The Sumter
ITEM IMPACT
Local News for Everyone
SERVING SOUTH CAROLINA SINCE OCTOBER 15, 1894

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2026
1 SECTION, 32 PAGES | VOL. 3, NO. 6

PRSRT STD
ECRWSS
US POSTAGE PAID
SUMTER, SC
PERMIT NO. 92
POSTAL CUSTOMER



What to know about each of 12 tri-county football teams as season begins **A20**

CONTACT US
Information:
(803) 774-1200
Advertising:
(803) 774-1246
News:
pressrelease@theitem.com
Sports:
sports@theitem.com

INSIDE
Education A5
Entertainment A17
Events A24
Government A4
Puzzles A26
Reflections A30
Religion A7
Sports A20

VISIT US ONLINE AT
the ITEM.com

Planting a LEGACY



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Susan Wild, chair of Sumter Green, was one of the original members of the committee that started the organization decades ago and talked of its 30th anniversary and hopes for the future. Read more on A12.



The Sumter ITEM IMPACT
Local News for Everyone

SECOND FRONT

Call: (803) 774-1200 | **E-mail:** pressrelease@theitem.com

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2026

It's time to get back outdoors again



Melanie Smith

As I write this, the forecast calls for 99 degrees today and tomorrow, with 101 the day after that, but better days are (hopefully) in sight with fall approaching.

The kids are back in school, the Friday night lights have returned, camo gear and sweaters are already on the clothing store racks, and soon the weather will be a bit more cooperative for spending time outdoors. And I'm more than ready for the pesky mosquitoes' numbers to be reduced as cooler weather gets here.

In keeping with that change this time of year, this issue of *The Sumter Item Impact* is all about the outdoors.

This year, Sumter Green is celebrating 30 years of beautifying our county, and the group is inviting the community to help it continue to grow its green legacy. Starting in 1996, the group has beautified areas of Sumter, including around welcome signs, to "make Sumter brighter and more inviting," according to its website. We wrote a bit about their efforts, mission and anniversary for this issue, plus how you can get involved if you'd like. Its annual Fall Feast fundraiser is coming up Thursday, Oct. 22, at USC Sumter. Enjoy a night outside with a live band, unique foods from local vendors and chefs, and know you're supporting the group's efforts at the same time.

We've also taken a look at the Y's Camp Mac Boykin, which is open each summer in Manchester State Forest for kids ages 7 to 14, looking to expand to year-round use. The camp allows kids to make new friends, learn some new skills and have fun in the outdoors.



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter Green, which works to beautify green spaces across the City of Sumter, celebrates its 30th anniversary this year and planted these blanket flowers in the city. These flowers are the perfect colors to usher in fall weather soon.

It wouldn't be fall without hunting season starting, and we pulled together a list of programs and resources offered by our state Department of Natural Resources geared toward safety. DNR announced earlier this year that the number of hunting-related fatalities has decreased, thanks to education outreach efforts, but more is needed to reach zero deaths.

As it gets more comfortable outside, we hope your family enjoys this time together, whether it's taking a hunting trip, supporting your community or cheering on your favorite team.

OSTEEN
PUBLISHING COMPANY
Established 1894
36 W. Liberty St., Sumter, S.C. 29150
(803) 774-1200

Vince Johnson
Publisher
vince@theitem.com

Kayla Green
Executive Editor
kayla@theitem.com
(803) 774-1235

Jill Burrus
Customer Service Manager
Classifieds, Subscriptions and Delivery
jill@theitem.com
(803) 774-1212

Melanie Smith
Assistant Editor
melanie@theitem.com
(803) 774-1293

HOW TO REACH US

TO PLACE A NEWSPAPER AD

To place an ad, **call (803) 774-1242, (803) 774-1274 or (803) 983-0786** Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., or email **advertising@theitem.com**

Impact Item Sales Reps

Karen Cave
karen@theitem.com
(803) 774-1242

Devin McDonald
devin@theitem.com
(803) 983-0786

Mark Pekuri
mark@theitem.com
(803) 464-8917

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

It's your world.
Read all about it.
the Sumter ITEM
Call (803) 774-1200
and get started today.



Best Elected Official
7 Years in a Row!

Murrell Smith

MURRELL SMITH
GETS IT DONE

Thank you for your vote!

Thank you, Sumter County, for allowing me the honor to represent you in the South Carolina House of Representatives. As Speaker of the House and as District 67's Representative, I work to deliver results for our community, support our families, and keep Sumter County moving forward!

126 N. Main Street, Sumter, SC 29150 (803) 778-2471

Paid For By Murrell Smith for House

Government

Sumter County government headlines from the past month

BY KYLIE CORDELL
kylie@theitem.com



KYLIE CORDELL / THE SUMTER ITEM

Palmetto Tennis Center and City of Sumter won the Municipal Achievement Award and the Joseph P. Riley Jr. Award for Economic Development from the Municipal Association of South Carolina.

AMERICAN REVOLUTION EXHIBIT COMING TO SUMTER

Sumter will host The American Revolution Experience later this summer after the city secured a last-minute opportunity to bring the traveling exhibit to the community, city officials announced during the Tuesday, July 21, Sumter City Council meeting.

Presented by American Battlefield Trust, the organization behind Liberty Trail, the exhibit will travel to libraries, historical societies and museums across the country through 2027, highlighting the stories of people who experienced the Revolutionary War from different perspectives and the places they visited throughout the conflict. The pop-up exhibit features display panels and interactive digital kiosks that use storytelling, illustrations, technology, artifacts and primary source accounts to connect visitors with the people and places that shaped the nation's founding.

The exhibit will be open Aug. 24 through Sept. 8 at the Swan Lake Visitors Center with extended weekday and weekend hours.

It will also include lesson plans and educational activities to support public education and tourism. The city is partnering with American Battlefield Trust, with additional sponsorship provided by local Sons of the American Revolution chapters. Staff said more details about programming and exhibit logistics will be announced as plans are finalized.

GAMBLE ANNOUNCES CAMPAIGN FOR SUMTER CITY COUNCIL WARD 1 SEAT

The field is set for Sumter's upcoming municipal election after the filing period for candidates officially closed. Candidate information was released by Sumter County Voter Registration Office on July 31.

Ward 1 Councilman Anthony Gibson will seek reelection and will face challenger Derek Gamble. Incumbent Ward 3 Councilman Calvin Hastie and Ward 5 Councilman Colin Davis also filed to seek another term.

The general election is scheduled for Tuesday, Nov. 3. Sumter City Council members serve four-year terms, with elections staggered so that three seats appear on the ballot every four years. A runoff election will be held if necessary.



GAMBLE

First-time candidate Gamble said his decision to run stems from years of community service and a desire to create change through action.

"I've always believed in people over politics," Gamble said, describing his campaign as one centered on serving residents rather than partisan interests. He said his goal is to help Sumter become a cleaner, safer and more prosperous community.

PALMETTO TENNIS CENTER, CITY OF SUMTER RECOGNIZED FOR ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VENUE

A Sumter facility and the city were given an award recognizing the city's strategy of using tennis as an economic driver by creating a distinctive sports destination that attracts visitors, tournaments and spending in the local economy.

The 2026 South Carolina Municipal Achievement Award in Economic Development was presented by Charlie Barrineau to Mayor David Merchant and Sumter City Council during council's regular meeting on Tuesday, Aug. 4. Palmetto Tennis Center and City of Sumter won the Municipal Achievement Award and the Joseph P. Riley Jr. Award for Economic Development from the Municipal Association of South Carolina.

Staff and city leaders credited the tennis center team for consistently executing tournaments well and helping establish Sumter as a reliable destination. A video presentation highlighted the development of the Philip L. Edwards Tennis Complex, which added eight authentic German clay courts built to international standards usually found only at elite private clubs or professional venues.

The clay courts were described as rare in the United States and especially unusual for a city of Sumter's size, making them a major competitive advantage.

The project was a $4 million public-private partnership, supported by the Williams Brice Edwards Trust and state infrastructure grants.

CITY TO PURCHASE NEW GARBAGE TRUCKS

During the Aug. 4 meeting, the city also requested approval to purchase three new sanitation vehicles using money from this year's budget cycle.

The purchases include one automated garbage truck from Amick Equipment for $370,824.62, one grapple loader truck from Amick Equipment for $276,345.40 and one front-loader truck from Atlantic Heavy Duty of Warrington, Pennsylvania, for $396,137.54. The automated garbage truck and grapple loader prices reflect North Carolina Sheriffs Association contract pricing, while the front-loader price reflects Sourcewell contract pricing. Each purchase falls within its respective budgeted amount.

The new automated garbage truck will increase the city's fleet from five to six trucks, moving closer to the long-term goal of maintaining seven automated units. The grapple loader truck, which is used to collect yard debris and is equipped with a large claw attachment, will replace an older vehicle in the city's fleet of eight. The front-loader truck will restore the fleet from six to its normal size of seven by replacing a truck that was lost last year because of engine failure.

Education

Recent headlines show SCISA valedictorians, district's new theme

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

WILSON HALL, TSA LEADERS SHINE IN CLASS OF 2026

Sumter's two largest private schools — Wilson Hall and Thomas Sumter Academy — had a total of three valedictorians in the Class of 2026, and all departed recently for college with goals to become doctors.

TSA's Aiden Steele-Allen and Wilson Hall co-valedictorians Muskaan Judge and Mary Ellen Thorne were tops in their classes, earned all A's throughout high school and each received the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship that goes to top-performing high school graduates in South Carolina staying in state for college.



STEELE-ALLEN



JUDGE



THORNE

At Thomas Sumter, Steele-Allen ranked No. 1 in a class of 41 students in 2025-26 with a 5.28 weighted GPA.

His extracurricular activities included three sports at TSA (wrestling, football and track and field). In wrestling, Steele-Allen won the state championship in the heavyweight division in the South Carolina Independent School Association, or SCISA.

In the classroom, he took Advanced Placement Calculus at TSA, was in honors classes in his core subjects and participated in dual enrollment where he earned 30 credit hours for college.

Steele-Allen has now started at Clemson University, majoring in biology on a pre-dental track.

Wilson Hall had co-valedictorians in 2025-26 for the first time in recent memory in Judge and Thorne. Both had the same GPA to the third decimal point at 5.202 on a weighted scale, and school administrators said they felt both deserved the honor. The school's graduating class was 62 students.

Regarding extracurricular activities, Judge played tennis for two years in high school. Outside of school, she loves art to include drawing and painting.



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

From left, Alice Drive Elementary's Lauren Hansen, Superintendent Gerald Gary and Cherryvale Elementary's Arella Oxendine pose for a photograph in front of two new Toyota vehicles from Jim Hudson Toyota Sumter at Sumter School District's Back-to-School Rally on July 28. Hansen and Oxendine won the district's top two annual awards, and each will drive a new Toyota for free for one year as part of being honored.

Judge also enjoys Indian Bollywood Dancing, she said. It is a fusion of all various types of Indian dances.

She took nine Advanced Placement courses at Wilson Hall, she said.

The school does not offer dual enrollment but instead focuses on its more than 20 AP course offerings for students to earn potential college credits while still in high school. Judge has about 18 credit hours earned as she now begins at University of South Carolina in the Honors College.

At USC, she plans to major in biology and is on the pre-med track.

Thorne's extracurricular activities included three sports (cross-country, swimming and track and field), serving as team captain in two of them.

She loved being a "distance runner" in cross country and placed ninth in the state as a junior and 11th as a senior, she said.

Last school year, Thorne was named the Wilson Hall Female Athlete of the Year and was also awarded the prestigious SCISA 2026 Bill Simpson Female Scholar Athlete Award for the 3A classification for achievement in academics and athletics.

She took 12 advanced placement courses, primarily in her junior and senior years.

Thorne is now in the Honors College at Clemson. With her high school AP courses, she earned 47 college credit hours, but given her major and other factors, Thorne carries about 15 into college, she said. She plans to major in biochemistry on a pre-med track.

DISTRICT HOLDS BACK-TO-SCHOOL RALLY, UNVEILS NEW THEME

Sumter School District kicked off the new school year — which began on Aug. 4 for students — with a spirited Back-to-School Rally on July 28, where new Superintendent Gerald Gary unveiled this year's theme.

Gary is an accomplished hometown product who has now returned home as the district's new leader.

A 1994 Sumter High School graduate, he served 28 years in K-12 public education to include 20 as a principal before Sumter school board unanimously voted for him as the district's new superintendent in March.

Along the way and while serving in Lexington-Richland School District Five in the last decade, the South Carolina Association of School Administrators twice named Gary as school principal of the year — once at the middle-school level and once at the high-school level. To date, he is the only administrator in the state to win both honors.

In his opening remarks, Gary told all district employees that when he was a student here, all staff from top to bottom invested in him and helped change his life and put him on a trajectory to success.

Therefore, he emphasized to all current staff "that their voice matters," and that is why attendance at the welcome rally was required for all. An estimated 2,200 employees were on hand at Sumter County Civic Center.

Gary added the local district's students could be future engineers, electricians, architects, astronauts and business owners, among other careers.

He emphasized that they need people who believe in them to succeed and called district staff to that role.

That led directly to Gary unveiling his theme for 2026-27.

"As we begin this year," he said, "our theme is simple: One standard. Excellence.

"One standard, and anything else is unacceptable. Not excellence one semester. Not excellence when someone is watching. Not excellence during an evaluation. Not excellence when the board is here. Excellence every day.

"Every moment, every minute, every classroom, every playoff game, every stadium, every theater, every bus stop. Excellence every day, and together we will win."

Mixed throughout the rally, various members of the district's leadership team to include Gary announced teacher and staff award winners for the new 2026-27 school year.

The two biggest awards were district Teacher of the Year, which went to Alice Drive Elementary's Lauren Hansen, and a new award named the Superintendent's Award of Excellence to recognize a non-instructional, classified employee who consistently demonstrates exceptional service, dedication and has made a meaningful impact on the district. The winner was longtime district employee Arella Oxendine of Cherryvale Elementary. She serves in a dual role as a school bus driver and a paraprofessional.

USC Sumter honors Sonntag in building commemoration ceremony

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

At a commemoration ceremony Thursday, Aug. 13, at University of South Carolina Sumter, the campus' fully renovated Science Building that opened two years ago was named in honor of former Dean Michael Sonntag.

Dignitaries, including Frank Edwards of the Sumter-based Williams-Brice-Edwards Charitable Trust that provided the funding for the naming opportunity, called Sonntag "the right person at the right time" when he took the helm of the college in 2014 and guided the major renovation and construction project to completion.

Sonntag served as USC Sumter's dean for 10-plus years before stepping down in June 2024, shortly after the building renovation was complete.



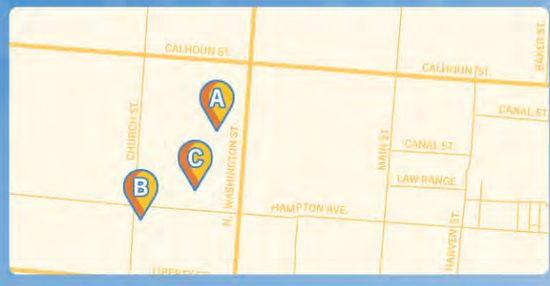


PHOTOS BY BRUCE MILLS / THE SUMTER ITEM

ABOVE: Former USC Sumter Dean Michael Sonntag, center, stands in front of his naming plaque with Sumter Partnership of the USC Educational Foundation President David Durham, left, and former President Chip Chase on Thursday, Aug. 13.

LEFT: Former USC Sumter Dean Michael Sonntag stands with the new monument sign in the rear of the college's Science Building on Aug. 13 after a naming ceremony in his honor.

PLAN A VISIT



SUMTER MUSEUM

A ADDRESS
122 N. Washington St.
Sumter, SC

HOURS
Thursday-Saturday
10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Closed all major holidays.

B ADDRESS
11 Church St.
Sumter, SC

HOURS
Wednesday-Friday
1p.m. - 4 p.m.
Closed all major holidays.

C COMING SOON
SUMTER MILITARY MUSEUM

Scan the QR code or visit SumterMuseum.org for admission information.

Museum Members are always free!


A WILLIAMS BRICE HOUSE


A HERITAGE EDUCATION CENTER


A CAROLINA BACKCOUNTRY HOMESTEAD


B TEMPLE SINAI JEWISH HISTORY CENTER


C SUMTER MILITARY MUSEUM

Religion

Focus on the new things



Pastor Stewart Rawson

As a pastor of a Christian church, we hold as sacred the texts of the Old and New Testament. We share in common with our Jewish brothers and sisters the Old Testament. Much of the Old Testament is the account of God's relationship with the ancient Jewish people, often referred to as the Israelites. Throughout the Old Testament there are books designated as the writings of different prophets. A prophet is one who speaks for God and brings a message to the people of God. Sometimes these messages are messages of judgment, announcing to the people the errors of their ways. Other times the message is one of hope, promising deliverance for the people of God.

In the Book of Isaiah (the writings of the prophet Isaiah) we read, "See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." A message delivered thousands of years ago still has relevance today. In that quote, Isaiah is announcing that God is doing something new, and he asks the people if they can see it. He also adds that God's "new thing" is through the wilderness, often an image in the Old Testament of a place of struggle and suffering, and he says that God is making streams in the wasteland, once again, God's "new thing" happens in a place of difficulty, struggle and challenge.

As a person of faith and as a hopeful person, I believe that God is always doing something new. I believe that God's work is positive and transforming. I believe that God's work is focused on love and the spreading of love to everyone, especially those who might feel unloved or unlovable. This is what I mean about new and powerful.

Often, we find ourselves dwelling on the past, focusing on some loss that grips us and won't let us go. I encourage my congregation to focus on the future and where we are headed. A good friend of mine and a teacher says, "Don't look back, that's not where we are going!" We often are crippled by anxiety and worry, focusing on what has happened to us in the past, rather than looking for the new thing that God is doing in our lives and in the world. A well-known and widely published psychologist shared a study that she conducted that revealed that 91.4% of things we worry about never come true. In her extensive study, she found out that 1 out of 4 participants reported that exactly zero of their recorded worries ever materialized. If she is right and if her data is correct, then we lie awake at night and lose sleep over things that will never happen, outcomes that will never materialize, possibilities that really aren't possibilities. I am not trying to downplay or minimize the reality of crippling anxiety or worry, I am simply trying to encourage us all to focus on the new things that are happening in our midst, things that are good and positive and impactful to all in our community.

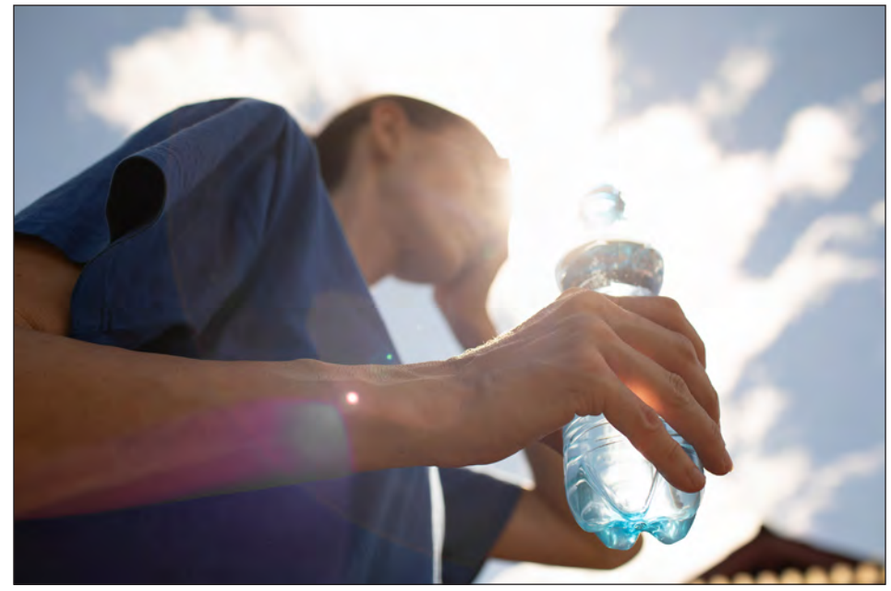
My hope and prayer is that we will all work harder to be a part of this sort of life-giving and life-changing work that goes on all around us. Sometimes they are small things, but their impact can be profound. Let us commit ourselves to looking for and working for the common good.

The Rev. Dr. Stewart Rawson is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Downtown Sumter.





DPH offers safety tips to help prevent heat-related illness amid high temperatures



BY S.C. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

COLUMBIA – South Carolina Department of Public Health is reminding everyone in South Carolina to take measures to protect themselves from heat-related illnesses.

"We urge everyone to take precautions to help protect themselves and their families from the extreme heat. People should take the risk of heat-related illnesses seriously because they can result in serious injury and even death," said Dr. Brannon Traxler, acting DPH director.

DPH reminds people to check on their family, friends and neighbors, especially if they have chronic medical problems or live alone, and to check on pets.

There were 246 hospitalizations and 2,014 emergency department visits for heat-related illness in South Carolina from May to September in 2024, according to data from DPH's Heat-Related Illness Dashboard. Additionally, in South Carolina in 2023, the most recent year for which data is available, 15 people died from exposure to excessive natural heat. Some people are more at risk for heat-related illness, including infants and children, pregnant women and older adults.

There are three stages of heat-related illness:

— Heat cramps are painful muscle spasms often occurring in the legs or abdomen. If you experience heat cramps, move to a cool place and drink water. You can also massage and stretch the muscle that's cramping and apply something cold to the muscle, like an ice pack.

— Heat exhaustion is caused by the loss of large amounts of fluid by sweating, sometimes with excessive loss of salt. The signs of heat exhaustion include the skin feeling cool and clammy or moist, and looking pale or flushed. People with heat exhaustion may also get a headache, nausea or feel weak and dizzy. Immediately stop your current activity, rest in a cool place, and drink plenty of liquids. Consider drinks that replace electrolytes and avoid beverages with caffeine or alcohol.

— If you don't recognize the signs of heat exhaustion, or ignore them, they could lead to heat stroke. The signs of heat stroke are red, hot, dry skin and confusion or loss of consciousness, as well as rapid, weak pulse and rapid, shallow breathing. Heat stroke is the most serious of health problems associated with heat, and it is a life-threatening emergency. Early and rapid recognition and treatment of heat stroke are the only means of preventing permanent brain damage or death.

If you suspect someone is suffering from heat stroke, call 911 right away. Additionally, you should take immediate action to cool the person experiencing heat stroke down while waiting for emergency treatment by moving the person into shade or indoors, removing excess clothing and cooling the person using water, ice packs or cold, wet towels.

DPH recommends the following tips to stay safe:

— Drink plenty of water. If you are doing an outdoor activity, drink 2 to 4 glasses of at least 16 ounces of

SEE **HEAT,** PAGE A9







HEAT FROM PAGE A8

cool fluids every hour. Don't drink liquids that contain caffeine, alcohol or large amounts of sugar, as these cause you to lose body fluid.

— Avoid strenuous activity outdoors.

— Take frequent cool showers or baths.

— Wear lightweight, light-colored, breathable clothes.

— Limit sun exposure.

— Those who live or work in settings without air conditioning should find public facilities like malls, libraries or cooling centers to get a break from the accumulating effects of heat each day.

Advice for working outdoors

In 2024, more than 82,000 workers in South Carolina spent more than half of their shifts outdoors.

It is especially important that those working outdoors hydrate, seek shade when possible and wear appropriate clothing as well as sunscreen (broad spectrum, SPF 30 or higher is recommended by the American Academy of Dermatology), sunglasses and brimmed hats that provide additional UV protection. Encourage co-workers to take breaks to cool off and drink water.

Whenever possible, schedule tasks earlier or later in the day to avoid midday heat, when temperatures are at their highest. Seek medical care immediately if you or a co-worker has symptoms of heat-related illness.

Preventing vehicular heatstroke

DPH also reminds families and pet owners to never leave children or pets in a parked car. In just 10 minutes, a car can heat up by 20 degrees and become deadly. DPH reminds residents to ACT to protect children from vehicular heatstroke:

— A - Avoid heatstroke–related injury and death by never leaving a child alone in a car, not even for a minute. Make sure to keep your car locked when you are not inside so kids don't get in on their own. Do not leave dogs or other animals in a car, even if the windows are cracked.

— C - Create Reminders: Keep a stuffed animal or other memento in your child's car seat when it's empty and move it to the front seat as a visual reminder when your child is in the back seat, or place and secure your phone, briefcase or purse in the back seat when traveling with your child.

— T - Take Action: If you see a child alone in a car, call 911 immediately. Emergency personnel want you to call. They are trained to respond to these situations.

Animal health during extreme heat

Take care to avoid heat illness or injury in pets. Dogs or other animals should not be left alone in a car, even with the windows cracked.

Additionally, use caution on hot pavement to avoid burns to unprotected paws. During times of extreme heat, it is even more important to make sure that pets outdoors have access to a shaded or cool indoor place to rest and that they always have access to plenty of cool, fresh water to drink.

Additional resources related to heat safety can be found online at www.heat.gov, and via the South Carolina Emergency Management Division and DPH.

At home

— Drink more water than usual, and don't wait until you're thirsty to drink.

— Carry a water bottle. Drink and refill it throughout the day.

— Consider limiting beverages high in sugars and sodium, caffeine and alcohol.

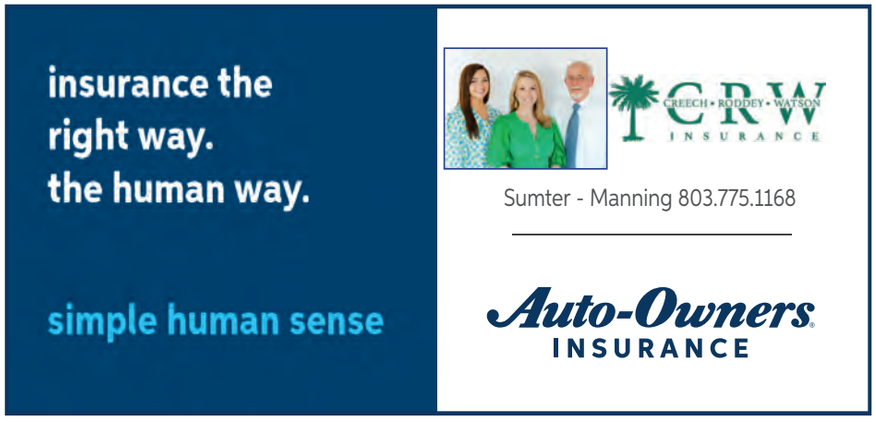
— Use a buddy system — check on a friend or neighbor, and have someone do the same for you.

— Take cool showers or baths.

— Don't rely solely on fans to keep you cool. While electric fans might provide some comfort, when temperatures are really hot, they won't prevent heat-related illness.

— Use your stove and oven less to maintain a cooler temperature in your home.

— Heat can cause power outages. Have a plan for what to do with refrigerated medications and electronic medical devices. Keep an ice-filled cooler stocked with food, water and medicine so that they don't spoil.





YMCA envisions growing Camp Mac Boykin

Organization wants Pinewood site to become a year-round retreat location through partnerships

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

Sumter Family YMCA leaders are looking to grow the historic summer camp facility in the Pinewood area of Sumter County into a year-round retreat location with corporate and church partners.


BOYKIN


HUGGINS

The local YMCA has operated Camp Mac Boykin on the edge of Manchester State Forest annually since 1952 with thousands of youth attending to enjoy the great outdoors, and organization leaders Derek Burress and Cheryl Huggins recently discussed plans to expand use of the facility with partner assistance.

Sumter YMCA has always owned the camp named after Sumterite "Mac" Willie Shannon Boykin, who started it in the 1950s for area children, but not the 55-acre property, which is leased from the state Forestry Commission.

Through the decades, kids have built friendships, learned how to fish, swim and canoe, and enjoyed numerous other activities, and now Burress, the YMCA's community outreach director, wants to increase the camp's capacity as possibly a "daytime getaway" for corporate partners and other potential uses.

"We want to increase our capacity out here because we have a lot of untapped potential," he said. "The weather is nice enough here that we can use this facility year-round. It's close by to the City of Sumter if folks want to do a little daytime getaway and maybe bring their business out here to come out and just relax and have a little retreat. Do some fishing, grill out, cook a couple meals and things like that."

Huggins, who is Camp Mac Boykin's first full-time, year-round director for the YMCA, is also actively seeking to start church partnerships for youth groups to come out and get back to nature.

SEE **EXPANSION,** PAGE A11


PHOTO PROVIDED

A camp counselor takes a selfie with campers on the pond earlier this summer at Camp Mac Boykin in Pinewood. Next year will be the camp's 75th anniversary.


BRUCE MILLS / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter YMCA's Derek Burress discusses features in a cabin on site at Camp Mac Boykin.



EXPANSION

FROM PAGE A10

Camp renovations have already been underway since Huggins came on board about a year ago to include building more cabins, pond-area resurfacing projects, an automatic gate at the camp's entrance area and new signage.

Regarding the summer camp season, Sumter YMCA's leadership goals include increasing the number of summer campers when school is out, more overnight stays and building a fully functional catering kitchen that requires state DHEC approval, Huggins and Burress said.

Beyond summer camp season, organization leaders envision a bigger resident camp that operates 12 months a year with a full-time caretaker who lives on site and a new main cabin.

That vision would make Camp Mac Boykin like bigger, year-round YMCA camps, such as Camp Cherokee in the Upstate and Camp Thunderbird in the Charlotte, North Carolina, metro area, Burress said.

To reach those goals will partly require people in the Sumter area to become partners with the YMCA, he added. That could include businesses, civic clubs and individuals.

"We're really looking for long-term corporate or church partners to help sustain our needs out here with camp," Burress said. "That can be monetarily, voluntarily or providing materials for construction. Just anybody who would like to become a Camp Mac Boykin partner with the YMCA."

Next year will be the 75th anniversary of Camp Mac Boykin, and Burress said Sumter YMCA will have a big campaign to include a large-scale open house celebration for former campers and community leaders to attend.

The YMCA is looking for anyone to provide memorabilia, photographs, T-shirts or any other items to create a big display for the celebration, he added.

WANT MORE INFO OR WANT TO HELP?

WEB: *ymcasumter.org/camp-mac-boykin*

Contact YMCA Community Outreach Director Derek Burress at (803) 468-6288 or Cheryl Huggins at (803) 774-2485 to become a partner in various capacities to include helping with adopting a cabin, donating materials or financial donations to help a child attend camp next summer. Volunteers can also help with construction on site.



















Planting a LEGACY

Susan Wild and Sumter Green celebrate 30 years of beautifying Sumter

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysha@theitem.com

Susan Wild remembers when Sumter Green was little more than an idea. It was a small beautification committee with a simple goal of making Sumter a more welcoming place.

Three decades later, she doesn't have to look very far to see what became of that idea.

That's because it's in the flowers that sway along the roads she drives every day, the trees planted along Prisma Health Shot Pouch Greenway and the green spaces that invite natives and newcomers to bask in the beauty of it all.



"As one of the original members of the committee that started 30 years ago, I have a personal

SEE **SUMTER GREEN,** PAGE A13

Susan Wild, chair of Sumter Green, was one of the original members of the committee that started the organization decades ago and talked of its 30th anniversary and hopes for the future.

PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

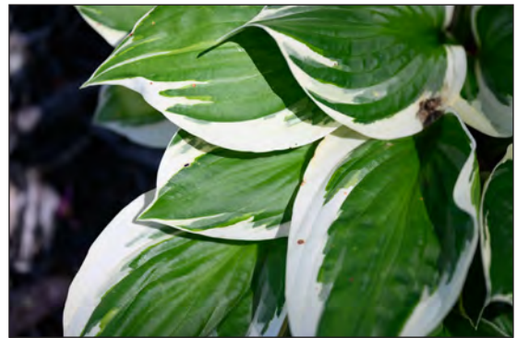
SUMTER GREEN

FROM PAGE A12



PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter Green has worked to beautify green spaces across the City of Sumter for 30 years, such as this space in downtown Sumter.





excitement and pride for how far we have come from the beginning," she expressed.

Wild moved to Sumter in 1986. Even though she considers Sumter home, she said being a newcomer gives her a slightly different perspective. After traveling to different communities, she returned to Sumter and realized how much the city had to offer. Sumter Green's evolution happened alongside Sumter's broader effort to revitalize and grow the community. Community leaders were focused on moving Sumter to the next level.

And a little more green was one way to do it.

Sumter Green became a nonprofit in 1996, opening the door for growth and expansion of its work. Originally, the effort focused on four entryways into Sumter. Early grants, fundraising and community support helped the nonprofit launch its projects. As the organization developed, it had to figure out how to become sustainable, which required continued awareness, fundraising and community support. After gaining recognition and financial contributions from state and local governments, Sumter Green expanded to enhance major corridors and green spaces throughout the county, one of its first being Greater Sumter Chamber of Commerce's Chamber Park.

As the nonprofit developed,Wild said it held true to one of its most important aspects: Contributions go directly into the community. Its board is volunteer-based, which means proceeds help to maintain the nonprofit and its projects. Fall Feast remains the organization's annual fundraiser and is heavily supported through donations. Businesses and partners that participate donate their time, food and other items. Ticket partners donate and help raise money for the event. Entertainment event space is donated as well.

Sumter receives visitors for many reasons, including people coming in for a short stay, new families looking for a place to call home and retirees looking to settle down. Wild said people naturally notice a community's appearance upon entering a new place. The condition of Sumter's entryways and surrounding green spaces can create community pride before visitors have fully entered town.

That also goes for local wildlife. Wild emphasized that Sumter Green's work preserves and improves green spaces that can have a positive "domino effect" on wildlife, watersheds and the surrounding environment. There are 14 locations with community partners who support the initiative, featuring flowerbeds with blooms that bring life and give a vibrant welcome to those entering the county. Sumter Green has also left its mark on Prisma Health Shot Pouch Greenway, planting trees through contributions and grants. Wild explained the greenway as another example of how beautification can create opportunities to connect with the outdoors. Without these evergreen markers to show that life thrives here, people sometimes drive past these spaces every day and forget to notice them. As with Joe McElveen Park on Broad Street. During its construction, the site went from an empty space to dirt, brick, steel and structures. Once the landscaping was installed, the project came alive.

"Our focus now is to beautify, inspire and connect. That has always been what we've been doing — beautifying, but then we also want to inspire those who enjoy and love their surroundings around them to donate and also hopefully understand that it's good for all of us. It makes a difference. It inspires us to do more," she shared. "It inspires us to not only do our own area, but also help contribute to maintain and grow our community because it really and truly provides the next step of connection."

For its 30th anniversary, Sumter Green highlighted nine Green Legacy partners — BD, Hines Furniture and Bedding, Duke Energy, USC Sumter, FTC, EMS, Walmart, Prisma Health and SAFE Federal Credit Union — that have maintained a longstanding connection with the nonprofit. The organization has also launched its "30 for 30" campaign, which is designed to have 300 community members donate — be it $10, $100 or more — to reach a fundraising goal of $30,000 in recognition of Sumter Green's 30th anniversary. Money raised through the campaign will go toward additional projects and the revitalization of different Sumter green spaces.

Wild said Sumter Green's legacy — it's "green legacy," as she put it — is less about the individual people who planted flowers, served on a board or participated in a particular project and more about what today's work leaves behind for future generations. Her philosophy is that if everyone contributed to that goal, the community would succeed collectively.

"Where we are today is now truly a green legacy," she said. "Where we are today was built on a foundation that started long ago, and now we have the opportunity to continue to add to it to only make it stronger."

"It isn't what we plant today. It's what we leave behind for our future generations."

GET INVOLVED

To support Sumter Green's "30 for 30" campaign, visit *www.sumtergreen.org*.

Tickets for the annual Fall Feast, presented by FTC, can be purchased at *www.sumteroperahouse.com/fall-feast-2026*. Fall Feast will be held at USC Sumter entrance on University Drive on Thursday, Oct. 22, from 5:30 to 8 p.m.

Safety should be top of mind this hunting season

BY MELANIE SMITH
melanie@theitem.com

This spring, our state Department of Natural Resources shared that hunting-related fatalities have decreased recently, thanks to emphasizing safety and awareness while in the great outdoors.

South Carolina DNR announced in April that two hunting-related deaths were recorded in 2025, which is down from five such deaths the year before.

"Officials say the decline represents something larger: a growing emphasis on safety, awareness and shared responsibility outdoors. As even one is too many, the goal is zero," DNR wrote in a news release in April. "For many South Carolinians, hunting is a long-standing tradition woven into the state's culture and economy. But even for those who don't participate, the impact of safer practices extends beyond the woods, affecting families, first responders and communities statewide. Fewer accidents mean fewer emergencies, fewer lives disrupted and a stronger sense of public safety overall."

"Safety in the field doesn't happen by chance; it's built through education. The continued decline in hunting-related incidents is a direct result of emphasizing hunter education," Capt. Charlotte Mayhugh said in the release.

That education starts young. The department focuses on teaching young hunters through its Take One Make One program, during which officers and experienced hunters mentor the younger hunters to help them learn about all facets of hunting, including responsibility in the field.



In South Carolina, all residents and nonresidents born after June 30, 1979, must complete a hunter education course before a hunting license can be obtained, and there are several options for taking the course, including in person with DNR (free) and online (includes a fee). For more on these classes and requirements, visit *dnr.sc.gov/education/hunted.html*.

Beyond the field, the department also wants to emphasize firearm safety after the hunt ends. It works with Project ChildSafe to remind hunters this season that "The Hunt Isn't Over Until Firearms are S.A.F.E. and Secure." **SAFE** stands for:

-**Secure** your firearms when not in use;

-Be **Aware** of those around you who should not have unauthorized access to firearms;

-**Focus** on your responsibility as a firearm owner;

-and **Educate** yourself and others about safe firearm handling and storage.

Project ChildSafe has plenty of resources covering proper firearm storage and safety, including a checklist on safe hunting for families, tips and guidelines on safe firearm handling and talking with kids about gun safety. Find these resources at *https://projectchildsafe.org*.

For more information about the Take One Make One program for hunters age 12 to 17, call 1-800-277-4301. You can also find the brochure with attached hunter education application at *dnr.sc.gov/education/tomo/pdf/brochure.pdf*. You can also contact DNR if you'd like to become a mentor for the program.

Despite the increase in safety awareness, DNR warns that "leaders emphasize that progress doesn't mean the work is done. Hunting, like many outdoor activities, carries inherent risks, and maintaining this downward trend will require continued awareness and accountability from everyone involved."

PROTECTING DEER, TOO

Along with programs and measures to protect humans during hunting seasons, safety also encompasses correctly transporting deer carcasses within South Carolina to protect deer here and the state's hunting heritage. DNR has been trying to prevent Chronic Wasting Disease from entering the state by enforcing a set of rules for what is allowed to come into the state and what is not. These measures were set up to prevent the deadly disease from entering the state's deer population and were enacted regarding North Carolina cases in 2022 before deer hunting season began. DNR has regulated transportation of deer, elk and moose from states with CWD since 2004.

According to DNR, what is allowed to come into South Carolina:

– Quarters (hams and shoulders) or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached.

– Meat that has been boned out.

– Hides with no heads attached.

– Clean skulls with no meat or tissue attached, clean skull plates with antlers attached, antlers detached from the skull plate and finished taxidermy heads.

What IS NOT allowed to come in from North Carolina or any other state with CWD cases:

– Any whole deer, field-dressed deer or intact carcass.

– Any deer head except finished taxidermy, clean skulls or clean skull caps.

– Any portion of the neck or spine.

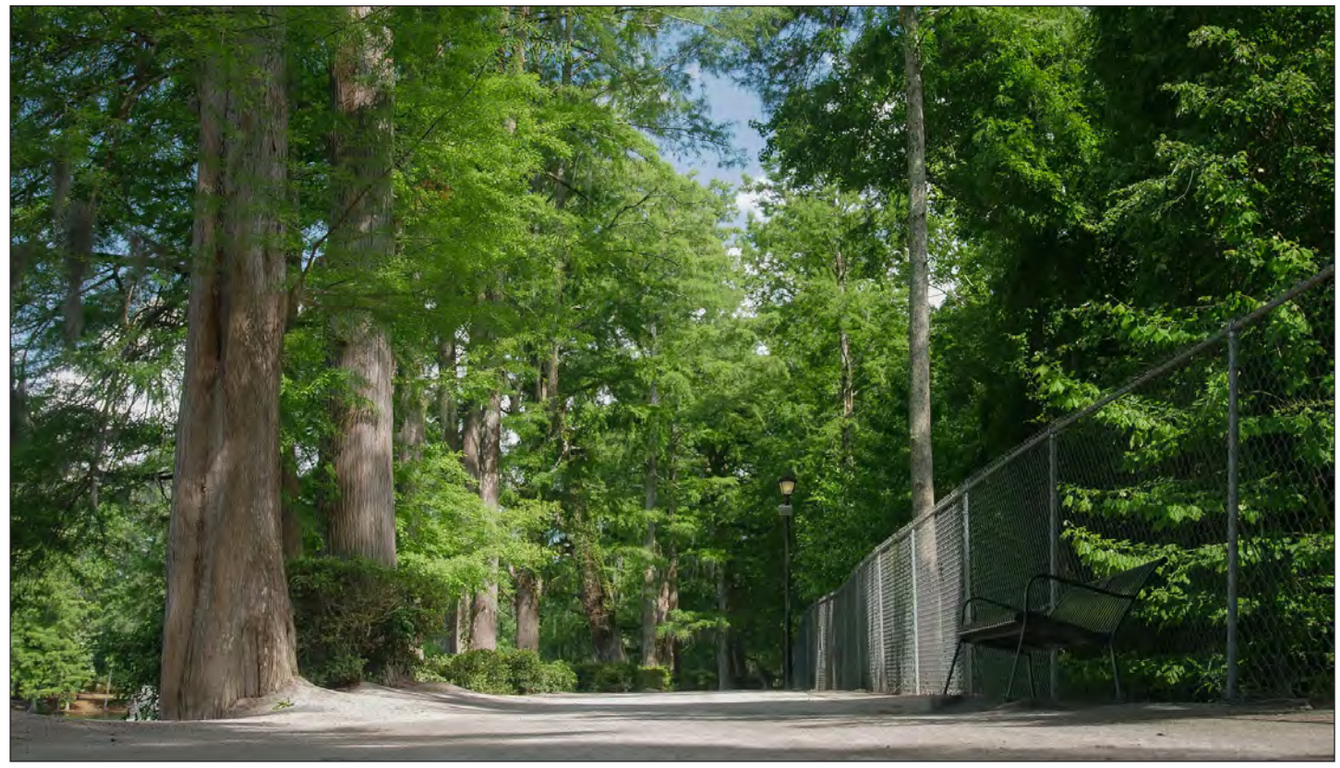
"CWD is a transmissible and always fatal neurological disease that affects cervids, including white-tailed deer. The disease is slow to advance and infected deer may appear healthy, making proper transport or disposal important," DNR wrote in the news release about the North Carolina restrictions. "An infected carcass or carcass part, if not disposed properly, can contaminate the environment, persist for years and potentially infect deer in the area."

Violating the state statute is a misdemeanor and punishable by a fine of up to $500 or up to 30 days in jail.

Pilgrim's®
Great Benefits - Earn up to $20.25/hr.
NEW PAY RATES
www.pilgrims.com/pilgrims-jobs
2050 HWY. 15 S, Sumter, SC 29150, 803-481-6243
SCAN HERE!
NOW HIRING
AND RE-HIRING!
Join Our Team!

Get outside with Sumter Clemson Extension agents

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysha@theitem.com



SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTO

Swan Lake Iris Gardens in Sumter is the launching point for Prisma Health Shot Pouch Greenway, which will again host Sumter Water Mission Walk for Water in 2027. Learn more about Water Mission on Wednesday, Aug. 26, at Trinity United Methodist Church.

It's in the name: the great outdoors. What lies beyond our humble abodes, academic arenas and busy offices is more than just foliage and flora. The outdoors has a plethora of physical, mental and emotional benefits, from improving cardiovascular health and strengthening the immune system to calming the brain and reducing stress hormone levels.

Time in green spaces is also associated with better academic performance, increased alertness and offers free sensory pleasures, from fresh air and waterfalls to singing birds, that inspire joy and connection to the great outdoors.

The great outdoors is great because it recharges both the body and the mind. And Clemson Extension is passionate about preserving it.

Clemson Extension employs extension agents who work closely with state extension specialists and researchers at Clemson University and various research and education centers across the state.

Sumter's own Clemson Extension office, at 123 E. Liberty St., has extension agents who can provide expertise in agribusiness, agronomy, food safety, nutrition, horticulture, livestock and forages, forestry and wildlife resources, rural health, water resources and 4-H and youth development.

The agency has several initiatives coming up to inspire communities to get out and connect with what makes the outdoors so great.

WATER GOAT LUNCH & LEARN

For months, youth in Sumter Clemson Extension's 4-H program have been working with a Water Goat. As cool as the name is, its purpose is even cooler.

A Water Goat is a netted trash boom deployed into streams, rivers and waterways. It captures floating debris and plastic litter before it can reach larger bays and oceans. Its name derives from the idea that "goats eat everything."

The students are excited to present their work, and an audience is welcome.

Attendees are invited to Lunch & Learn with Clemson Extension. They can pack a lunch, bring a chair or blanket and learn about what a water goat is and what it has collected during the past six months.

Attendees can also ask questions

SEE **EXTENSION,** PAGE A16





Participants in the 2026 Walk for Water fundraiser beautify a structure along Prisma Health Shot Pouch Greenway during the event.

PHOTO PROVIDED

EXTENSION

FROM PAGE A15

and find out how they can get involved.

The Lunch & Learn will be Saturday, Sept. 5, at YMCA Trailhead at Prisma Health Shot Pouch Greenway, 510 Miller Road, from noon to 1 p.m.

For any questions, contact Castleberry at *castleb@clemson.edu*.

SOUTH CAROLINA BEACH SWEEP RIVER SWEEP

The annual South Carolina Beach Sweep is the state's largest one-day volunteer cleanup of beaches, rivers, lakes, marshes and swamps. While local agents often make the drive to the coast to clean our beaches, this year's effort will be close to home.

Community members can be part of this statewide initiative as Sumter agents join Costas Farm to help clean up along the banks of Turkey Creek. The small waterway is important for its connection to the Pocotaligo River, Black River and the Pee Dee River that empties into Winyah Bay in Georgetown, South Carolina.

Those interested in participating are encouraged to wear outdoor clothes and boots and bring a water bottle and bug spray. All litter cleanup supplies will be provided.

The cleanup will be from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Sept. 19, at Costas Farms, 1520 U.S. 521.

For any questions, contact Castleberry at *castleb@clemson.edu*.

WATER MISSION INFO SESSION

After a successful inaugural year of its Sumter Water Mission Walk for Water in 2026, planning for the 2027 event is underway.

In March, Castleberry and others hosted 100 walkers who carried buckets of water from Swan Lake Iris Gardens to Prisma Health Shot Pouch Greenway to help raise awareness of the global water crisis. The walk simulated "the daily reality of millions of people worldwide who walk miles each day to collect water that is often unsafe."

Anyone interested in learning more about Water Mission is encouraged to attend the information meeting on Wednesday, Aug. 26, at Trinity United Methodist Church's Fellowship Hall, 226 W. Liberty St. at 6:30 p.m.

On the same evening, Trinity will host its "Wednesday Night Supper" at 6 p.m., which requires reservation. Anyone who wants to join the church for supper must contact the church at (803) 773-9393 no later than Monday, Aug. 24, to make a reservation. The menu will include burgers, baked beans and chips. An adult meal costs $10, a child meal costs $7, meals for a family of four are $30 and for a family of five $35. Cash or check only.

For any questions about the information meeting, contact Castleberry at *castleb@clemson.edu*.

LITTER CLEANUP TIPS

— Know emergency procedures. You should know the location of the nearest emergency facility/hospital and dial 911 to quickly summon an ambulance or the police.

— Beware of your surroundings. Watch out for poison ivy, poison oak or poison sumac. These plants can be identified by their leaves of three and reddish stem. It is also best to avoid any contact with animal wildlife. They are not interested in you as long as you are not interested in them.

— Avoid hazardous items. Do not pick up dangerous items (guns, knives, etc.) or hazardous materials such as hypodermic needles, sharp objects, old car batteries, animal carcasses or other unidentified, questionable objects.

— Use the buddy system. Always work in groups of two or more, and exchange contact numbers if your group decides to separate.

— Watch your step. If doing a creek cleanup, a creek is oftentimes uneven and a bit slippery. Watch your step, and use solid branches or stones to support yourself when walking.

— Wash your hands. Always wash your hands after a cleanup. The water is not safe to drink, and your hands should be washed, especially before eating anything. During and after collecting litter, do not touch your face with gloved hands or unwashed hands.

— Have fun! A litter cleanup can be hard work but fun at the same time. Have a contest to see who can find the strangest littered item or who can collect the most bags. Remember to take a moment and really see the beauty of the area.

— Adapted from a handout from Live Green in Plano

Entertainment

‘Spider-Man: Brand New Day’ gets a resounding 10/10



A REVIEW BY ISAIAH RIDLEY

I still maintain the memories of both my father and I being avid collectors of Marvel comics during our initial deployment in Germany. He would read "Punisher," "Daredevil," "Dr. Strange" and the occasional "X-Men" story line here and there. Me, on the other hand, I collected "Spider-Man" on a regular basis without fail. One of my sincerest regrets is remembering how I had a box filled with "Spider-Man" comics in plastic coverings in mint condition. Unfortunately, at some point during another deployment, every one of them was lost in transition. One can only imagine how much all those issues would be worth now considering they were original releases at the time.



SONY PICTURES VIA AP

This image released by Sony Pictures shows a scene from “Spider-Man: Brand New Day.”

July 31, 2026, saw the release of "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" as the 38th entry of the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise. Director Destin Daniel Cretton, who initially helmed the project of "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," assumed the reins from Jon Watts after Watts completed his work of "Homecoming," "Far from Home" and "No Way Home." Tom Holland, Zendaya and Jacob Batalon reprise their respective character roles. Joining the familiar cast is Jon Bernthal, reprising his role as Frank Castle/The Punisher and Mark Ruffalo as Bruce Banner/Hulk.

Operating anonymously as the masked superhero, Peter is living a life of complete isolation in what I would consider to be the most emotional, mature and darkest chapters of the character on the big screen. "Brand New Day" is more of a character-driven superhero film managing to capture all the important elements of what makes this the "Spider-Man" representation I had always wanted to watch. As Peter continues his superhero ventures, he finds himself facing an unexpected and unusual threat. While combating a constantly evolving circumstance, he begins experiencing a dangerous mutation threatening to change his human existence.

A significant difference I noticed with this film and its predecessors was how the atmosphere was reflective of Peter’s struggles. The lighting from the previous outings showcased a bright, colorful dynamic in a world where other superheroes were within the same universe sharing each other’s existence. Cretton’s directorial style visually brought to life a more grounded and grittier perspective, reminding me of the 1960s' animated "Spider-Man" series I would watch on a regular basis during my childhood. What I found missing from previous "Spider-Man" outings was how little it felt like "Spider-Man." All the films prior, as great as they were, in my opinion didn't fully capture what the character was supposed to represent on a physical and emotional level.

"Brand New Day" felt more organic, as if the audience were living the experience of an actual comic book coming to life. For once, it felt refreshing watching Spider-Man interact with citizens of New York, Damage Control and Frank Castle as the character without feeling the need to betray his secret identity. It was a literal breath of fresh air and allowed me to appreciate the legitimate aspect of Cretton embracing the creative approach of a superhero maintaining his secrecy.

Holland’s performance as Peter Parker/Spider-Man once again never fails with his elite, quality acting. For me, he is the quintessential Peter Parker with how I always envision him while reading comics, watching animated series or playing video games. He is exactly how the character himself should be reflected as he captures his intellect, naivety, morals and struggles. Zendaya surprised me with her performance in this film, as she branched out more into exhibiting a various range of emotions. Because this story involves the relationship between Peter and Michelle as a tragedy, it was interesting watching the dichotomy unfold.

"Brand New Day" features the absolute best Spider-Man action on the big screen, and I do not exaggerate this claim either. Some of my past grievances involved various films not fully capturing the absolute realization of what makes Spider-Man’s powers unique, exciting and innovative. All I can and will say is the action merges perfectly with the story in terms of emotion and excitement and is not there for the sake of having an action sequence. It serves the story.

Another interesting aspect involved the inclusion of the Punisher, known more for his brutal, vicious nature, which provided a difficulty properly balancing brutality and tone compared to the world where Peter is combating in a vicious manner. Their dialogue was one of the many highlights, and I would not oppose another Spider-Man/Punisher team-up. Holland and Bernthal have the best comedic chemistry and timing.

Any other analysis will take this review into spoiler territory, and I intend for this to remain as vague as possible for viewers. For a Spider-Man story, I was surprised at how dark, serious, violent and deeply personal it became with its heavy emotion. It provided the necessary impact at the appropriate moments without feeling forced. The acting, writing, atmosphere, humor, chemistry and dialogue exchange with the character development made this for me the best "Spider-Man" I have ever watched. Without a doubt, this is the perfect street-level adaptation of the web slinger that has been missing for years. There are numerous references and upcoming hints as to what is on the horizon for the future. As the stakes increase, it becomes apparent that Peter’s story is only going to become even more shrouded with pain and tragedy. And I am eager to witness how it all reveals itself when it reaches its inevitable conclusion. The combined elements of utilizing practical effects and complicated visual techniques in my opinion rival that of James Cameron’s "Avatar" features.

"Spider-Man: Brand New Day" is the best Spider-Man film of all time. I give it a resounding 10/10 and two thumbs up. Highly recommended from beginning to end. It is the definition of perfection.

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

Sumter School District welcomes students back to class



PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter School District Superintendent Gerald Gary visited Willow Drive Elementary School, where he went to school, and multiple other district schools on the first day Tuesday, Aug. 4.



A Willow Drive Elementary School student walks through the school's "Tunnel of Inspiration" on Tuesday, Aug. 4, for the first day of school.





Willow Drive Elementary School students and parents walk through the school's "Tunnel of Inspiration" as Sumter School District leaders and school leaders greet them on Tuesday, Aug. 4, before the first day of school.



Liberty STEAM scholars enjoy their first day back









PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Liberty STEAM Charter School welcomes students for the 2026-27 school year to its two campuses in Sumter on Wednesday, July 29. This school year is also the first to host a sixth-grade class. Liberty plans to grow with the current sixth grade through 12th-grade graduation.

COMPLETE FLOORING SERVICES & WATER RESTORATION
M&M Carpets, Inc.
SALES • INSTALLATION • CLEANING
Carpet Vinyl M&M Carpets Inc. Hardwood Tile
We offer both residential and commercial carpet!
1285 Peach Orchard Rd. • Sumter, SC 29154
(Behind Shaw AFB)
803-494-2100 • Cell: 803-972-3758
Monday - Friday 9am - 6pm

The Sumter ITEM IMPACT
Local News for Everyone

SPORTS

E-mail: sports@theitem.com

One thing to know about each of the 12 tri-county football teams as season begins

BY TIM LEIBLE
tim@theitem.com

Football teams across Sumter, Clarendon and Lee counties began their seasons on the gridiron on Friday, Aug. 21. With each new season comes a fresh batch of stars and a renewed sense of excitement for every program. As fall on the gridiron kicks off, here's one tidbit about each team to prepare for the season.



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Sumter High's Cleveland Pinkney IV (19) receives a handoff from quarterback Frank Richardson during their matchup with Manning at the FTC Jamboree on Friday, Aug. 14.

DANA DELAVAN / SPECIAL TO THE SUMTER ITEM

BELOW: Lakewood's Justin Wilder, center, looks to pass during the FTC Jamboree on Friday, Aug. 14.





MICAH GREEN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Crestwood linebackers Ahmadre Ricks, left, and Yachin Gamble, right, will be pillars of the Knights' defense this fall, while Calvin Wofford, center, leads the offense at running back.



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Manning's CJ Robinson will be a two-way weapon for the Monarchs at wide receiver and defensive back.

SCHSL PROGRAMS

SUMTER HIGH

Let's skip past the most obvious addition to the Gamecocks, as Drew Marlowe returns to Sumter High after a six-year stint at South Florence, which included two state titles.

Instead, one group to keep your eye out for this fall is Sumter High's spectacular backfield. It all starts with quarterback Frank Richardson, who is in his third season leading the Gamecock offense. His bruising rushing style, mixed with an expanded passing attack, should lead to a dynamic SHS offense this fall. Instead of the triple-option offense the Gamecocks ran last fall – which saw Richardson run for 1,424 yards and 31 touchdowns – Sumter High will run a power run offense that mixes in play-action passing and run-pass options.

Joining Richardson in the backfield are a pair of established backs. Reggie Shannon ran for 871 yards and 12 touchdowns last season, while Cleveland Pinkney IV added 885 yards and six touchdowns.

It remains to be seen how exactly they'll spread the carries in the Sumter High backfield, but the Gamecocks certainly have a talented enough stable of runners to be a terror on the ground this fall. And with a few more pass attempts mixed in to keep defenses honest, they might even have a little more room to run.

LAKEWOOD

We'll once again skip past the new head coach coming to the program, but Jerran Devlin seems to have the Gators moving in the right direction this fall.

Instead, let's focus on the quarterback situation at Lakewood. The Gators' primary quarterback this fall is sophomore Justin Wilder. The left-hander isn't afraid to pull the ball and run a bit, but he's shown an ability to sling it a little bit in the preseason. But he won't be the only signal-caller for Lakewood this season. Brian Brooks will do a little bit of

SEE **FOOTBALL,** PAGE A21



DANA DELAVAN / SPECIAL TO THE SUMTER ITEM

East Clarendon's Blease Hardy (11) and Skyler Cornelius (2) run the EC offense behind their offensive line during the FTC Jamboree on Friday, Aug. 14.

BELOW: Scott's Branch senior Quintin Jackson (11) looks to evade the Lee Central defensive front during the FTC Jamboree on Friday, Aug. 14.



FOOTBALL FROM PAGE A20

everything for the Gator offense, including taking snaps under center. Brooks played quarterback early in his Lakewood career and will now have specific packages that take advantage of his dynamism in the backfield, as well as his ability to throw the football.

CRESTWOOD

The Knights bring back talent across their roster, but their linebacking group will be the focus today. Yachin Gamble and Ahmadre Ricks have been constants in the middle of the Crestwood defense, providing consistent tackling in the run game while also helping to suppress opposing passing attacks. Last season, Gamble had 79 total tackles, 20 tackles for a loss and an interception, while Ricks added 88 total tackles, 10 tackles for a loss and three picks.

Perhaps most importantly, they're constantly pushing each other to be better as two standout seniors at the same position.

"It's healthy competition," Gamble said. "We build each other up as men, even on and off the field. So, it's not just he gets a tackle, so I wouldn't get a tackle, but I'm making him better by driving him to do more tackles than me."

MANNING

The amount of continuity for Manning this fall is hard to overlook. The main seniors they're replacing are brothers Jontavious and Dontavious Canty, with Jontavious serving as the superstar two-way player for the Monarchs last fall. Typically, it can be difficult to replace a player who had such an extreme workload paired with immense success, but Manning had to play a month without their star running back-turned-linebacker because of a preseason hip injury, so several players returning this season had plenty of opportunities to earn experience.

The Monarchs have players who had at least part-time starting reps at nearly every position on both sides of the ball, so that level of continuity should help them start fast and gives them a golden opportunity to finally make that push to the SCHSL 2A state title game after consecutive deep playoff runs.

To shout out one player, CJ Robinson returns as a true two-way standout. He led the team in receiving a year ago, catching 43 passes for 843 yards and 15 touchdowns. He was the Manning passing attack. On defense, he was a shutdown corner who showed strong ball skills and an ability to force fumbles and block kicks. He broke up six passes, picked off two more, forced two fumbles, blocked two kicks and scored a defensive touchdown.

EAST CLARENDON

The Wolverines have their share of continuity from a year ago, as well, but let's highlight the offensive line. East Clarendon has big shoes to fill – quite literally – with the graduation of Xavier Smith, but they return the rest of their offensive line.

Walker Kirby, Koy Wright and Colten Baker remain the same on one side of the line, while Johnny Boyington moves back from tight end to guard. A rotation of defensive starters Jesse Floyd and Avery Lowery rounds out the EC line. With that much beef up front, a true stable of running backs, led by Skyler Cornelius and Picasso Brown, should have plenty of room to run.

SCOTT'S BRANCH

Clarendon County had some serious youth thriving last year, because Scott's Branch also has a ton of talent back from a year ago. This year's senior class has been the center of attention for the Eagles since they were freshmen for obvious reasons. Quintin Jackson, Nyren Bowman and Danny Ragin have been All-State-quality players for the past two seasons and show no signs of slowing down now.

Jackson's flexibility on offense continues to be a weapon. He missed some time with injuries last season and still managed to throw for 500 yards and six touchdowns, while rushing for 454 yards and six touchdowns and catching 18 passes for 306 yards and another four touchdowns. Bowman is a dynamic linebacker who will move inside this year to provide a real boost to the Eagles' run defense, while Ragin remains a monster up front on the defensive line.

Scott's Branch has talent across the board. Now it's time to see if young quarterback Kaleb Minger is ready for the challenge of leading this offense. The Eagles are extremely confident that he'll answer the bell.

LEE CENTRAL

Speaking of young teams, Lee Central was extremely young last year with several sophomores in key spots. The Stallions are most excited about their trench play, especially on defense.

While LCHS lost star lineman Savion Williams to graduation, they bring back some strong play up front. They have seven players between the defensive line and outside linebacker that they're really excited about, with the likes of Kendall Johnson, Kedrick Toomer, Drevion Wright, Darius Toney, Kivon Hopkins, Jamarion Johnson and Imari Toney. If they can shut down the run on defense and run teams into the ground on offense, it will lead to success in Bishopville.

SCISA PROGRAMS

WILSON HALL



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Wilson Hall's Wyatt Meyers is part of a small returning group to the Barons after the graduation of a massive senior class.

The Barons will have a new look this fall after graduating a massive senior class from last season. That outgoing group of seniors played in three consecutive SCISA 3A state championship

SEE **FOOTBALL,** PAGE A22



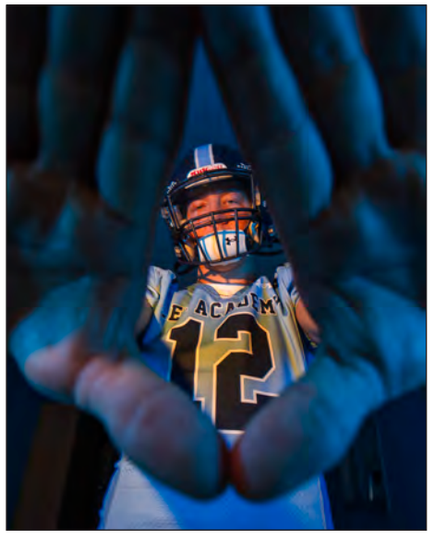
PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Laurence Manning quarterback Grainger Powell looks to pass during the FTC Jamboree on Aug. 14.

FOOTBALL FROM PAGE A21

games, but Wilson Hall doesn't see this as a re-loading year.

If Wilson Hall will be successful this fall, their defensive front seven will be critical. They return Reese Wilson and Wyatt Meyers on the defensive line, while leading tackler Peyton Gilley is back at linebacker. Wilson and Gilley will also anchor the Baron offensive line. With that trio at the helm, Wilson Hall will work to slow down some potent offenses, as they will face Hammond and Williamsburg Academy, two of the powerhouses of their respective classifications, on their regular season schedule.



Lee Academy's Landen Olson moves from running back to quarterback this fall.

LAURENCE MANNING

Laurence Manning also has a new head coach this year with David Rankin adding another local SCISA program to his long history of coaching success. Throughout this fall the combination of Rankin's typically run-first offense with their dynamic quarterback, Grainger Powell, will definitely be something to keep an eye on.

Powell has been a consistent passing threat throughout his high school career and is more than capable of scrambling for additional yardage. He passed for 1,747 yards and 13 touchdowns with just three picks a year ago and has his top passing target, Scoop Dennis, back in the fold.

LEE ACADEMY

Moving from one team with a new head coach to another, Lee Academy seems to have renewed energy under Johnie Moreno.

One player to keep an eye on this fall is Landen Olson, who shifts from running back to quarterback this season. Lee Academy plans to move guys around their offense this season and will not be afraid to use Olson's legs to their advantage, either. They've been heavily dependent on the now graduated Andrew Bowers during the last two seasons, but they plan to spread the ball around a bit more this year, so the entire weight of the offense shouldn't land on Olson's shoulders. That said, a strong quarterback is a great player to build an offense around, so his play under center will be important this fall.

CLARENDON HALL



Clarendon Hall head coach Shane Wallace and the Saints are looking to snap their losing streak after going 0-10 in his first season last fall.

The Saints are beyond hungry this fall after going winless in each of the last two seasons. One thing that stood out when they came to *The Sumter Item* Football Media Day, presented by Hines Furniture, to open August was their desperation to stop that streak.

"And so, we were just trying to keep that flame going, trying to learn to hate to lose," head coach Shane Wallace said. "Don't worry about the win, just hate losing and get that anger in you that forces you to go back out on the field when you don't want to during practice, during these hot days of summer, because let me tell you, it's been hot. And these boys have showed up every day, and I'm super proud of them. I think we're going to do it this year. I think we've got that attitude where we're going to refuse to lose."



Thomas Sumter's Jace Williams returns to the Generals after passing for 2,481 yards and 20 touchdowns last fall.

Almost the entire team is back this season, with one important addition. Joey Hatchell returns at quarterback after missing most of the season because of injury. If the Saints can keep him upright, Clarendon Hall will have a much better chance of getting back into the win column more than once this fall.

THOMAS SUMTER

The Generals have plenty of reasons to be excited about the upcoming fall, especially on offense.

Jace Williams came during the summer last year and was electric, passing for 2,481 yards and 20 touchdowns. While Williams watched his top receivers graduate, he also had the chance to work with his current pass-catchers for an entire offseason, which should pay dividends, as he aims to throw for 3,000 yards and 30 touchdowns.

"I feel a lot more settled in this year. Coming in last year, it's not easy to come into a new team in the summer and try and put up a lot of numbers. But I feel a lot more settled in. I feel like I can play more free," Williams said. "I feel like I know my teammates a lot better, being able to grow that connection in the offseason and go into the season with that chemistry. It's a really, really nice thing to have. So, being on the same page with everybody too, it's really good."

Come see our award winning team!



Family Oriented • Warm, Friendly Atmosphere
Painless Experience • Crowns • Smile Enhancement • Preventative Care

Dr. R. Capers Lee & Dr. Hunter Lee



Dental Team of Sumter

803.494.8466

5635 Broad Street Ext. Sumter, SC 29150
(on the corner of 378 & 441)

www.DentalTeamofSumter.com



Like us on Facebook

Get outside to enjoy a fall concert, farmers' markets, annual Labor Day gospel concert at the park and more this season

Sumter Farmers Market is 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** through Oct. 9. 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. Vendors are welcome to sell their goods. Call (803) 774-7776 to reserve your space at no charge.

Mackenzie Sholtz's work in **"Handwork 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 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*.



ABIGAIL PITTMAN / THE SUMTER ITEM

Help send local students to camp with a game of mahjong at Tin Lizzie's Cafe on Thursday, Aug. 27.

The celebration of our nation's 250th birthday continues. Join Sumter Museum for **an evening with award-winning author Andrew Lawler** as he discusses his newest book, "A Perfect Frenzy: A Royal Governor, His Black Allies, and the Crisis that Spurred the American Revolution," which according to the museum is "a fascinating account of the overlooked events and individuals who helped shape the path to American independence." The Thursday, Aug. 27, at noon event includes a presentation by the author, audience Q&A, book sales and signing and reception included with ticket purchase. Ticket options are available, including admission-only options for members and non-members, as well as a package that includes a copy of "A Perfect Frenzy." Get tickets at *https://tinyurl.com/mryh6cjt*. The event will be held at Sumter Museum – Heritage Education Center, 122 N. Washington St.

Help send local students to camp through **Mahjong with Mission** on Thursday, Aug. 27, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. at Tin Lizzie's Cafe in Sumter, 105 E. Wesmark Blvd., Suite 1. Sumter Young Life is hosting the fundraiser, and all proceeds support sending students from Sumter Young Life's Traditional, Wyldlife and Capernaum ministries to camp. No experience playing is needed to attend. Registration includes playing at a table, raffle entry and light refreshments. Register at *https://tinyurl.com/7td7375e*.

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.

Browse, shop and meet like-minded people at the fourth **Sumter Comic and Toy Show** on Saturday, Aug. 29, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. There will be vendors from across the Southeast with an amazing selection of comics, vintage toys and cards at Sumter Original Brewery. Comic legend Bud Root, Andy Smith, Brian Shearer and Surtur will be signing, sketching and selling their wares. The brewery will debut its show-exclusive comic. This will be a family oriented event, with great books, toys, food, cards and beer (must be 21 to consume alcohol). Free admission. The brewery is at 2 S. Main St.

Fourth Fridays Concert Series returns Aug. 28 with Level 10 Live Band &

SEE **EVENTS,** PAGE A25

MAYO'S SUIT CITY
For your special day, let Mayo's take your stress away!
Great suit selection.
Tuxedos for sale and rent.
1121 Broad St. Suite 11 Wesmark Plaza
Monday-Saturday 10-7
803-773-2262 • www.MayosDiscountSuits.com
BEST OF SUMTER 2026

EVENTS FROM PAGE A24

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!

Sumter Gun Show will be held this year Aug. 29 to Aug. 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.

Sumter's Marine Corps League No. 1202 will host a **Pancake Breakfast** on Saturday, Aug. 29, at the VFW No. 3034, 1925 Gion St., Sumter, from 8 to 11 a.m. Tickets are $7 in advance but can be purchased on the day of the event for $7. It is your chance to donate to Toys for Tots and get a great breakfast.

Sumter Symphony Orchestra's debut concert will be Saturday, Aug. 29, at 7 p.m. at Patriot Hall, 135 Haynsworth St. The performance will include Suite in E major, Clarinet Concerto, Adagio for Strings and Serenade for Strings. Tickets are $5 for students with ID, $10 for military, government employees, teachers, first responders and seniors and $40 for general admission. Tickets can be purchased at the event.

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: Sept. 5, The 10 Commandments (featuring Moses).



Visit *www.slpff.com* to learn more about how you can get involved with the Swan Lake Premiere Film Festival, including buying tickets and submitting your own film.

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."

Shonda English is hosting **Gospelfest** featuring special guest Luther Barnes and The Sunset Jubilaires, Lee Burgess and Resurrection, Soul Alliance, The Wilson Family of Cades and more on Monday, Sept. 7, from noon to 6 p.m. Gates open at 10 a.m. Co-host will be Elijah "Mr. Thaddeus" Bradford. This annual Labor Day celebration will be held at Bishop W. T. English Memorial Park, Sumter, 3735 Congruity Road. Food trucks and food stations will be on site. Register to win a 30th anniversary T-shirt and other anniversary giveaways. No smoking or alcohol allowed, and security will be enforced by Sumter County Sheriff's Office. For more information, call (803) 840-2809 or (803) 848-1866. For ticket information, visit Imports Ltd., 9 N. Main St.

Celebrate independent filmmaking at the **2026 Swan Lake Premiere Film Festival**, coming up Sept. 11-13. The three-day program at Sumter Little Theatre includes a special 9/11 presentation, official-selection screenings, screenplay awards, a pitch fest and an awards show. According to the theater, "The Swan Lake Premiere Film Festival welcomes films from around the world across all genres—including drama, comedy, thriller, horror, sci-fi, animation, documentary, music videos, faith-based films, and Southern storytelling. Whether you're a first-time filmmaker or a seasoned professional, SLPFF celebrates the diversity and daring spirit of independent cinema. Proceeds from the Festival will benefit the Sumter Little Theatre and Sumter Museum." Learn more about the competition, buy tickets and submit a film if you'd like at *www.slpff.com*.

African Queenz and Seniors United will present the **2nd Annual Senior Citizens Prom** on Sunday, Sept. 13, with all proceeds going toward future senior events. Admission for 62 and older is $5 and for under 62 is $10. There will be a cash bar. The event will be held at Silver Spoon Event Center, 670 W. Liberty St., from 5 to 8 p.m. that day. For more information, visit *www.theseniorsunited.org*.

Join Sumter County Gallery of Art for **Making Space** each month. According to the Facebook page, Executive Director La Ruchala Murphy" is moving her desk to the studio to work on a hands-on art project and you're invited to pull up a chair and join in. No agendas, no presentations and no artistic experience required. Just two hours to work side by side and create something from scratch." The meetings are from 4 to 6 p.m. at 200 Hasel Street, Room 202. The events are free, but register at *https://tinyurl.com/yy9tepbr* to help prep materials. Remaining dates and topics this year are: Aug. 20: Jasper Johns Inspired Map Flags; Sept. 17: Charles Demuth Inspired Number Drawing; Oct. 15: Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Art; and Nov. 12: Matisse Inspired Collage With Translucent Paper.

The **Major General Tom Olsen Memorial Kiwanis Golf Tournament** is coming up quickly on Friday, Sept. 18, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. This annual Kiwanis golf tournament community service fundraiser will be at the Links at Lakewood, 3600 Green View Parkway, Sumter. There is a 9 a.m. shotgun start. For more information or if you have questions, contact Bill Hoge at (803) 795-9299, (803) 717-6575 or *william.h.hoge@gmail.com*.


OLSEN

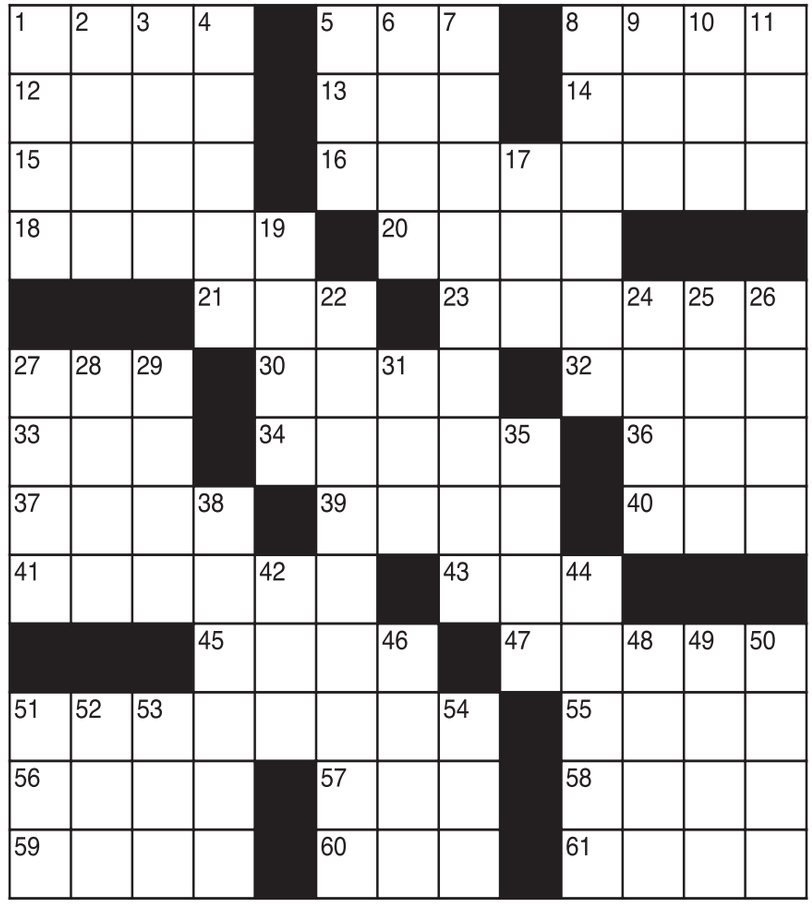


The Sumter ITEM IMPACT
Local News for Everyone

PUZZLES

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2026

CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1. _____ dunk
5. Drink cubes
8. Mop
12. Show up
13. Hightailed it
14. Rushed
15. Scored on serve
16. Refinement
18. Gin and _____
20. Coll. group
21. Camp bunk
23. Powerless flier
27. _____ is me!
30. Slime
32. Underground chamber
33. Building vine
34. Cuts
36. Fib
37. _____-do-well
39. Long narrative
40. Moose's relative
41. Make beloved
43. Is able
45. Grouchy one
47. Batman's partner
51. Painters' boards
55. Fuss: hyph.
56. Unrefined metals
57. Enjoy a buffet
58. Cluster
59. Sprinkles
60. Without water
61. Crater

DOWN
1. Scram
2. "Un Poco _____" ("Coco" song)
3. Church response word
4. First-aid provider
5. Great rage
6. Newborn cow
7. Peppy
8. TV interference
9. Triumphed
10. Circle part
11. Honey source
17. Miss
19. Murmurs fondly
22. Put up with
24. Glen
25. Vicious
26. Stink
27. Sangria ingredient
28. Cake baker
29. Watched
31. Pep
35. Wound reminder
38. Trial break
42. Gallery offering
44. V-shaped cut
46. Grizzly _____
48. _____ tie
49. Admired person
50. Jot down
51. Explosion sound
52. "You _____ My Lucky Star"
53. Lease
54. Hog's dwelling

COPYRIGHT PENNY PRESS

SOLUTION



SUDOKU

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

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

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

KIDS CORNER

Did You KNOW?

LaMarcus Adna Thompson is widely credited as being the "father of the roller coaster."



Get the PICTURE?



Can you guess what the bigger picture is?

Answer: Roller coaster trestle

"How they say that in..."

English: Ride
Spanish: Atración
Italian: Giostra
French: Attraction
German: Attraktion

Double Word Puzzle

Unscramble the individual words to reveal letters for the phrase.

CKATR

1	2	3	4	

LAFL

5				

PSDEE

		6		7	

CITTEK

				8		

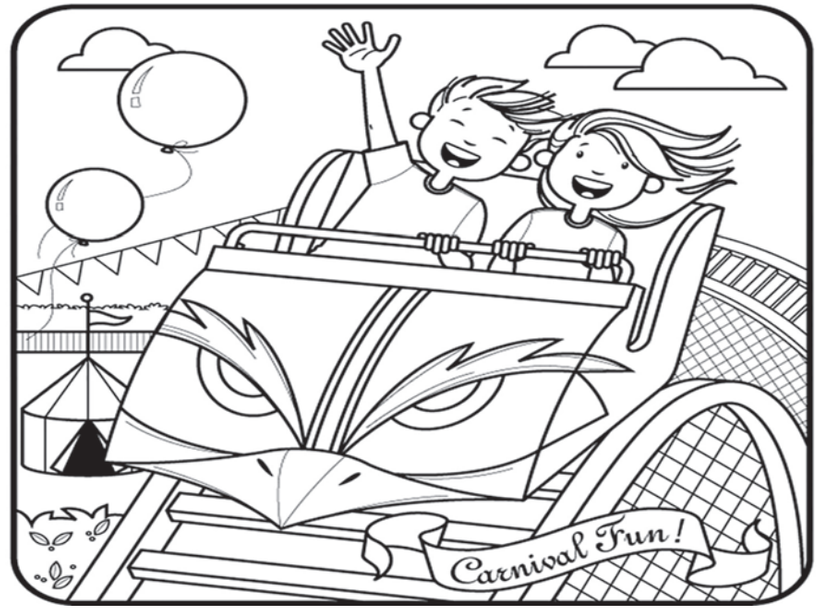
		O	N						
5	2			1		4	3	2	

2	8	7	6	2

Answers: Track, Fall, Speed, Ticket : Front car rider

Creative Coloring

Color in this picture to create your own masterpiece.



World FACT:

The roller coaster that will be the tallest and fastest in the world is being built in this country.

Answer: Saudi Arabia

NEW WORD

INVERSION

a roller coaster that turns riders upside-down

Put those bountiful blueberries to use in Blueberry Lemon Cornmeal Cobbler

Blueberries are out in full force in the summer. Blueberries are delicious freshly picked and can be topped with some light cream for a refreshing dessert. Blueberries also are equally at home baked in muffins, breads and cobblers.

The following recipe for Blueberry Lemon Cornmeal Cobbler courtesy of Vegan Cooking for Beginners! with recipes curated by Publications International Ltd. pairs the tang of lemon with the sweetness of blueberry for the perfect treat. It's great for dessert or even served for brunch.



BLUEBERRY LEMON CORNMEAL COBBLER

Makes 8 to 10 servings

3 tablespoons boiling water
1 tablespoon ground flaxseed
5 cups fresh blueberries
1/2 cup plus 1/3 cup sugar, divided
3 tablespoons lemon juice, divided
2 tablespoons cornstarch
1 1/2 tablespoons finely grated lemon peel, divided
1/2 cup plain unsweetened soymilk or almond milk
2/3 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 cup fine-ground cornmeal
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup coconut oil, melted

1. Preheat oven to 375 F. Spray 8-inch square baking pan with nonstick cooking spray. Combine boiling water and flaxseed in small bowl. Let stand until cool.

2. Combine blueberries, 1/3 cup sugar, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, cornstarch, and 1/2 tablespoon lemon peel in large bowl; toss to coat. Spoon into prepared pan.

3. Combine soymilk and remaining 2 tablespoons lemon juice in small bowl; let stand 5 minutes. Combine flour, cornmeal, remaining 1/2 cup sugar, 1 tablespoon lemon peel, baking powder and salt in medium bowl; mix well. Add soymilk mixture, coconut oil and flaxseed mixture; stir until just combined. Drop topping by 2 tablespoons into mounds over blueberry mixture.

4. Bake 40 to 45 minutes or until filling is bubbly and topping is golden brown. Let stand 30 minutes before serving.



Stuffed Shells With Spinach and Ricotta please a crowd

Hosting is a fun way to welcome loved ones. Simple but flavorful meals are a host's best friend. Such meals, which include the following recipe for Stuffed Shells With Spinach and Ricotta from Lines+Angles, give hosts more time to mingle but still ensure a delicious dish makes its way to the table come dinnertime.

STUFFED SHELLS WITH SPINACH AND RICOTTA

Makes 6 to 8 servings

Salt, to taste
32 jumbo pasta shells
10 cups frozen chopped spinach, thawed
2 cups ricotta, softened
1 cup Parmesan cheese, grated (divided), plus extra to serve
3 cloves of garlic, peeled and minced
2 eggs, lightly beaten
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
3 3/4 cups marinara or spaghetti sauce

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook per package directions until al dente. Rinse pasta in cold water to stop cooking process and drain well.

2. Squeeze spinach dry. Transfer spinach to large bowl. Add ricotta, 1/2 cup Parmesan, garlic, and beaten eggs to bowl. Season mixture with salt and pepper, and mix to blend.

3. Preheat oven to 350 F.

4. Spoon 1/2 cup marinara sauce evenly over bottom of 9- x 13- x 2-inch baking dish. Fill each pasta shell with spinach mixture. Place shells, filling side up, in prepared baking dish. Sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup Parmesan. Cover loosely with foil and bake until heated through and bubbly, about 30 minutes. Spoon remaining sauce over shells. Garnish with Parmesan cheese, if desired, and serve.

Slow cooking is a go-to option for busy home cooks

Slow cooking is appealing for a number of reasons. Busy home cooks know that slow cooking ensures a homecooked meal is ready and waiting when arriving home from work. And cooks accustomed to slow cooking know the aromas emanating from slow cookers throughout the day can make anyone look forward to dinnertime.

Winter is an especially popular time to utilize a slow cooker, which are widely associated with hot and hearty meals. Such is the case with this Lines+Angles recipe for Beef Stew, which makes a great dinner on busy nights, so hold on to this recipe.



BEEF STEW

Makes 6 servings

2 pounds boneless stew beef
1 teaspoon coarse salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 onions, peeled and diced
1 clove of garlic, peeled and finely chopped
3 carrots, peeled, trimmed and thickly sliced
3 ribs of celery, rinsed, trimmed and diced
6 medium new or red bliss potatoes, rinsed and quartered
2 bay leaves
2 teaspoons sweet paprika
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1/2 cup red wine
2 cups vegetable or beef broth

1. Rinse the beef under cold running water and pat completely dry with paper towels. Using a sharp knife, cut the beef into generous bite-size pieces.

2. Combine the salt, pepper and flour. Place the cubed beef in a large resealable plastic storage bag. Add the seasoned flour and shake to thoroughly coat the beef with flour.

3. Heat the oil in a heavy bottomed skillet over medium heat. Add the flour-coated beef and brown on all sides.

4. Place browned beef in the crock pot. Add onions, garlic, carrots, celery, potatoes, bay leaves, paprika, Worcestershire sauce, wine, and broth.

5. Cover and cook for 1 hour on high and reduce heat to low and continue cooking for 6 hours, or until meat is tender and vegetables are cooked through.

6. Remove bay leaves and discard. Ladle stew into individual serving bowls and serve.

Note: Cooking time may vary depending on age and size of the slow cooker.

Enjoy this delicacy at home

Certain foods have inspired a devotion that other dishes simply cannot match. Oysters certainly fit that mold. To oyster lovers, there's simply no better way to start a meal than to order a plate of these wildly popular delicacies.

Of course, oysters also can be enjoyed at home. Whether you procure your own oysters or find them at your local fishery, this recipe for Oysters With Spinach and Gruyere from Lines+Angles is a simple and tasty way to enjoy this popular delicacy once you arrive home.

OYSTERS WITH SPINACH AND GRUYERE

Makes 4 servings

24 oysters (in the shell), scrubbed
1/2 cup butter, melted
6 ounces fresh spinach, cooked and drained
6 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
4 ounces Gruyere cheese, grated
1 lemon, cut into wedges, for garnish



1. Shuck oysters using an oyster knife. Scrub the inside of the deeper shell.

2. Brush the inside of each shell with a generous amount of melted butter. Spread a layer of cooked spinach on each shell. Dip each oyster in Worcestershire sauce and place on top of spinach. Sprinkle each oyster with remaining melted butter and top with grated Gruyere cheese.

3. Place oysters in a shallow pan or on a cookie sheet. Broil quickly or until the edges of the oyster curl and the cheese is bubbly and golden brown.

4. Serve on a bed of sea salt with lemon wedges.





The Sumter ITEM IMPACT
Local News for Everyone

REFLECTIONS

Call: (803) 774-1200 | **E-mail:** pressrelease@theitem.com

Blue Sky used talent to help beautify our community

Reflections revisits Warren Edward Johnson, known today as Blue Sky, born Sept. 18, 1938, in Columbia, South Carolina. He received national attention for his artistic ability by winning a poster competition while a student at Dreher High School. The data and photos used to prepare this paper were taken from *The Item* archives and a personal interview conducted by Martha Greenway for the Sumter County Cultural Commission with Mr. Johnson.



Sammy Way
REFLECTIONS



The "Winter Beach" mural in downtown Sumter, painted by Blue Sky, was unveiled in October 1980 with fireworks and dancers at sunset.

SUMTER ITEM FILE PHOTOS

He worked as a jet aircraft technician while serving in the Air National Guard for six years. He worked numerous jobs while attending the University of South Carolina including "a parade float builder, a layout artist, and a dance instructor, among others." While in college he received instruction from Ed Yaghjian, the successful Ash Can painter. He was able to sell some of his works at student auctions held at McMaster College, later being judged "best of show" at the 1964 Spring Mills Show which held over 700 participants by Henry Geldzahler, the curator of the Metropolitan Museum. Blue Sky was invited to study at the Art Students League of New York, which he did for a year.

He returned to Columbia in 1966 where he was employed as a conceptual artist for Wilbur Smith & Associates prior to enrolling in the USC Graduate School in 1970. In 1974, Warren Johnson made Blue Sky his legal name and was later accorded the Order of the Palmetto, South Carolina's highest civilian award, in 2000. The award was given for his contributions to the arts, primarily for painting the first large-scale public mural in 1975.



Artist Blue Sky, left, holds a copy of his painting "Winter Beach," completed on a wall of the then Gilbert Ross package store in downtown Sumter in 1980.

Blue Sky, like many artists, often depended entirely on the sale of his art to cover living expenses. A large number of his public projects remain self-funded. He and his wife, Lynn Sky, opened the Blue-Sky Gallery in Columbia's Five Points in 1981 where he sold his original artwork beginning in 1989.

He became interested in painting murals on walls in 1975. That year saw him produce perhaps his most memorable work, "Tunnelvision." His design for the project was not readily accepted, however; he persevered, finally gaining approval from the South Carolina Arts Commission. The work was completed on the wall of the AgFirst Farm Credit Bank located in Columbia and has been repainted five times since, each time with some modification.

BLUE SKY PAINTS IN SUMTER

In March of 1980 while exhibiting some of his artwork, a sudden snowstorm proved providential to the Sumter community. Unable to return to Columbia, Blue Sky was given a tour of the city when he happened upon a wall of the then Gilbert Ross package store and immediately declared this to be the "most beautiful wall in Sumter." Martha Greenway, representing the Cultural Commission, sponsored the project costing $3,000, expressed appreciation for the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Promotion Council and the Downtown Sumter Improvement Association for their support of the undertaking.

Blue Sky referred to his style of work as "drive-in art" and also stated that he had used a variety of mediums to express his creativity. The work he chose for Sumter was a mural titled "Winter Beach" intended to give those who passed by the feeling of "walking or driving on the beach." He stated a preference for working with "big brushes and gallons of paint" and intended to begin painting in Sumter in July of 1980. He estimated the project would require three to five weeks to complete.

The completed work was unveiled at sunset and featured fireworks and dancers.

Social Security Matters

Can my spouse file at 63 and then get half of mine when I later claim?



RUSSELL GLOOR

Dear Rusty: My spouse is 63 and I am 65. I am planning to take my Social Security benefits at age 70. Can my lower earning spouse take his own benefits now, and then — when I take my full benefits at age 70, can he then file for 50% of mine instead of the lower benefit he is getting because he claimed at age 63? *Signed: Higher Earning Spouse*

Dear Higher Earning Spouse: Yes, your lower-earning spouse can take his benefits based on his personal lifetime earnings record at any time (i.e., age 63) and, when you later claim your own SS at 70, your spouse will be evaluated to determine whether he is eligible for a "spousal boost" based on your Social Security record. But to be sure you are clear, if you claim at age 70, your spouse will not get 50% of your age 70 benefit amount.

Spousal benefits are always determined by comparing each partners' full retirement age (FRA) entitlement and, if your spouse's FRA entitlement is less than half of your FRA entitlement, your spouse will get a "spousal boost" to bring his monthly SS retirement payment up to what he is entitled to as your spouse. The amount of the "spousal boost" would be the difference between his FRA entitlement and 50% of your FRA entitlement, which would be added to his own (age 63) SS retirement amount. And that means that his total benefit amount would be less than half of your age 70 amount (less also than 50% of your FRA amount, because he claimed at age 63).

One caution for your spouse to be aware of: if he is still working and claims at age 63, he will be subject to Social Security's Annual Earnings Test (AET), which limits how much he can earn before SS takes away some benefits. The earnings limit for 2026 is $24,480 (changes annually) and if that is exceeded, SS will take back $1 of benefits for every $2 he is over the limit. FYI, Social Security will "take back" by withholding future benefit payments, so he will not get his benefits for some months if he exceeds the annual earnings limit. And if the annual earnings limit is significantly exceeded, your spouse could even be temporarily ineligible to receive SS benefits (until he either earns less or reaches his full retirement age (the earnings limit goes away when FRA is reached)).

The only way your spouse can avoid both a reduced personal benefit and the annual earnings test limitation is to wait until his own full retirement age to claim Social Security. However, if he's not working full time and needs the Social Security money sooner, then claiming at age 63 may be a good choice. In any case, he won't get half of your age 70 amount.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org).

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.AmacFoundation.org) is the Association's non-profit 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-amac.



CHASE THE SEASON!

REG. $1,649.99

$1,649.99

Browning A5 Hunter 20ga 3" Semi-Auto

- Choose from 26" or 28" barrel

16006004
16006005

BROWNING

$699.99

Springfield Hellcat Pro OSP 3.7" 9mm Pistol Bundle

- Black Sling Bag
- Four (4) 15rd magazines

HCP9379

Smith&Wesson

Treestands

RHINO MUDDY

Mojo Outdoors Voodoo Dove **$39.99**

HW2300

mojo OUTDOORS

Dove Shells

Rio DOVE LOAD 20

WINCHESTER SUPER X

MIGRA DOVE

Scopes

Burris.

SIG SAUER LEUPOLD SIMMONS SWAROVSKI OPT K

UPGRADE YOUR GUN!

The ticket to your next gun is already in your safe! Bring your firearms in to trade up or cash out.

ALL FIREARMS BROUGHT INTO THE STORE MUST BE CHECKED IN AT THE FRONT SERVICE DESK.

1 **Assessment** We review the gun you'd like to trade-in or sell and discuss the options.

2 **Offer** We make you an offer. Trade-ins get additional bonus credit.

3 **Upgrade** Apply your offer to firearms – or take cash or a gift card instead.

WESMARK BLVD. LOCATION ONLY.

Twiggy the Water Skiing Squirrel

Simpson ACE HARDWARE & SPORTS

GREAT OUTDOORS EXPO

recteq

MAKING A SPLASH OCTOBER 9 & 10

- **Andrew Beam** Country Music Artist
- **Ronnie McCoy** Professional Bass Fisherman
- **Hayden Alabama Podcast** Live
- **Andy Montgomery** Professional Bass Fisherman

40 W. Wesmark Blvd., Sumter HuntSimpsons.com/expo

recteq BERETTA Smith&Wesson RETAY TACTACAM BLACK+DECKER STANLEY DRAKE SAVAGE ARMS Nocpix iRAMSHI banded STREAMLIGHT VORTEX OPTICS BROWNING WINCHESTER AVERY LACROSSE Benelli TRAEGER

Simpson ACE HARDWARE & SPORTS 75th ANNIVERSARY Authentically Local

Prices valid Friday, August 21 - Friday, September 4, 2026

40 W. Wesmark Blvd., Sumter **803-773-3397**

110 N. Brooks St., Manning **803-435-2651**

222 N. Church St., Lake City **843-374-4000**

ShopSimpsons.com **HuntSimpsons.com**

Not all items available at all locations.