \$10, and comedy show tickets are \$20. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/2jvxr69r> for tickets and showtimes.

Go on a Reading Adventure with Curious George with the Sumter Museum and Temple Sinai Jewish History Center at 1:30 p.m. Saturday, July 11, at the cen-

ter, 13 Church St. Families are invited to enjoy George's Zoo Adventure through interactive storytelling, hands-on activities and fun for children of all ages. The event is free.

The 2026 Krawlin' For Christ Jeep Show featuring Jeep vendors, live music, food vendors, RC course, and a Jeep Show and Shine Competition will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, July 25, at Sumter Civic Center, 700 W. Liberty St. Entry to this indoor and outdoor event is free to the public. All proceeds will benefit St. Jude Children's Hospital. To find out more go to <https://Krawlinforchrist.wixsite.com/my-site-1>. The show and shine registration booth will be open from 8:30-11 a.m. the day of the event. Cost to register your Jeep is \$20, all proceeds will go to St. Jude Children's Hospital. There will be raffles. No alcohol allowed.

Sumter Chapters of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity have teamed up with Sumter County Library for a new reading program. Join the group on the first Saturday of every month for Alpha Reads, starting at 11 a.m. Sumter County Library is at 111 N. Harvin St.



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WATERWORKS

FROM PAGE A17

over with as fast as possible, and we want to give you the most communication that we can possibly give you. I think you could ask any of our customers, and that is truly what we give.”

THREE-PHASE RENOVATION

In recent years, the three partners realized the WaterWorks store location on Alice Drive was not matching the look of what they were selling in pools and spas, and Eric Prince said he felt the need and sense of urgency to change that.

Moss said she wanted to sell more spas, and an industry representative told her that the location “must look like you are in the spa business.”

A three-phase renovation began in 2024 that added a pavilion area for spas, or hot tubs, a large in-ground



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

pool last summer and a full building renovation at the end of 2025 and early part of this year.

The store sells virtually everything you can imagine for the outdoors from sunglasses to pool towels, floats and furniture, Prince said.

“We are a one-stop shop for anything you can think of outside,” he said.

The outside area next to the in-ground pool includes outdoor kitch-

ens, putt-putt and artificial turf.

As sales manager, Moss will also draw out in two- and three-dimensional drawing a full, five-year plan for a family’s “backyard oasis,” she said.

The business has built a reputation from “Columbia to the coast,” Moss added.

According to Prince, distribution centers, industry vendors and representatives who learn about WaterWorks and also visit say the business is a leader in the state with the route the company has taken.

“They tell us that they have never seen a store set up like this right here,” he said, “where you can actually come and touch it and feel it and see it.”

Prince credits his grandfather’s business for having an in-ground pool on display and selling furniture also back then for where he got those ideas.

“I got an idea of how things were supposed to look because I saw it at an early age and what the customer wants to experience and how they can be able to shop it and experience it,” he said.

“I guess I feel like I have had a little bit more of an upper hand since I have been in the business my entire life and I have been able to just see it.

“We have taken the family business to just another level. But this isn’t work to us. This is fun.

“Can you imagine if this is what you did every day? You get to come out here and get people excited. We show you what you can do with a space. Whether it’s going to be an outdoor kitchen, whether it is going to be a pool or whether it’s going to be putt-putt. You never knew you could take that one little space and make it that and have the outdoor living like this.”

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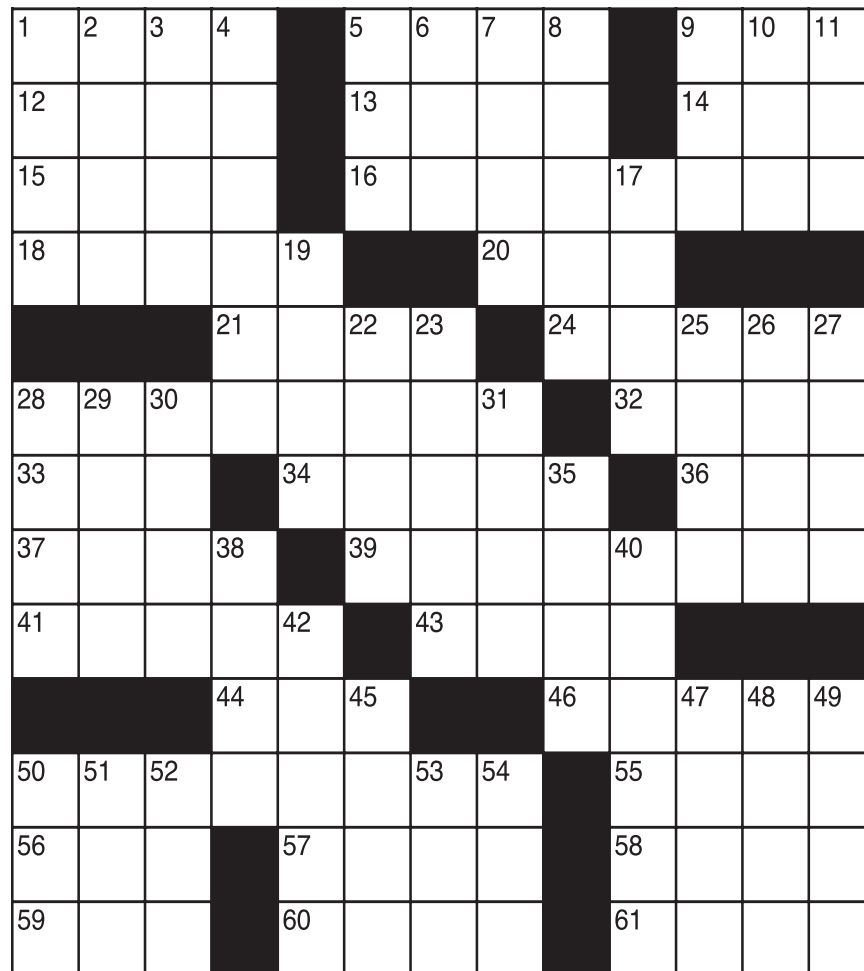
ACROSS

1. Tacks on
5. Building annexes
9. Hole-punching tool
12. Leak slowly
13. Banister
14. Fixed charge
15. On an even

16. Allowed in
18. Parsley unit
20. _____ and the same
21. Engine parts
24. Shocked responses
28. Nonconformist
32. Public melee
33. Smashing serve
34. Golden-haired
36. '60s do
37. Neat
39. House's threshold
41. Male voice
43. Tease
44. Fisherman's pole
46. Looks sullen
50. Sideways
55. Fairy-tale bad-die
56. Man
57. Sinister
58. Secluded valley
59. Trinket
60. Writing surface
61. Stared at

DOWN

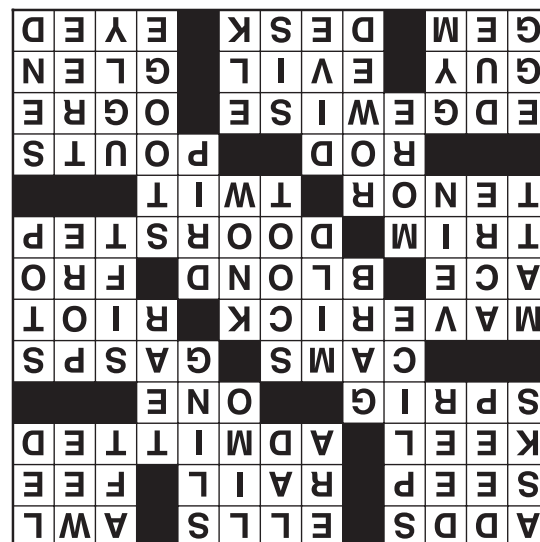
1. Probes
2. Not shallow
3. Doe
4. Edit film together
5. Memorable time
6. Young fellow
7. Chauffeured car
8. Hurl
9. Fore's partner
10. Itty-bitty
11. Guided
17. Binge
19. Clothing
22. Moderate
23. Hurry
25. Filter
26. _____ over



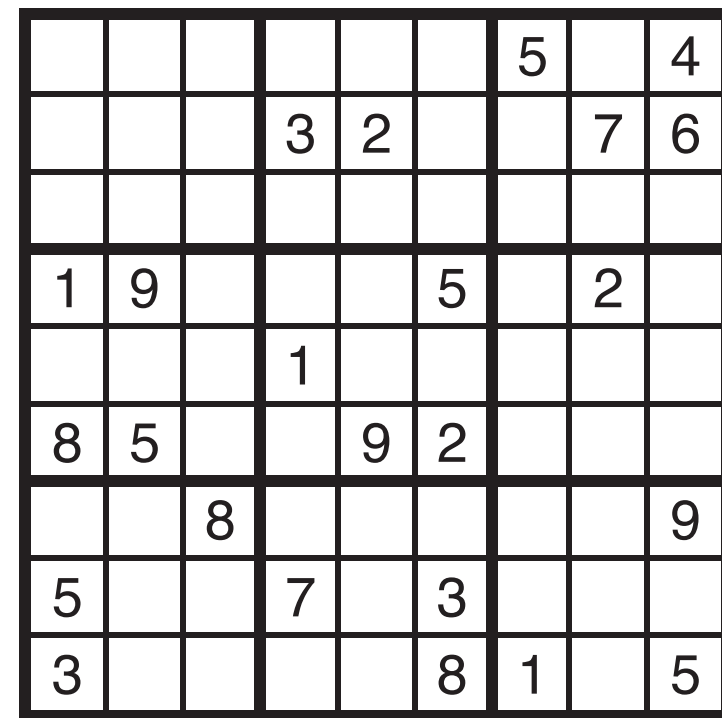
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- (study)
27. Finish
28. Actor LeBlanc
29. Unit of land
30. Mineral deposit
31. Realize
35. Trickle
38. Further
40. Moe or Curly
42. Paddled
45. Swoop
47. Homely
48. Poplar, e.g.
49. Cause to go
50. Easter edible
51. In _____ course
52. Phys ed classroom
53. Sib
54. Broad-antlered beast

SOLUTION



SUDOKU



HOW TO PLAY:

Fill the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 only once.
Each 3x3 box is outlined with a darker line. You already have a few numbers to get you started. Remember: you must not repeat the numbers 1 through 9 in the same line, column or 3x3 box.

SOLUTION

