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A26

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BACK to SCHOOL

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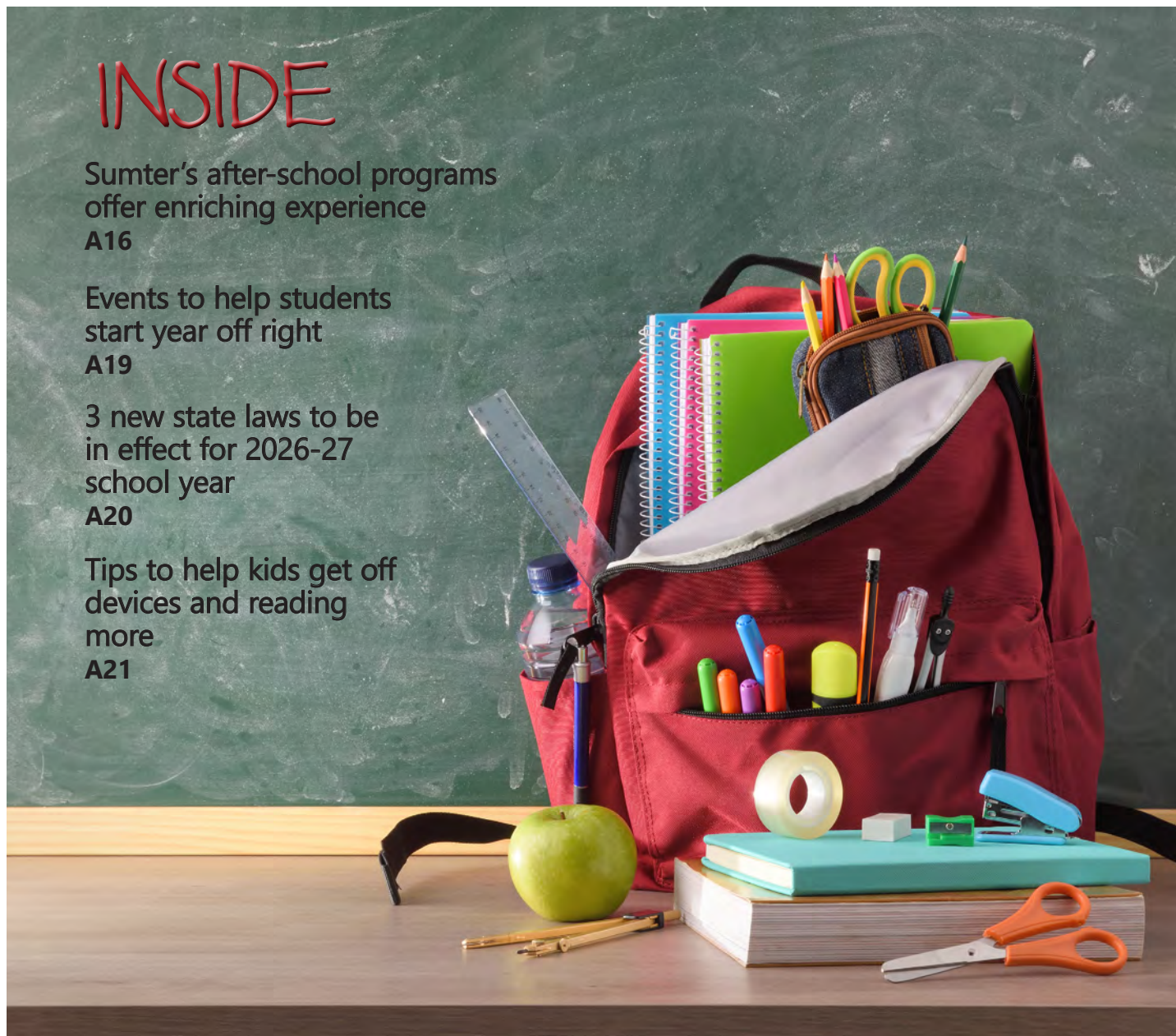
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An advertisement for Jewelry Wholesale. It features a couple in wedding attire embracing on a beach. To the left of the couple are several diamond rings. To the right, the text reads 'HAPPILY EVER AFTER STARTS Here' in a mix of fonts, followed by 'JEWELRY WHOLESALE' in large letters with a diamond icon. Below that is the address '41 E. Wesmark Blvd. • 803-778-1031' and the tagline 'We Buy Gold'. On the far right, there are more diamond rings and a blue ribbon bow.

Back-to-school season is here already

Summer may be top of mind now, but soon we'll be trading swimsuits for hoodies, watermelon and pasta salad for BBQ wings and other tailgate fare and summer camps for the books again.



Melanie Smith

The kids will be back to school in just a few short weeks, families will be busier each day, and *The Item* wants to help families make that transition again. In this back-to-school edition of *The Item Impact*, we've collected information about back-to-school bashes across our community for everyone to enjoy and to pick up some needed supplies for the first day and beyond, plus tips on how to get kids off

their devices and into reading again. We also highlight new laws taking effect this school year that parents will need to be up to date on and plenty of information about after-school care opportunities that families might be able to take advantage of this school year.

It still seems odd that schools are back in session so early in the summer now (it only started in late June, after all), and I imagine that it's difficult for children to pivot from pool games and camp activities to quizzes and benchmark tests.

Along with all of our school articles, we've included what to look out for in the world of local sports this coming fall. Several area schools' football programs will have new coaches this year. Plus, our annual Media Day is coming up quickly. This year it will be hosted again at *The Sumter Item* office at 36 W. Liberty St. and will feature all 12 tri-county football programs. We'll post videos online of each team's par-



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Crosswell Drive Elementary School hosts a Title I Community Back to School Bash in Sumter in July 2025. Turn to page 19 for a list of similar events this year.

ticipation in this annual event in the leadup to the season. We hope you'll join us to learn how each team is preparing for its best season yet.

There's plenty more in this edition. Enjoy these last few weeks of summer

as we transition into fall and maybe some cooler weather and fewer wild storms. Some less-humid days and those annual fall dishes (check out our recipe pages inside) are coming up.

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Education

Recent headlines show Sumter district budget voting, new school leaders

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

SCHOOL BOARD PASSES BUDGET AT FINAL READING; RAGIN, ALSTON CHANGE VOTES TO NOT SUPPORT

New Sumter School District Superintendent Gerald Gary's first budget includes new district office-level positions to help with retention and satisfaction of district families to grow enrollment. When it passed, it did so without the support of two of Sumter school board's leaders.

The full board passed Sumter School District's fiscal 2026-27 budget at second and final reading on June 22 by a 4-1 vote with two abstentions, but after supporting Gary's budget at first reading in May, Chairman Shawn Ragin and Vice Chair Brian Alston changed their votes at final reading.

The chair and vice chair were the only trustees of seven total who voted on the new \$176.6 million budget to change their stance for second reading.

Alston voted against the budget at final reading, while Ragin abstained. When questioned on the matter by *The Sumter Item*, the vice chair spoke by phone, while Ragin did not return calls and responded to the newspaper by email. Both said ultimately they did not support Gary's new district-level positions in the 2027 budget considering declining district enrollment.

In total, Gary requested six new district office positions as expenditures in the new budget, plus a partial new post with the reclassification of the former executive director of operations to a chief operations officer. The COO position is a pay upgrade to the former role.

The six new posts include a deputy superintendent, director of secondary education, district marketing coordinator, procurement manager, safety director and district athletic director.

The total projected cost for all the



BRUCE MILLS / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter school board Chairman Shawn Ragin, right, makes remarks at a recent board meeting as Vice Chair Brian Alston listens. After supporting new Superintendent Gerald Gary's first budget at first reading in May, the two board leaders changed their votes at second reading in late June to not support it.

additions is \$870,902 to include salaries and benefits.

The new additions are less than \$1.1 million in pay increases to building service workers, or custodians, that Ragin suggested the district's administration look into at first reading and eventually passed in the new budget.

Alston told *The Item* he only supported the budget at first reading on May 4 to give district administration time to change its response that the new district office positions would only be sustained by teacher and staff attrition, Alston said.

But in the budget process during May and June, Gary provided multiple benefits from his perspective for the new district hires to direct questions from Alston and others.

Gary said the new administrators will help current school-level instructional staff "through coaching, professional development, supervision and holding people accountable" to improve academics. The new district leaders will also help teachers to address students' increasing social and emotional needs. Additionally — in

combination with the new marketing coordinator — he said the new district administrators will help to retain and attract teachers and students and address a 20%-plus decline in enrollment in the last decade. Increased district enrollment would drive additional state funding appropriations.

In the board's top two leadership positions for about 1.5 years and since the November 2024 election, Ragin and Alston have never asked district administration for an official enrollment presentation to address possible solutions.

There were about 30 school-level position cuts that included a few instructional staff in the new budget, but all those jobs had been "budgeted vacancies" for years — due to the student losses — that moved forward in ensuing budgets, according to district Chief Financial Officer Shatika Spearman.

Throughout the budget process, the superintendent also said moving forward the total budget needs to be looked at "line by line" to consider what is necessary and what is not.

The vice chair told the newspaper

that he does support Gary and moving his vision forward. He said that he is not against the new positions.

"It's not that I am against the positions," Alston said, "I am just unsettled when it comes to sustainability and looking at avenues to move that vision forward."

Ragin provided a detailed statement to *The Item* on why he abstained at final reading after approving the budget at first reading, and he essentially said that he changed his mind.

"As board members, we must recognize the ability we have to reassess our positions on both policies and in this case, the budget through multiple readings," he said. "That's the beauty of having multiple readings. It is essential for us to remain flexible and open to changing our decisions when we are better informed."

In emailed remarks, Ragin also said that he "finds it contradictory to add these [top-level] positions while simultaneously considering cuts to school staff."

When the newspaper responded that the school-level cuts were "budget vacancies" that had moved forward over time, he declined to offer a specific response and said in his opinion it was not productive to continue revisiting the budget vote issue.

The Item also asked both leaders regarding the six new positions and the reclassified COO if there were any they did consider critical and essential in the new budget.

Both Alston and Ragin said they did not consider it their role as board members to decide which positions were essential and which are not. Instead, that is the role of district administration, they said.

Like Ragin, fellow trustee Phil Leventis also abstained at second reading, but he had abstained at the initial reading as well. In his second year as a board member, Leventis told the newspaper at

EDUCATION

FROM PAGE A4

least twice in recent months that the annual budgeting process needs to look more deeply into the total district budget and the summary explanations provided by Spearman were not adequate.

In a statement explaining his abstention provided at the second reading, Leventis said “the process of writing our budget is opaque to the board, which is charged by the public with managing hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer monies.”

Before being elected to represent Area 8 on the school board, Leventis was a state senator in the General Assembly for 32 years, representing the greater Sumter region.

The board and district administration did not request a millage (tax) increase from Sumter County Council for the new fiscal year that just began on July 1.

In a unanimous vote, Sumter school board chose Gary as its new district superintendent on March 9, and he officially began in the role April 1.

LIBERTY'S IVEY MOVES TO FOUNDATION ROLE; MIDLANDS SUPERINTENDENT IS NEW SCHOOL LEADER

In a leadership announcement, Liberty STEAM's board voted May 26 to allow Executive Director Trevor Ivey to move into a new school foundation role, and a Midlands-area superintendent who was leaving Lexington intending to retire was named the school's new leader.

Ivey, a school co-founder in 2019, will help establish the Liberty STEAM Charter School Foundation as a development arm and separate organization, and retiring Lexington School District 2 Superintendent Brenda Hafner became Liberty's new school leader in a superintendent position. Both moves were effective July 1.

Liberty officials cited the transition as the best path forward for the school's long-term growth and impact, and the board of directors' actions occurred at its monthly regularly scheduled meeting at the public charter school's elementary academy campus in Sumter Mall.

Ivey's role in starting the new foundation is to focus on fundraising, partnerships and supporting Liberty's long-

term expansion efforts to include the future high school vision and an early college/technical high school concept, he said. Officially, at the meeting, the board voted unanimously to accept his resignation as the school's executive director on June 30 to allow him to pursue the new opportunity.

The nine-member board also voted unanimously on naming Hafner as superintendent with a three-year contract. As Ivey transitions to his off-site role, she will oversee the school's day-to-day operations.

Hafner has ties to Sumter after serving about 4.5 years as a top administrator in Sumter School District from February 2018 until June 2022. Former interim district Superintendent Debbie Hamm hired her as an assistant superintendent shortly after arriving in Sumter in fall 2017, and Hafner continued as chief of schools under former leader Penelope Martin-Knox.

She left Sumter for the superintendent post in Lexington 2, where she served four years and retired effective June 30. The West Columbia-based district had an official enrollment of 8,019 students this spring, according to the state Department of Education.

Last school year, Liberty was a K-5 school with 913 students. In its growth model, the charter school adds one grade per year, or 150 total students. When Liberty reaches its current buildup with four academies across grades K-12 in 2032-33, the school will have an estimated 2,061 students. However, school leaders have said at various times that additional growth may occur with more campuses.

In a released statement, the board said it determined that moving to a superintendent structure best reflected the level of authority, leadership and operational oversight needed to lead Liberty into its next growth phase.

Ivey additionally told *The Item* that school leaders realized “we needed a true superintendent-level leader prepared to help lead a rapidly growing multi-campus public school system into its next phase of growth and development.”

WRIGHT, STAGGERS AND NEWCOMER FILL HIGH SCHOOL-LEVEL POSTS IN SUMTER

Two Sumter School District veterans and one newcomer have filled open high school-level principal positions for the new school year.

In June, Maggie Wright was named

the new principal at Sumter Career and Technology Center and Tarsha Staggers the new leader at Crestwood High School, while a Lexington-Richland School District Five administrator took the helm at Lakewood High, according to news releases from a district spokeswoman.

New Superintendent Gerald Gary, who started locally on April 1, made the appointments.

Wright takes over at the district's career and technology center after longtime principal Shirrie Miller retired at the end of the 2025-26 school year. Wright was previously the school leader at Lakewood.

Staggers is Crestwood's new principal after former leader Jayson Leach resigned in late February due to “personal, family health matters,” according to Shelly Galloway, the district's executive director of communication and civic engagement.

Staggers made the move to Crestwood from feeder middle school Hillcrest Middle in Dalzell, where she was principal for more than a decade. Her leadership allowed Hillcrest to achieve noteworthy academic accolades along the way.

Given Wright's move to the career center, Dutch Fork High School's Lori Grant is the new Lakewood principal. In recent years, she was assistant principal for instruction at the Irmo-based school in Lexington-Richland 5, which is where Gary moved from to be Sumter's new superintendent.

Before becoming chief operations officer in that district, Gary was the principal at Dutch Fork, which during his tenure was recognized as a Palmetto's Finest Award winner by South Carolina Association of School Administrators. The honor is one of the most coveted and respected school awards in the state and encompasses student achievement, instructional programs, professional learning communities and school culture.

All moves were effective July 1.

The only local district high school to not experience changeover at the principal level was Sumter High, where Anamaria Sandor continues as the school's leader.

GEDDINGS, CARNES, MITCHELL, CATO ARE NEW ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Four Sumter School District veterans will all step into their first-ever principal positions at the elementary and middle school levels with the new

school year.

In June, Jennifer Geddings was selected as the new leader at Pocalla Springs Elementary School and Christine Carnes was named the new principal at Cherryvale Elementary. At the middle school level, Dana Mitchell took over at Chestnut Oaks while Troy Cato is the new leader at Hillcrest in Dalzell.

New Superintendent Gerald Gary made the appointments and district Executive Director of Communication and Civic Engagement Shelly Galloway distributed the news releases.

Both Geddings and Carnes replace principals who retired at the conclusion of last school year.

After Michelle McBride's retirement at Pocalla Springs on Bethel Church Road in the southern portion of Sumter County, Geddings now moves in. She most recently served as an assistant principal at Manchester Elementary in Pinewood, according to Galloway.

Following Debbie Healey's retirement from Cherryvale at 1420 Furman Drive and near Shaw Air Force Base, Carnes is the elementary school's new leader. She transfers to the school from a district staff position as coordinator of elementary English/language arts, social studies and the Read to Succeed program, where she provided instructional leadership and support to schools across the district, a release said.

Mitchell and Cato replace middle school principals who left their posts.

Former Chestnut Oaks Principal Jenai Edwards left the district for a job opportunity elsewhere, Galloway said, and that created the opening for Mitchell. She began her career in Sumter School District as an eighth-grade science teacher at Chestnut Oaks from 2010 to 2013.

Mitchell moves to the Oswego Highway school in Sumter County from Sumter High, where she was an assistant principal for three years.

After Tarsha Staggers left Hillcrest for the principal position at Crestwood High, Cato was named the Dalzell school's new leader. He moves to Hillcrest from Lakewood High, where he was an assistant principal.

Cato demonstrated a strong commitment to student achievement, school culture and educational excellence at Lakewood, according to a release.

All moves were effective July 1. The upcoming 2026-27 school year in Sumter School District begins Tuesday, Aug. 4, for students.

Entertainment

'Masters of the Universe' is a nostalgic journey back into childhood

My father was one of my greatest influences when it came to sword and sorcery entertainment in the form of novelizations, television series, comics and film. He introduced me to mythological heroes from his collection ranging from Conan the Barbarian to Kull the Conqueror, Death Dealer and Red Sonja. Every one of those mystical and majestic stories awakened my imagination in ways that were completely unexpected.



**A REVIEW BY
ISIAH RIDLEY**

Throughout the '80s and '90s there remains an eclectic array of entertaining classic animation, films, television series and action figures shaping and molding my childhood. One of my favorite cartoons from the '80s was and remains "He-Man and The Masters of the Universe." The series from Filmation studios presents the story of Prince Adam from Eternia, chosen as the hero and defender of the secrets of Castle Grayskull. He embraces his destiny as He-Man in the battle against Skeletor and his nefarious forces. Every episode offers a singular story without necessarily expanding the lore into a continuing storyline with a significant resolution.

Growing up, I remember having the action figures of He-Man, Battlecat, Skeletor, Castle Grayskull, Trap-Jaw, Beast-Man and a massive toy set piece symbolizing Skeletor punishing his enemies or minions with slime. It is one of those pieces an individual would have to see a picture of to visualize my description. He-Man's popularity during this period brought forth a live-action adaptation starring Dolph Lundgren as the title character and



PHOTO BY ANDREW PARK / INVISION / AP

From left, Camila Mendes, Nicholas Galitzine and Idris Elba arrive at the premiere of "Masters of the Universe" on May 17, 2026, at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles.

Frank Langella as Skeletor. It remains one of the cheesiest, corniest and ridiculous films in cinema; however, as a child of the '80s, I cherish it for remaining a cult classic. A regret I still have to this day is not taking care of or keeping those action figures from my childhood. I can only imagine the amount of money all of them would have been worth in 2026.

There are three avenues a director could take when adapting He-Man into a live-action cinematic story. First is embracing the literal cheese factor from the '80s animated series, second is establishing a balance between cheese and seriousness or a complete deviation from the familiar trope into an unrecognizable concept. Director Travis Knight thought it necessary to fully navigate the humor, campy and over-the-top conceptual elements where Masters of the Universe resides.

The story begins in Eternia with Prince Adam depicted as the outcast among warriors with no one believing in his abilities. After an ambush from Skeletor and his forces, Adam for his protection cast to Earth with the Magic Sword of Power. He spent his

entire growing phase remembering his past, yearning for a return to Eternia. After reuniting with childhood friend Teela, he returns to an apocalyptic, dystopian and scoured home, realizing he must reclaim the kingdom from the clutches of evil and become the champion of Eternia. Nicholas Galitzine portrays Prince Adam/He-Man, Camila Mendes is Teela, Idris Elba is Duncan/Man-At-Arms, and Jared Leto provides motion capture/voice acting of Skeletor.

It is important in stating this film follows every bit of the '80s animated series to perfection with the dialogue, bright and colorful visuals, bombastic orchestral arrangements, over-the-top action and Easter egg references to the cartoon. Galitzine's performance as Prince Adam/He-Man was a surprise. He brought a unique sense of charm, honor and believability to the role. The only minor complaint I have about his look is that it would have been preferable if they kept Adam physically weak in appearance, thus making his transformation far more surprising. His performance as He-Man was entertaining with obvious charisma and intensity, and it was ob-

vious how hard he worked in crafting his body physically to match He-Man's chiseled physique. While he still behaved more like Prince Adam instead of He-Man in that form, he was a surprising highlight.

Leto as Skeletor was every bit as fun, exciting and 100% faithful to the source material. Too many villain renderings in recent years found themselves written or visualized as "cool," "exciting" or "sympathetic." Skeletor is a character fully understanding he is evil and embraces his true nature. Leto understood the assignment in leaning fully into chewing the scene with classic '80s cartoon Skeletor, combining those concepts with the proper amount of nefarious sinister behavior. I do not believe any other actor could have brought to the table what Leto established with his performance.

Visually Eternia is beautiful, and I love how the majority of the film takes place in Eternia rather than entirely on Earth. Action sequences feature the traditional method of fight scenes captured steady, tight and pulling the camera back, allowing the audience to see what is happening. Here is how I will articulate the presentation of "Masters of the Universe": For anyone familiar with these films, imagine "Highlander," "Guardians of the Galaxy," "Flash Gordon" and "Conan the Barbarian." Combine all of them, and for me, that is what this film represents. It is exactly how it needed to be in the entertaining, exciting, colorful, humorous and charming department. Great for the entire family and an epic, electric, bombastic orchestral score featuring Brian May from the band Queen.

Overall, I found myself having an amazing amount of fun with this film, taking me back on a nostalgia journey into my childhood once again. It is sincerely as if the cartoon is coming alive on the big screen. I recommend it and give "Masters of the Universe" a 10/10 with two thumbs up. Stay for two scenes during the credits as well.

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

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'A Look at Sumter 1900-1925' – Remembrances of Cassie Nicholes

Reflections revisits the author of Historical Sketches of Sumter County, Cassie Nicholes. She was considered to be one of Sumter's foremost histo-



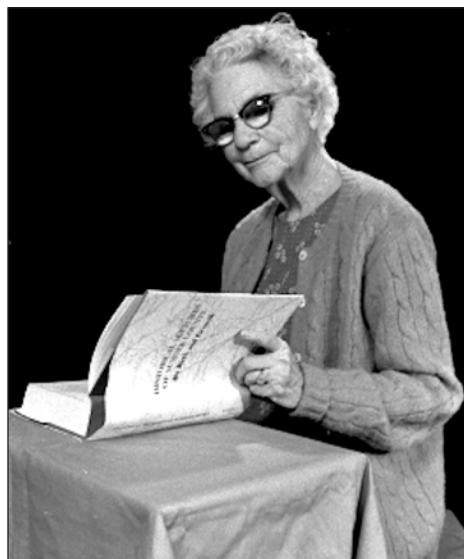
Sammy Way
REFLECTIONS

rians. "Born in Sumter County before the turn of the century, she has defied the accepted norms."

According to the late Mike Karvelas, she was keeping her house at the age of

83 while working as an associate editor of the *Sumter News*. She had an acute memory of Sumter's past, which is the topic of this Reflections. Data and photos used to prepare this piece were acquired from *The Item* archives; the writings of Nicholes were also consulted.

According to Nicholes, "During



Cassie Nicholes

the first 25 years of the 20th century, Sumter experienced much activity along many lines. As the new century began, it tended to focus on the businesses and industries which lined downtown Sumter. Ms. Nicholes reported that when the new century began, city streets remained unpaved. Bricks were used as the first improvement material



Jones Mules, Commander Coal building

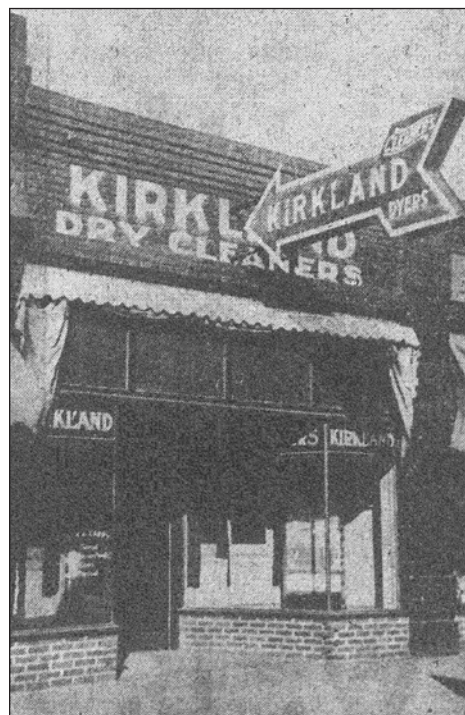
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This ad for Winburn Photography was published Feb. 14, 1914.



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DuRant Hardware Co. :: Exhibit Now On

This ad for DuRant Hardware was published in December 1914.

in paving Main Street beginning at Canal Street and ending at Bartlette Street. As stated in Nicholes' research, this project was concluded in 1910 during the mayoralty of W.B. Boyle.

Some of the merchants conducting retail businesses were V.H. Phelps, grocer; Levy and Moses, health food distributors; the Palace Shaving Parlor and the Cash Dry Goods Company.

"The J.C. Craig Furniture Store opened four years later on the corner of Canal and N. Main St. Mr. Hurst later opened a funeral home in the rear of this establishment. Mr. W.S. Reynolds opened a Sporting Goods store on North Main followed by J. H. Winborn's photography shop on South Main Street. In 1906 Durant Hardware opened in that year along with E.L. Bogel who set up a bicycle shop and accessories store hoping to do business on Main Street. Two popular men's shops, D.J. Chandlers and Cuttino,

soon opened and were well received in the community. A music store opened downtown in 1903 under the direction of Prof. Schumacher. The store sold music rolls, violins, mandolins, guitars, banjos, harps, Columbia zithers, and 'talking machines.' Heron's Pharmacy opened for business in 1907 remaining one of the most popular drug stores on Main Street for many years."

Numerous additional businesses opened during that time including "Sumter Marble and Granite Works, Commander Coal, The New York Bakery, and the Star Restaurant. Also, Stubbs Brothers Men's Store, the O'Donnell Co., Bee and Dee Cleaners, Kirkland Cleaners, A.J. Hatfield Auto Parts, Tom Evans Garage, and in 1921 R.H. Tucker's Nu-Idea School Supply Company."

According to Nicholes, Sumter's businesses were indeed experiencing extensive growth and development during this period of commercial expansion.

Sumter United Ministries asks for food pantry donations

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysa@theitem.com

Sumter United Ministries is asking the public for donations to stock its food pantry.

According to the nonprofit, Sumter County has experienced a significant increase in the need for food assistance.

The nonprofit used to serve two to three families daily. Currently, they are assisting six to 10 families a day, an average of 20-30 individuals seeking support.

The food pantry shelves are emptying much faster, which is why they are seeking the community's help.

The pantry frequently runs out of the following items:

- Beef stew
- Manwich
- Mac and cheese
- Dry instant milk
- Instant potatoes
- Jelly
- Grits (canisters and boxes of individual packages)
- Oatmeal (canisters and boxes of individual packages)

Donations can be gathered in various ways:

- Hosting a food drive
- Picking an extra item or two when grocery shopping
- Inviting your church, Sunday school class, book club, business, organization or civic group to participate

Donations can be dropped off at Sumter United Ministries, 36 Artillery Drive, Monday to Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Sumter United Ministries is asking the public for donations to stock its food pantry. It is at 36 S. Artillery Drive in Sumter.

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Dalzell church celebrates 150 years

Hopewell Baptist still sings as its tradition goes and follows God's word in its approach

BY BRUCE MILLS

bruce@theitem.com

The adage that the more things change the more they stay the same can apply in a good way to Dalzell's Hopewell Baptist Church, which recently celebrated its 150th anniversary.

Founded in 1876 after a peaceful church division from High Hills Baptist Church on Meeting House Road in Dalzell, Hopewell has held to its tradition for singing and having a popular Gospel choir, and its pastor holds closely to God's word in his teaching and personal walk.

The Rev. Richard Addison, some longtime church members and some relatively newer members in comparison all sat down recently and discussed Hopewell's history and family spirit that lives on today.

At the time of the division from High Hills Baptist 150 years ago, Hopewell derived its name. According to historical accounts, High Hills'

members told the separating group and new church founders "We hope you well," and the Hopewell name has stood the test of time.

Not much is known about the new church's vision from the late 1870s, but the 30 to 50 founding church members met for a few years in a brush arbor nearby without much protection from the elements. It did have a singing Gospel choir back then.

Longtime Hopewell members include Abraham Alston, Calpurnia Gethers, Syntyche Mallard and Geneva Russ, who is the eldest of them all at 94. Some longtime members have

family members who were part of the church plant from 1876, they said.

After a few years meeting outside, a wood building was constructed that became the church's new home. It no longer stands but was just down the hill from the current facility

at 3285 Peach Orchard Road.

Fast forward to 1965, and Hopewell moved into its current brick building.

The pastor at the time was the Rev. L.W. Walker, and he was the longest-serving pastor in the church's history, leading Hopewell from 1952 to 2002.

When the new church building

HOPEWELL BAPTIST CHURCH

Address: 3285 Peach Orchard Road, Dalzell, SC 29040

Phone: (803) 499-2920

Web: hopewellbaptistchurchsc.com

Sunday: Church school: 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.;
Worship service: 10 a.m.

Tuesday and Wednesday: Bible studies via
Zoom are at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. both days.



BRUCE MILLS / THE SUMTER ITEM

Several longtime Hopewell Baptist Church members and new members participate in a group photo with Pastor Richard Addison at the front of the church recently. Hopewell recently celebrated its 150th anniversary.

opened, Hopewell members participated in a grand march up the hill from the former wood structure.

The church has always held its anniversary celebration on the fourth Sunday in May, Addison said.

150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AND REFLECTIONS

The church began its sesquicentennial celebration during Black History Month in February when it recognized some former choir members, member Mary Blanding said.

Events continued through the end of May when Hopewell held its anniversary celebration festivities. A large



PHOTO PROVIDED

A cornerstone monument was placed in Hopewell's new building when it opened in 1965 and still is at the front of the building. The monument commemorates the founding pastor, the Rev. J. Capers, founding deacons and the deacons and trustees from 1965.

SEE HOPEWELL, PAGE A11

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HOPEWELL BAPTIST BY THE NUMBERS

1876

Year Hopewell Baptist
was founded

150

Years Hopewell has been
in existence. In May,
the church celebrated its
150th anniversary.

60

Years in current church facility
(opened in 1965)

50

Years Hopewell's longest-
serving pastor served. It was
the Rev. L.W. Walker
(1952 to 2002).

30

At least 30 to 50 people were
part of the church's initial
founding in 1876.

23

Total churches in
Wateree Baptist Association's
lower division that Hopewell
is a part of.

20

Years the Rev. Richard Addison
has served at Hopewell.

11

Total number of pastors in
church's 150 year history.

Source: Hopewell Baptist Church

HOPEWELL

FROM PAGE A10

churchwide picnic celebrating 150 years occurred on Saturday, May 23, followed by the Sunday, May 24, church service.

At the picnic, Hopewell members commemorated the 1965 grand march by walking up the hill from the former church home to the current home. More than 100 people took part in the honorary weekend, including former members who traveled in from out of town and out of state, Addison said.

Through the decades, Hopewell has maintained a strong music focus and a commitment to God's word, according to Mallard.

"Love maintains us, but we have also held to our traditions," she said. "A lot of things are changing as the world evolves, but we still have the spirit of singing here. The church was known for having a great Gospel choir.

"So the spirit of the founding church is still here, and we carry that forward. We have not drifted far away. We still sing the hymns.

"We also have a traditional preacher in Rev. Addison. You can go to some churches and you don't hear Bible teaching, and it is more of the what the world does. You come here on Sunday morning, and you are going to hear what the Bible says and get Scriptures shown to you."

Blanding added that Addison's approach in the pulpit and his personal walk in life is what brought her and her husband to Hopewell and has kept them there.

"Two important reasons for us are: No. 1 he lives what he preaches," she said. "And the other thing is our pastor literally preaches the word, and he is not giving us something fake. And we get to know that because he keeps us in study."

She was referencing Addison's weekly Bible studies.

He holds four of them per week via a virtual Zoom platform on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. They are at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. each day. The earlier study is mostly for seniors, while the evening study is often for people who work, he added.

One of the longtime members, Calpurnia Gethers, said the Hopewell family has played a big part in the person she has become.

"From my early years in Sunday School, some of those same teachers also taught me in public school," she said. "As a family, we spent most of our time when we were not working at the church. Whenever the church doors were open, we were here."



Hopewell Baptist members participate in a grand march in 1965 up the hill from the former wood building structure in Dalzell to the new church building when it opened.

PHOTO PROVIDED

Another elder member, Geneva Russ, said the church family has treated her very well. She added that she was the president of Hopewell's Senior Missionary Women for 19 years.

At 94, she is no longer in the role.

"As women, we still go to her for whatever things we need," Blanding said. "She is still hanging in there with the women."

Russ said that love is what makes the Hopewell congregation so resilient and welcoming after all these years.

"I believe it's love," she said. "We love each other and love God."

Blanding added the welcoming atmosphere resonates through the church.

"This is a good place to be at Hopewell Baptist Church," she said. "It's like family."

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Lasagna with Zucchini and Meat Sauce hits the spot

Comfort food is an umbrella term that refers to a wide array of dishes. For fans of Italian food, there may be no dish that fits the comfort food mold better than lasagna. Lasagna can be made with a wide array of ingredients, and each iteration of it qualifies as comfort food. That's certainly the case with this recipe for Lasagna With Zucchini and Meat Sauce from Lines+Angles.

LASAGNA WITH ZUCCHINI AND MEAT SAUCE

Makes 9 servings

2 large zucchini, rinsed and trimmed
Salt
12 dried lasagna noodles
1 pound ground beef
1 1/2 teaspoons ground black pepper
1 small green bell pepper, rinsed, trimmed and diced
1 onion, peeled and diced

8 ounces tomato paste
15 ounces canned tomato sauce
3 1/2 tablespoons red wine
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano
1 egg, beaten
2 cups low-fat ricotta cheese
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
2 cups grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 325 F. Coat a deep 9 x 13-inch baking pan with nonstick cooking spray.

Slice zucchini lengthwise into very thin slices. Sprinkle slices lightly with salt; set aside to drain in a colander.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the noodles and cook until al dente, 8 to 12 minutes. Drain, immerse in cold water to cool and drain again. Lay the noodles in a single layer on a baking sheet and cover with plastic wrap.

Meanwhile, in a large skillet, set over medium-high heat, cook and stir the ground beef and black pepper for 5 min-

utes. Drain excess grease from pan. Add in green pepper and onion; cook and stir until beef is no longer pink. Stir in tomato paste, tomato sauce, wine, basil, and oregano. If sauce is too thick, add a small amount of warm water. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer sauce for about 20 minutes, stirring frequently.

Meanwhile, stir egg, ricotta and parsley together in a bowl and mix well.

To assemble lasagna, spread 1/3 of the meat sauce into the bottom of prepared pan. Then layer 1/3 of the cooked lasagna noodles, 1/3 of the zucchini slices, 1/2 of the ricotta mixture, 1/3 of the mozzarella cheese. Repeat the layers ending with a layer of zucchini followed by a layer of noodles. Spread Parmesan cheese evenly over the top; cover with foil.

Bake for 45 minutes. Remove foil; increase oven temperature to 350 F, and bake an additional 15 minutes. Let stand for 5 or 10 minutes before serving.

Tip: This may be assembled a day ahead. Refrigerate until ready to bake.



Potato salad with a twist

Potato salad is a backyard barbecue staple, and this recipe for Potato Salad With New Potatoes, Zucchini, Olives, and Almond Pesto from Lines+Angles offers a fresh and tasty twist to this popular side dish.

POTATO SALAD WITH NEW POTATOES, ZUCCHINI, OLIVES, AND ALMOND PESTO

Makes 4 servings

For the pesto:

3 cups basil, leaves only
1/2 cup whole blanched almonds
1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, finely grated
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt



1/2 cups extra-virgin olive oil

For the salad:

1 3/4 pounds new potatoes
2 zucchinis, halved and sliced
1 1/4 cups black olives, pitted

1 small handful basil, leaves only
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper

For the pesto: Combine the basil leaves, almonds, Parmesan, garlic and salt in a food processor.

Blend on high until broken down and finely chopped. Scrape down the sides of the processor if needed.

Continue to blend on a low setting, drizzling in the olive oil

through the feeder spout until the pesto comes together. Adjust seasoning to taste and chill until needed.

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Sticky rice recipes will satisfy your sweet tooth

FEATURE IMPACT

Although many people associate rice with savory dishes, this staple grain can actually level up your dessert game, too. Cultures from around the world have invented a variety of creative ways to turn the sticky rice in your pantry into treats you can whip up when you're on the prowl for something sweet.

Sticky rice, also known as sweet rice, is a specific type of short- or medium-grain rice that, as the name implies, becomes sticky when cooked. With Success Boil-in-Bag Sticky Rice, it's simple to make sweet, soft, perfectly cooked rice for desserts without extra steps, equipment or hassle. In only 12 minutes, you'll have an ideal base to use for your favorite recipes.

A rice-based take on a quintessential British dessert, this Sticky Toffee Pudding is decadent and full of mouthwatering flavor. With the rich sweetness of brown sugar and vanilla imbued in every bite, it's a warm, comforting dessert you might find yourself craving on a rainy day or cold night. Take it to the next level by adding caramelized banana and toasted coconut toppings.

For a more refreshing, summery option, transport your kitchen to the tropics with this Thai-inspired Sticky Rice with Mango and Coconut. Creamy coconut-infused rice contrasts with juicy ripe mango slices, nutty black sesame seeds and cooling mint-leaf garnishes for a fun, fresh blend of textures and flavors that might have you picturing palm trees. If you're not a mango fan, feel free to swap in a different tropical fruit of your choice.

The versatility of rice makes it an excellent mainstay to keep on hand in your kitchen, adding ease and flexibility to your daily meal routine. For more ideas on how to use rice for dessert — or for breakfast, lunch and dinner — visit SuccessRice.com.

STICKY TOFFEE PUDDING

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 25 minutes

Servings: 2-4

1 bag Success Sticky Rice

3/4 cup milk

2 tablespoons brown sugar

3/8 teaspoon salt, divided

1 stick unsalted butter



1/2 cup brown sugar

1/2 cup heavy cream

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

toasted coconut, for garnish

Caramelized Banana:

1 tablespoon butter

1 tablespoon brown sugar

1 banana, sliced into coins

1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract

Prepare rice according to package directions.

Remove rice from bag. Return to pot and stir in milk, brown sugar and 1/4 teaspoon salt. Simmer 5 minutes.

In small saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Stir in sugar 2 minutes, or until dissolved. Whisk in cream and bring to simmer. Cook 5 minutes until thickened. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla and remaining salt.

To make caramelized banana: In medium skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Stir in brown sugar until syrupy. Add banana coins in single layer and cook 2 minutes per side until golden brown. Drizzle vanilla on top.

Add rice to bowl. Pour toffee sauce on top. Garnish with caramelized bananas and coconut. Serve warm or chilled.

STICKY RICE WITH MANGO AND COCONUT

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 12 minutes

Servings: 2-4

1 bag Success Sticky Rice

1 1/2 cups water

1 1/4 cups coconut milk, divided

3 1/2 tablespoons brown sugar, divided

2 mangoes, sliced

1 tablespoon black sesame seeds

fresh mint leaves, for garnish

Prepare rice according to package directions



using 1 1/2 cups water, 1 cup coconut milk and 1 1/2 tablespoons brown sugar rather than 4 cups water.

In separate small saucepan over medium heat, bring remaining coconut milk and brown sugar to boil. Cook, stirring often, 8-10 minutes, or until thickened and syrupy.

Divide rice among four serving bowls. Arrange mango slices over top; drizzle with coconut milk syrup. Garnish with black sesame seeds and mint.

Substitution: Use pineapple, guava or papaya for mango, if desired.

Source: Success Rice

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From concerts to book signings to farmers markets, July and August are packed with local activities

Honey & the New Era Band performs during the 2026 Shaw Air Force Base Freedom Bash at Shaw on July 4, 2026. The Independence Day event featured a concert for servicemembers, Department of War civilians, military retirees and their families. The band will play during the Fourth Fridays Concert Series on July 24.

U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY STAFF
SGT. MAX J. DAIGLE



Sumter Farmers Market is now open every Friday from noon to 5 p.m. and the first and third Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 200 Miller Road. Shop fresh and local produce and pasture-raised meat, sweet treats, olive oils, sauces, salad dressings, jams and jellies, freeze-dried treats, lemonade, crafters, artisans, soaps, specialty teas and coffees, food trucks and more.

Shop local on Friday evenings from 4 to 8 p.m. at the **South Sumter Farmer's and Flea Market**. Browse fresh produce, handmade goods, clothing, home decor, food and vendor tables while supporting neighbors and small businesses. The market is at 337 Manning Ave.

Take part in an intimate afternoon celebrating the release of **"The Book of Mya"** by Jamya June on Sunday, July 19, from 3:45 to 6 p.m. at the James Santee Wateree RTA Pavilion. Get your book signed and meet June during the event. The event will be at 129 S. Harvin St., Sumter.

Fourth Fridays Concert Series returns July 24 with Honey & New Era, Aug. 28 with Level 10 Live Band & Show and Sept. 25 with 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. Bring your chairs (no coolers) and spend an evening in downtown Sumter!

Get ready to laugh twice as hard at the **Sumter Comedy Showcase: Double Trouble** – when there will be two hilarious acts in one night! MTW Promotions will present the show Saturday, July 25, at Patriot Hall, 135 Haynsworth St., starting at 7 p.m. According to the website, "This in-person event brings together two hilarious comedians delivering the hits to have you rolling in the aisles. Whether you're out with friends or just need a good chuckle, this is the place to be. Don't miss out on the fun, great vibes

and plenty of laughs." Buy your tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/2z5pnabj>.

Don't miss out on a good time at Sumter's second-annual **Mr. Hops Beer Emporium** on Saturday, Aug. 1, at Sumter Original Brewery. Join Mr. Hops and breweries from all over at SOB for this brew party. The event starts at 1 p.m. at 2 S. Main St. Get tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/3mx9xnmx>.

The next **community cleanup** is coming up. City of Sumter invites everyone to pitch in to clean up their community through volunteer litter clean-up days in 2026. Spend a couple hours in the morning beautifying the area. Remaining days this year are Aug. 15, Oct. 17 and Dec. 12. Anyone who would like to volunteer can sign up at the city's website, <https://tinyurl.com/mry-zpu5n>. People can form cleanup teams to participate, but according to the site, you don't have to stick to just the scheduled days to help beautify your community. The city provides free supplies and trash bag pickup service.

Sip a cup of tea and celebrate the women who helped shape America at the **Revolutionary High Tea** from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 22, at Sumter Museum, 122 N. Washington St. "Enjoy classic scones, delicate petit fours, tea, period-inspired crafts and captivating stories that bring the past to life. Colonial daywear is encouraged but not required. Be sure to browse our Costume Closet. From gowns and petticoats to accessories, you may find just what you need for Revolutionary High Tea." Tickets are \$10 / member; and \$15/public. To purchase tickets visit, <https://tinyurl.com/52v4a377>.

Mackenzie Sholtz's work in **"Hand-work Exhibit: Celebrating Community-based Art and Art Education"** showcases Aug. 27 to Oct. 23 at Sumter County Gallery of Art. For 250th U.S. anniversary-related sewing classes, check out "Learn to Make History: The 1700s," an introductory sewing course

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EVENTS FROM PAGE A14

offered by Sumter County Gallery of Art in partnership with Sumter Museum. In this three-week course starting Aug. 1, students will create a wearable final garment inspired by colonial dress and participate in a Revolutionary High Tea at Sumter Museum Gardens on Saturday, Aug. 22. Registration is open. To register or learn more, visit <https://tinyurl.com/2b4jhejp>.

The **Sumter 2026 Annual Coin and Currency Show** will be held at 2320 Four Bridges Road, Sumter, on Aug. 28-29, starting at 11 a.m. that Friday. This event brings together coin dealers, collectors and numismatic enthusiasts to buy, sell and trade coins, currency, bullion and collectibles. Whether you're looking to add to your collection, get a free appraisal or simply browse, the show offers something for collectors at every level.

Sumter Gun Show will be held this year Aug. 29-30 all day at Sumter American Legion (Sumter fairgrounds), 30 S Artillery Drive, through Great American Promotions. One hundred twenty exhibitors are expected to attend.

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 County 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/>



This year's Krawlin' for Christ Jeep Show will be held July 25 at Sumter County Civic Center.

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.

The **US MTB Series** returns to Poinsett State Park, Wedgefield, for another edition of The Knot MTB race at 10 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 9. Get tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/366buxbt>.

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."

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.

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.

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Sumter's after-school programs offer enriching experience for youth each day

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysa@theitem.com

National Association of Elementary School Principals reports children spend an average of 80% of their days out of school. And they encourage parents to make that time productive.

Researchers have found that after-school programs have valuable resources that aim to enhance the overall development and well-being of children of all ages. They provide academic support, enrichment activities, workforce development opportunities, mentoring relationships and more.

And the impact goes beyond a great way to pass the time. A 26-year-long study by a University of California professor found that adults who participated in after-school programs were more likely to graduate and pursue higher education, earned higher incomes, secured better jobs and were more engaged in their communities.

Sumter offers several after-school programs that provide students with an educational, sup-



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS

The H.Y.P.E. After School Summer Program begins its first week at the M.H. Newton Family Life Center in 2022.

portive and impactful space to spend their afternoons.

H.Y.P.E. AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

Helping Youth Pursue Excellence, or H.Y.P.E. After School Program started in 2002 with support from Jehovah Missionary Baptist Church and Clemson Extension. The program grew from seven students from each elementary and

middle school in the former Sumter School District 17 in 2005 to 150 students enrolled in the program with 35 children on the waiting list in 2006.

Today, H.Y.P.E. has a total of 10 sites that serve children in the city and county limits of Sumter.

Students are transported to each site by school buses and receive a



SEE **PROGRAMS**, PAGE A17

PROGRAMS

FROM PAGE A16

hot meal upon arrival. They receive academic enrichment, tutoring and engage in recreational activities with certified teachers and college mentors. The program operates Mondays through Fridays from 2:30 until 5:30 p.m. during the school year.

For more information or to register, visit www.mhnlifecenter.org.

CLEMSON EXTENSION 4-H CLUB

Clemson University Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development uses "a learn-by-doing approach to help youth gain the knowledge and skills to be responsible, productive and contributing members of society." This is accomplished by creating safe and inclusive learning environments, involving caring adults and utilizing the expertise and resources of Clemson University and the national land-grant university system.

4-H Youth Development focuses on several program areas, including agriculture and animals, civic engagement, healthy living, natural resources and science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM.

Sumter has several 4-H clubs in areas of interest for students, including coding, STEM, horseback riding and more. For more information, contact Cindy Foley at (412) 973-1381, email cgfoley@clemson.edu or visit www.clemson.edu/extension/4h/county/sumter.html.

YMCA AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

YMCA's Afterschool program provides homework help, arts and crafts, and more. It offers transportation for many elementary and middle schools in the county, including Liberty STEAM Charter School. There is also a drop-off option for homeschooled



PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter County Library has many programs available for students year 'round.



The Sumter YMCA offers many classes and amenities, including after-school care.

children and those from other schools.

The program runs from school district dismissal times to 6 p.m. Fees also cover all-day care on teacher work-days and scheduled early dismissal days.

Registration is open throughout the year with limited space.

For more information, visit YMCA at

510 Miller Road or call (803) 773-1404.

SUMTER COUNTY LIBRARY

Each branch of Sumter County Library offers programs and clubs of various topics and activities, fit for children of all ages. These programs are meant to introduce youth to new skills and interests, engage with

other young minds with similar interests and are designed to be beginner friendly.

To see a schedule of events, visit www.sumtercountylibrary.org/calendar. For other services and resources provided by the library, visit www.sumtercountylibrary.org or call (803) 773-7273.

SUMTER COUNTY GALLERY OF ART ART CLASSES

Sumter County Gallery of Art offers a variety of classes for youth and adults during the school year from September to May.

For more information, visit 200 Hasel St. from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday or call (803) 775-0543.

SALVATION ARMY RED SHIELD YOUTH CENTER

The Salvation Army offers after-school and summer programming — "A place for discovery, friendship, and growth."

According to the organization's website, "As part of The Salvation Army's Red Shield Youth Centers network, we provide after-school and summer enrichment programs that help youth build friendships, explore interests, and develop real-world skills in an environment rooted in positive values and community support. Our programs are designed to nurture the whole child — academically, socially, emotionally and spiritually — through engaging activities like tutoring and homework support, arts and creative projects, sports and fitness, leadership opportunities, and special community events. With trained staff and caring mentors, we strive to empower every young person who walks through our doors to reach their full potential."

The local center is at 14 Kendrick St., Sumter. Call (803) 775-5006 about its programs for students.





Tame kindergarten 1st day jitters

Kindergarten may be a child's introduction to formal schooling. Although many families send their children to pre-K programs, it's not a necessity. Kindergarten, particularly full-day sessions, will set the course of formal schooling for years to come.

USAFacts.com says between 3.5 to four million children attend kindergarten each year. Many children about to begin kindergarten understandably are anxious about what lies in store. First day of school jitters are common and may lead to fears and tears in many homes. There are ways to make the first day of kindergarten less scary for kids. Here are some pointers families can follow.

GRADUALLY INTRODUCE SEPARATIONS

Kindergarten may be the first time children are away from their parents for extended periods of time. Families can introduce controlled separations that gradually increase in duration. Play dates with friends at friends' homes can stretch a few hours, or grandparents can take kids out for excursions. The goal is to show kids they can thrive without their parents being around.

ATTEND SCHOOL-SPONSORED FUNCTIONS

Many schools offer meet-and-greet

opportunities for incoming kindergarteners in a fun setting. It may be an ice cream social or a pizza party that enables newcomers to mingle. This way some faces will be familiar when school begins.

CREATE A SPECIAL SEND-OFF GOODBYE

Make children look forward to leaving with a handshake, wave or another goodbye that is unique to them. Then this goodbye can be repeated each morning at drop-off.

TOUCH BASE WITH OTHER PARENTS

Parents can use community social media groups to connect with other families who have kids going into kindergarten. Then children can make friends before the start of school and arrive together.

WIND DOWN SUMMER HOURS

Parents can acclimate kids to going to bed earlier and rising earlier to mimic a school year schedule. Begin this transition a few weeks before school starts.

Kindergarten is a chance to learn new things and make friends. Although the change comes with some nerves, families can take various steps with a goal toward making sure kids are excited about starting kindergarten.

What parents can do to avoid overscheduling students

The start of a new school year presents a fresh opportunity for students. Parents know that the start of a new school year also means a return to the hustle and bustle that many households with school-aged children have grown accustomed to. When that hectic period begins, parents may wonder if their children are overscheduled and, if so, what effect that might be having on their performance in the classroom.

A 2024 study published in the journal *Economics of Education Review* found that modern students could be dealing with a host of adverse consequences due to what's piled onto their plates during the school year. According to the study, the amount of homework students are assigned coupled with the abundance of extracurriculars students now participate in is not helping them to build their academic skills but is harming their mental health by increasing feelings of anxiety, anger and depression.

Choosing where to draw the line regarding students' schedules is not an exact science. But parents can consider a number of strategies as they seek to avoid overscheduling their kids in the coming school year.

— **Take an age-based approach.** While parents may feel structured activities can benefit kids of all ages, some childhood development experts note that organized activities may not be as beneficial to younger children as they are to older kids. Andie Stallman, a clinical and developmental health and psychology specialist and the childhood and play expert at Imagination Playground, notes that childhood development professionals suggest that organized activities prior to age 6 and 7 are not developmentally appropriate. Stallman notes at this age kids should be encouraged to discover their own interests through self-directed play and exploration. Kids can still engage in organized activities at this age, but the focus should be on

fun and socialization more than building skills and improving performance. As kids advance through elementary school, parents can talk to them about organized extracurricular activities and which ones, if any, they want to participate in.

— **Keep a running dialogue about the schedule.** Parents understandably don't want kids to quit, but it's also important that kids are encouraged to let Mom and Dad know if they feel they have too much on their plate. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry recommends parents encourage kids to be open about their schedules, especially if they feel overwhelmed by their obligations, and let them know that it's alright and healthy to take a break. The AACAP also urges parents to talk to kids about their thoughts and feelings when children repeatedly resist an activity.

— **Learn to spot the warning signs of an overscheduled child.** Children do not want to disappoint their parents, so even those encouraged to share their thoughts about their activities and schedules may hesitate to speak up if they feel overwhelmed. With that in mind, parents can learn to spot the early warning signs that a child may be overwhelmed, which the AACAP notes include:

- Making excuses or refusing to go to the activity
- Feeling over-tired or not having enough time to sleep
- Exhibiting problems with organization or struggling to meet deadlines
- Declining school grades
- Unexplained physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomach aches
- Increased anxiety

It can be difficult for parents to avoid overscheduling kids. But it's important that parents remember the value of free time for youngsters. More information about striking a balance when it comes to kids' schedules can be found at aacap.org.

Back-to-school events help students start year off right

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysa@theitem.com

The countdown to the first day of school has begun, which means it's out with the sun-filled summer days and in with backpacks filled with pens, pencils, papers and possibilities.

To help make the transition a bit easier, local organizations will host back-to-school events to provide students with the supplies, skills and excitement needed to make the most of the school year.

Here's where you can go:

FREE SCHOOL SUPPLIES, HAIRCUTS AT RAGIN PREP CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Sponsored by Ragin Preparatory Christian Academy, Love Locs Academy and 521 Auto Sales, the public is invited to a back-to-school event that will include free school supplies, free food for kids, vendors, performances and family fun.

There will also be free haircuts and retwists, and availability is on a first-come, first-served basis.

The event is from 2:30 to 7 p.m. on Saturday, July 25, at Ragin Prep, 68 Market St.

SUMTER POLICE DEPARTMENT'S ANNUAL BACK TO SCHOOL BASH

Each year, Sumter Police Department brings together local public safety agencies to help parents and students kick off the school year with useful information for safety and fun-filled memories.

Attendees can meet representatives from Sumter Fire Department, Sumter County EMS, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Sumter County Department of Juvenile Justice, Tandem Health, Duke Energy, SAFE Federal Credit Union, Durant Children's Center, Safe Kids of Sumter County, YMCA of Sumter and many more. There will also be Kona Ice, face painting, balloon artists and musical entertainment from DJ Howie D.

This year's event will be at Birnie HOPE Center, 210 S. Purdy St., from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesday, July 28. In the event of rain, the event will move to July 30.

P.A.R.K. EVENT

Sumter County Coordinating Coun-

cil will host P.A.R.K. for students and parents on Saturday, Aug. 1.

P.A.R.K., which stands for "Parents Accessing Resources 4 Kids," will provide information from community partners, including Sumter Aquatics Center, which will provide free hands-only CPR training, there will be tips on regulating emotions from Sumter Behavioral Health, information on food and nutrition from S.C. State 1890 Research and Extension and information on healthy relationships with YWCA of the Upper Lowlands. There will also be free health screenings.

Students can also pick up free school supplies and bookbags, while supplies last. Farmers Telephone Cooperative will also host a giveaway for a free iPad.

Only students present will receive school supplies and must be accompanied by parents at all times.

The event is from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Sumter County Civic Center, 700 W. Liberty St.

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3 new state laws to be in effect for 2026-27 school year

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE

alaysa@theitem.com

The 2026-27 school year is approaching.

Before getting back to the books, students and parents should be aware of new state laws, signed in early 2026, that will roll out and begin to take shape this school year.

SMART HEART ACT

Signed into law by Gov. Henry McMaster in April 2026, the Smart Heart Act requires each public school to develop, implement and maintain a cardiac emergency response plan.

This plan must include a designated, trained response team, regular drills and an annual review.

It also updates state law to require public schools to ensure automated external defibrillators, or AEDs, are on site, unlocked and accessible at all school athletic venues and events. These emergency preparedness standards are also extended to private schools that com-



An automated external defibrillator (AED) is an emergency defibrillator for people in cardiac arrest. The Smart Heart Act, signed into law by Gov. Henry McMaster in April, requires public schools to ensure AEDs are on site, unlocked and accessible at all school athletic venues and events.

pete against public schools.

The American Heart Association said cardiac arrest often strikes without warning and can be fatal within minutes if CPR and AEDs are not immediately available. Studies have shown that prompt intervention can double or even triple survival rates.

The act took effect on July 1 and full implementation will begin in the 2027-28 school year, giving school districts the time and guidance needed to prepare for rollout.

The act took effect on July 1 and full implementation will begin in the 2027-28 school year, giving school districts the time and guidance needed to prepare for rollout.

BAN ON GRADE FLOORS

Signed in May 2026, the policy bans public school districts from establishing policies that require teachers to assign a minimum grade or score that exceeds a student's actual performance. If a school district is found to be in violation, the state Department of Education will withhold 10% of the school district's State Aid to Classroom funding.

The bill also bans schools from mandating benchmark tests to be included in the calculation of a student's final grade. Students are required to complete necessary assignments before they can be eligible to participate in credit recovery programs.

Prior to the start of the 2026-27

school year, the state Board of Education will establish a task force of three superintendents, principals, teachers, representatives of public school boards each and three high school students to evaluate potential revisions to the uniform grading policy. They will report their findings to the state board before June 1, 2027.

SCHOOL EXPULSION ACT

Signed in May 2026, this bill amended state law of student threats to now expel any student who "knowingly and willfully" brought a weapon to school with the intent to do bodily harm. The threat could have been delivered in writing, electronically or any other type of communication.

This comes after numerous statewide disruptions of schools and growing fear of threats against students, teachers and staff on campus.

The law states that the student must be expelled for no less than one academic year from the date of the incident. The student may be transferred to another school in lieu of suspension or expulsion, only after a conference with parents/legal guardians and notification from the principal of the receiving school.

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Tech overload? Some tips to help kids get off devices and reading more this school year

BY MELANIE SMITH

melanie@theitem.com

As the kids head back to the classroom, routines change and tech is even more in use. This year, help kids prevent tech fatigue, learn more and relax during their free time by making reading a fun alternative to endless scrolling that won't help them succeed in the long run.

Getting kids more into reading will help them in their studies, give them an outlet for spending time without tech and introduce them to new interests that could impact their future.

There are plenty of ways to incorporate more reading into kids' days. Imagine Learning online suggests that parents should model reading themselves, "read" your surroundings when you're out and about with your family and talk about the words you see on menus, signs, etc., and have dedicated reading time each day. It doesn't have to be long, dedicated blocks – start with 10 minutes for younger kids and work up the amount of time as they find their favorite books. Storytime with parents before bed can help introduce kids to new words, problem solving, pronunciation and new concepts.

"As much as we don't want them to sometimes, children learn from watching and mimicking their caregivers. If

they see you reading as a regular part of your day, they're more likely to make it part of theirs," the site says. And "setting aside even 10 minutes a day for reading can really make a difference in developing good habits. Maybe after dinner you turn on some instrumental music and read in the living room for 15 minutes. Or for younger kids you can work reading into their bedtime routine."

A few more home reading tips:

- Take regular family trips to the library so children can choose their own books, find a fun series to try or sign up for reading programs. Sumter County Library's summer reading program is coming to a close, but there are plenty of links available through the library's website that students can use to read books online.

- Did you have a favorite series while you were growing up? Introduce it to your kids if age appropriate.

- Ask other parents for suggestions for reading material. What are their kids enjoying right now?

- Come up with rewards for reading a certain amount of pages or books and then talking about what they've read as a family. Maybe take an educational trip to a museum or see a local play as the reward.

- If your child has a favorite movie or show, see if it's based on a novel and check out the book at the library.

- Kids at similar ages can all read the same book and talk about what they liked or didn't like about the story. What was their favorite part? What did they learn, and would they read something from the same author in the future?

- Help kids pick out books that are similar genres to their favorite show or movie.

- Have kids write a bit about each book they read at home in a journal format, including anything they learned and what they enjoyed about the reading.

- Try audiobooks and podcasts, too. Emily Solari with University of Virginia suggests her favorites, "Book Club for Kids," "Story Time," "Brains On," "Forever Ago," "Smash Boom Best," "But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids" and "The Past & The Curious."



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Football season is right around the corner; catch up on what's new heading into the fall

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

As the calendar prepares to turn into August, excitement around high school football in the tri-county continues to build. This fall will come with some changes for quite a few of our local programs. From region assignments to new head coaches, here's a quick look at what to look forward to this fall.

NEW REGIONS/CLASSIFICATIONS

The new regions and classifications were announced all the way back in January, so here's a refresher on some movement in the tri-county, particularly for SCHSL programs.



The two-year experiment of splitting SCHSL 5A into two divisions is done, as 5A will consolidate back into one classification this year. Sumter High will be in Region IV-5A, which features three programs from its previous region. Along with Ridge View, Spring Valley and Blythewood, the Gamecocks will face Gray Collegiate, who makes the

jump up from 4A.

The biggest local change comes for the other two Sumter County Schools, as Crestwood and Lakewood move back down to SCHSL 3A after a two-year stint in 4A. They will continue to share a region with Darlington and Hartsville in Region VI-3A but will also meet with Loris, Aynor and Atlantic Collegiate, the latter of which shared a region with Manning and East Clarendon in 2A for the last two years.

East Clarendon and Manning remain in 2A but have some new faces in their region. Lake City remains

paired with the Clarendon County programs and they're joined by Dillon, Marlboro County and Waccamaw in Region VI-2A.

Lee Central is in Region V-1A with Central, Cheraw, Chesterfield, Lamar, McBee, North Central and Governor's School, which does not play football.

Scott's Branch is in Region VI-1A, which also features Bamberg-Ehrhardt, Bethune-Bowman, Branchville, Denmark-Olar and Edisto.

SEE FOOTBALL, PAGE A25



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Drew Marlowe returns to Sumter High after a successful six-year run at South Florence, where he led the Bruins to four consecutive state championship games and two SCHSL 4A titles.

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PHOTO PROVIDED BY LAKEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

Jerran Devlin takes over the Lakewood football program after serving as an assistant at both Wilson High School and West Florence.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LAURENCE MANNING

David Rankin takes over at Laurence Manning as the next step in a career that spans 40 years in SCISA football. Locally, he coached at both Lee Academy and Thomas Sumter prior to his move to LMA.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LEE ACADEMY

Johnie Moreno takes over the Lee Academy football program this fall after serving as an assistant at Lugoff-Elgin, Thomas Sumter and Calhoun Academy.

FOOTBALL FROM PAGE A24

NEW COACHES

The tri-county has four new coaches this fall.

Sumter High made a splashy hire to replace Mark Barnes, bringing former Gamecock player and assistant Drew Marlowe in on Feb. 10. Marlowe led South Florence to two SCHSL 4A state titles and played for the state championship in four consecutive seasons. Last fall, Marlowe led the Bruins back to the 4A title game, where they fell to South Pointe. He was an assistant at Sumter High for 11 years before becoming a head coach for the first time at South Florence in 2020, making the move amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sticking in Sumter County, Lakewood hired Jerran Devlin as their new head coach on April 2. He takes over the program from Willie Offord, who took over the program at A.C. Flora. Devlin served two stints as an assistant coach at Wilson High School, most recently under former Sumter High defensive coordinator Brian Wilson, and spent nine years at West Florence. He looks to turn around a Lakewood program that went winless last fall but just played a part in a major turnaround at Wilson, as the Tigers won just one game

in 2024 and claimed seven victories in 2025 on their way to the postseason.

Laurence Manning hired a coach who is very familiar to local SCISA programs, as David Rankin takes over for the Swampcats. He replaces Jimmy Noonan, who led the ‘Cats for one season. Rankin has coached at two other local SCISA programs with two stints at Thomas Sumter and 11 years at Lee Academy. Rankin coached the Cavaliers from 2013 to 2023 and led Lee to four consecutive appearances in SCISA state championship games in his final four years, winning in 2022. Rankin most recently coached at Carolina Academy for two seasons. He also coached at The King’s Academy and Williamsburg Academy.

Rankin’s former program is another local school with a new head coach, as Johnie Moreno takes over at Lee Academy. He is the third head coach in as many seasons, replacing Justin Logan. Moreno spent time coaching at Thomas Sumter, Lugoff-Elgin and Calhoun Academy and is a 20-year veteran of the United States Air Force.

THE FUTURE GOES HERE

WilsonHall.org

Sumter Item to host annual Hines Furniture Football Media Day Aug. 1

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

As the month of July winds down, we inch closer to another fall filled with football in the tri-county. On Aug. 1, *The Sumter Item* will ring in the football season with the seventh-annual Hines Furniture Football Media Day.

Like last year, the event will be hosted at *The Sumter Item* office at 36 W. Liberty St. and will feature all 12 tri-county football programs. The day will start at 10 a.m. The event will not be streamed live but instead recorded and posted on *The Item* Sports Facebook page daily in the lead-up to the start of the football season. The annual media day will also help fill our annual Gridiron football preview section, which will run in the Aug. 19 edition of *The Sumter Item*.

This year's event will let fans get to know their teams a bit better heading into the season, as four area football programs have new head coaches this fall.

Sponsors for *The Sumter Item* Football Media Day include Hines Furniture, Simpson Hardware, Kona Ice and Mary Ann's Deli.



Manning head coach Reggie Kennedy, center, speaks alongside Jontavious Canty, left, and Isaiah Hamilton during the 2025 *Sumter Item* Football Media Day on Aug. 2, 2025.

Wilson Hall head coach Adam Jarecki and the Barons will be at *The Sumter Item* Football Media Day, presented by Hines Furniture, on Saturday, Aug. 1.



Sumter High head coach Drew Marlowe is one of four new head coaches in the area to hear from at *The Sumter Item* Football Media Day, presented by Hines Furniture, on Aug. 1.

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1 P.M. – LAURENCE MANNING
1:30 P.M. – EAST CLARENDON
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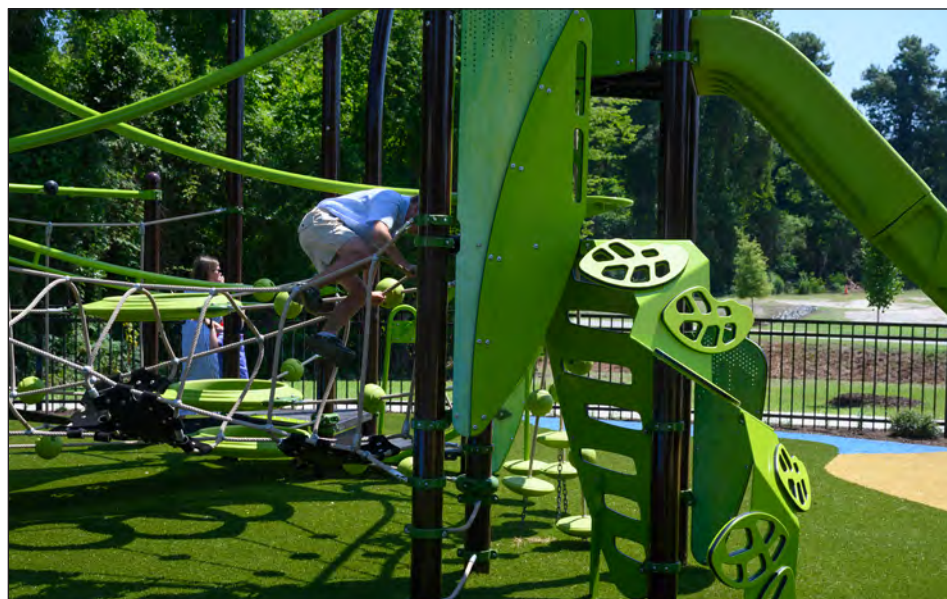
New park honoring longtime Sumter mayor opens to public

On the morning of July 9, City of Sumter officials, community members, families and friends officially opened Joe McElveen Park, honoring Sumter's longtime mayor. "As mayor for more than two decades, Joe McElveen championed parks, recreation, downtown revitalization and countless projects that continue to improve the quality of life in our city today. His dedication to public service and his love for Sumter left a lasting legacy that will be enjoyed for years to come," the city posted on its Facebook page. "Thank you to everyone who joined us on Broad Street as we celebrated this special milestone and officially welcomed Joe McElveen Park to our community. We look forward to seeing families, friends and visitors enjoy this beautiful new park for many years to come." McElveen served as Sumter's mayor for 20 years, on Sumter City Council and in the S.C. House of Representatives and retired from the mayor's seat in 2020. The park is just off the Broad Street entrance to Prisma Health Shot Pouch Greenway.

PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM



Joe McElveen, longtime former City of Sumter mayor for whom the park is named, speaks during the opening ceremony for the park, above and right.






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PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

The McElveen family stands for a photo in the park named for patriarch Joe McElveen, former mayor of the City of Sumter.



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Social Security Matters

Claiming Early is concerned about 'first year rule' and withdrawing from SS

BY RUSSELL GLOOR

Association of Mature American Citizens Foundation Social Security Advisor

Dear Rusty: I am 63 years old and about to apply for my Social Security benefits. I am self-employed but only working part time. I know about Social Security's annual earnings limit, but recently I learned I must also be concerned about a monthly earnings limit of \$2,040. My questions are:



RUSSELL GLOOR

1) How do I find out if I will be subject to a monthly earning limit of \$2,040 per month? I thought it was only evaluated annually.

2) If I choose to cancel Social Security within the first year or after, what are the penalties? Would I have to pay them back for the whole amount for the whole time that they paid me? Which makes no sense, since I have paid into SS since I was 13 years old.

Can you help me understand this?

Claiming Early and Still Working

Dear Claiming Early: It can get tricky if you are still working after claiming your Social Security before your SS full retirement age (FRA), especially during your first year collecting. I'm happy to answer your specific questions:

1. There is a special rule which applies during your first year collecting early Social Security benefits (e.g., before your full retirement age or "FRA," which for you is age 67). What will happen is this: When the IRS provides SSA with your 2026 earnings (in 2027), SSA will review to see if your total 2026 net earnings from self-employment exceeded the 2026 annual limit of \$24,480. If not, no further action is necessary. But if you did exceed the full year 2026 earnings limit, SSA will contact you

and ask you to provide them with details about your monthly 2026 net earnings. If you have exceeded the monthly limit in any 2026 month after your SS benefit started, you will not be entitled to SS benefits for that month. Essentially, if you have exceeded the annual limit, you cannot exceed the monthly earnings limit in any remaining month during your first year of collecting. If you exceeded the annual limit, and also any monthly limit, SSA will send you an overpayment notice saying you must repay them for the benefits you were not entitled to receive because you exceeded the monthly earnings limit.

2. You can, within 12 months of applying for Social Security, ask SSA to withdraw your application for SS retirement benefits. They will do that for you, but you will also be required to repay them all SS benefits that they have already paid to (or for) you. This essentially would "wipe the slate clean" and enable your SS benefit to continue growing, allowing you to apply for a larger monthly benefit later. But if you wait longer than 12 months after you first apply for SS benefits, you can no longer withdraw your application for Social Security. Thereafter, you would be subject to the annual earnings limit (the monthly earnings limit would no longer apply).

FYI, after you reach your FRA, there is no limit on your earnings, and you could choose to suspend your benefit payments and earn Delayed Retirement Credits (DRCs) to get a higher monthly benefit. Also at your FRA, if SSA withheld any of your benefits because you exceeded the earnings limit before reaching your FRA, you would get time credit for the number of months your benefits were withheld. Essentially, they would advance your benefit-start month by the number of months your benefits were withheld, yielding a slightly higher monthly amount after your FRA.

Finally, it's important to know that the contributions you made to Social Security from payroll taxes (FICA/SECA) over your lifetime are not what determines your monthly SS benefit amount. Your monthly SS benefit is based on two main factors: a) your average monthly earnings (indexed for inflation) for the highest-earning 35 years over your lifetime as reported to the IRS, and b) the age at which you claim your SS benefits. Your contributions to Social Security while working only provide you with eligibility to collect SS benefits; the contributions aren't put into a separate account for you and are not used to calculate your monthly SS benefit.

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ABOUT AMAC

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens [AMAC] www.amac.us is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation (www.Amac-Foundation.org) is the Association's nonprofit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's Seniors. Together, we act and speak on the Association members' behalf, protecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at [www.amac.us/join-amic](http://www.amac.us/join-amac).

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CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- 1. Cleopatra's snake
 - 4. Plug
 - 8. Vacation hot spots
 - 12. Anguish
 - 13. Mane
 - 14. Entertainer Bob

- 15. Historic period
- 16. Motionless
- 17. Gambler's wager
- 18. Walk leisurely
- 20. Pale
- 22. Celebration
- 24. Coal unit
- 27. Musical staff symbol
- 30. Barrel
- 31. Back in time
- 32. Bled, as a color
- 33. Dern of films
- 35. Bad humor
- 36. Newspaper features
- 37. Building wing
- 38. Pub beverages
- 39. Adios!
- 40. Rudder handle
- 43. Flat-topped hill
- 45. Cafe patrons
- 49. Newborn
- 51. Ship's pole
- 53. Court amorously
- 54. Stare rudely
- 55. Projecting roof edge
- 56. Gnome
- 57. Act
- 58. Winter coaster
- 59. Shark's home

- DOWN**
- 1. Impresses
 - 2. Classify
 - 3. Partridge's tree?
 - 4. ___ con carne
 - 5. Dipper
 - 6. Lamp fuel
 - 7. Nobler
 - 8. Iranian ruler, once
 - 9. Summer coiffure
 - 10. Befitting
 - 11. Comprehend
 - 19. Not working
 - 21. Long narrative
 - 23. ___ and cross-bones
 - 25. Mythical monster

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15				16					17			
18			19				20	21				
			22			23				24	25	26
27	28	29				30				31		
32				33	34					35		
36				37					38			
39				40			41	42				
		43	44				45			46	47	48
49	50				51	52				53		
54					55					56		
57					58					59		

- 26. Negatives
- 27. Grouchy person
- 28. Titled woman
- 29. Musical group
- 33. Gives permission to
- 34. Assumed names
- 38. Music or literature
- 41. Abandon
- 42. Having hearing organs
- 44. Viewed
- 46. Barnyard females
- 47. Actress's part
- 48. Love seat
- 49. Physique, shortly
- 50. 18 or 21
- 52. Playmate

SOLUTION

A	S		D	S		D	E	D	E	D	E	D
E	L		E	A		E	G	L	E	O	G	L
S	E		P	A		S	B	A	B		B	A
R	S		A	T		S	M	E				
			R	L		T	E					
S	E		A			E	L			A	D	S
R	E		I	R		A	L			N	R	A
O	A		G			K	E			F	C	L
N	T		A			S	I			F		
	Y		H			A	L			O	T	R
E	N		A			L	I			R	E	R
P	E		H			A	I			E	W	O
S	P		A			G	L			P	A	S

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SUDOKU

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

HOW TO PLAY:

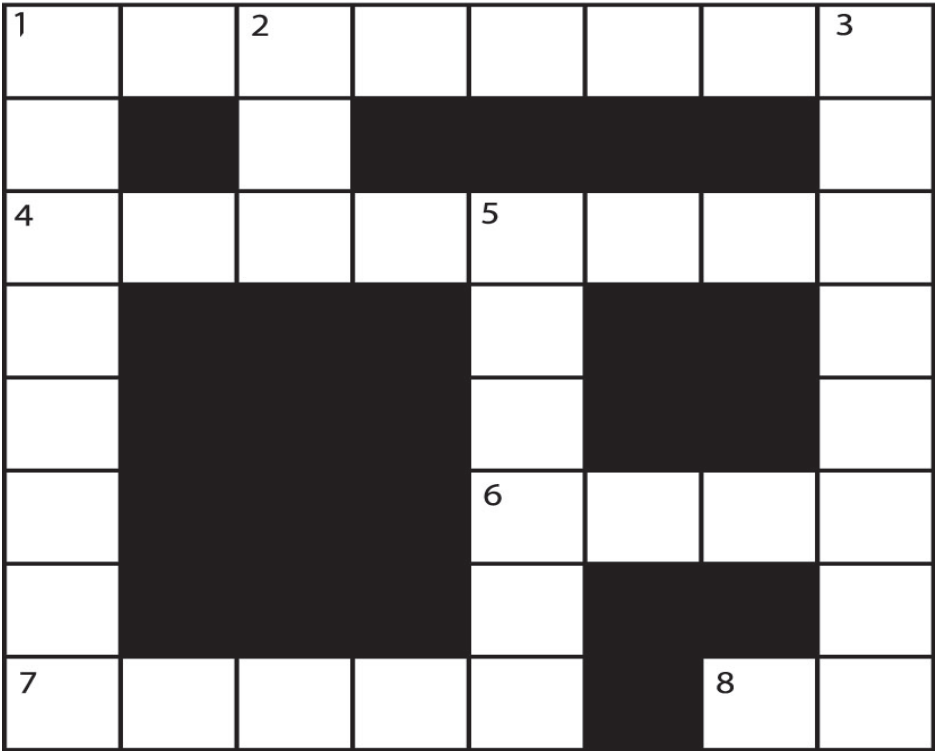
Fill the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 only once. Each 3x3 box is outlined with a darker line. You already have a few numbers to get you started. Remember: you must not repeat the numbers 1 through 9 in the same line, column or 3x3 box.

SOLUTION

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

KIDS CORNER

Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

- 1. Special church
- 4. Something that happened
- 6. Contraction for "is not."
- 7. Impressive
- 8. Opposite of down

DOWN

- 1. Structure with roof and walls
- 2. Short for "second"
- 3. Phrase meaning summit: _____
- 5. Refused to obey

Answers:
Across
1. Basilica 4. Incident 6. Isn't 7. Grand 8. Up
Down
1. Building 2. Sec 3. At the top 5. Defied



Skyscrapers come in supertall, megatall and superslender, depending on their height and width. A skyscraper rises to a minimum of 492 feet.



Can you guess what the bigger picture is?

Answer: Skyscrapers



English: Tall
Spanish: Alto
Italian: Alto
French: Grand
German: Groß



These buildings are designed to be flexible, which prevents them from snapping as they get taller.

Answer: Skyscrapers



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