



SOUTHERN BUSINESS DIGEST

September 2023

FREE

Southern Business Digest undergoes new digital transformation

By: Andy Ann

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Exciting news! The Southern Business Digest is going digital. We are thrilled to announce that we are moving away from traditional print media and embracing the digital age. This change will bring several benefits to us all, and we cannot wait to share them with you. Additionally, you will be able to access our content from anywhere, at any time, and on any device.

We know that our readers are busy people on the go, and that is why we are making this change. You will no longer have to wait a full month for your copy of the Southern Business Digest to arrive, or be limited by geography or physical distribution channels. Instead, you will be able to read our articles and stay up-to-date with the latest

stories in your community and the surrounding areas on your phone, tablet, or computer.

So, what does all this mean for you? Simply put, it means that you will be able to stay informed and abreast of all the latest developments in the business world, no matter where you are or what you are doing. Whether you are at home, work, or on the go, you will be able to access our content whenever you need it, that is something we are truly excited about.

Going digital also means we can offer a more engaging and interactive experience for our readers. With our new digital platform, we can include videos, infographics, and other multimedia content that would not be possible in a print publication. We can also provide real-time updates, keeping our readers informed on the latest busi-

ness developments in the southeastern region.

Another benefit of transitioning to a digital format is reducing our carbon footprint and doing our part for the environment. No more printing and distributing paper copies means less waste, less energy consumption, and fewer greenhouse gas emissions. It is a small step, but one that can make a big difference in the long run.

We are excited about this new chapter in our history, and we hope you will join us on this exciting journey. We are confident that our digital platform will provide a more convenient and engaging reading experience. Stay tuned for more updates, and be sure to check out our website for the latest news and insights. Thank you for your continued support!



SOUTHERN BUSINESS DIGEST

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Photo Credit: Jessica O'Connor

Mews + Brews Cat Café

Serving smiles and saving lives

By: Jessica O'Connor

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Cait Cox is Summerville's newest dealer, and based on the wild popularity of cat memes and videos living on social media, her product might be just as addictive as the hard stuff. The biggest difference? What Cait pushes saves lives-and I don't mean just the cats'.

"I always joke that I'm the local cat dealer," Cait laughed as she sat beside me on a vintage couch inside Summerville's very first cat cafe, Mews + Brews. An

Aiken native who studied political science and art history (along with a concentration in Russian language) at the College of Charleston, the vibrant entrepreneur is a life-long animal lover who discovered her love of cats post-grad.

"When I graduated from college I wanted a pet, but I knew that I wouldn't be able to take care of a puppy. So, I ended up adopting my first cat. Then about a year after that, because I was bartending and working late, I wanted to get him a friend

because I felt like he was lonely."

Although Cait felt that Mitsuki (a purebred Maine Coon cat) and Neko (who was found inside the wall of a historic home in downtown Charleston and bottle raised by Cait) fit her lifestyle without causing overwhelm, she found herself longing to adopt another cat.

The question became, "How can I have more cats without actually having

(Continued on page 4)

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A Note from the Editor

This month I want to first thank all of our readers, advertisers, and other supporters for sticking with us through our growing pains. Please know that though you've seen some changes (and may still see a few here and there going forward), we remain committed to bringing you content that you will find value in both as consumers and business owners.

As we move toward a digital presence, our audience and scope of coverage will broaden. We will, of course, continue to feature businesses, individuals, and community events located within Colleton County and surrounding areas, but we're excited to branch out into other areas of state and the southeast as a whole. This means that the engaging, informative, handcrafted written pieces our publication is known and loved for will be available to anyone-not just readers in a specific distribution area. Keep an eye on our Facebook page and website for the latest developments as we continue to evolve.

Our staff is passionate about bringing you the stories and information you want to hear most, and we pride ourselves on providing fresh, novel content. We welcome any and all suggestions on topics of interest. Feel free to reach out to me at editor@southernbusinessdigest.net if you have special requests, and one of us will be in touch to discuss your ideas further.

Best wishes as we head into the last quarter of 2023!
Jessica O'Connor



The Southern Business Digest extends a warm welcome to one of its newest contributors, Danielle M. Parker

A current resident of Walterboro, SC, Danielle is known for her community efforts in networking and promotions. She has an English background, deriving from her bachelor's degree that was received at the University of South Carolina-Beaufort in Bluffton, SC and an associate's from the University of South Carolina Salkehatchie in Walterboro, SC. While an undergraduate at USC-Salkehatchie, she received the ACN Writing Award in 2005, along with venturing to Beijing, China as a student of an east Asian history course a year prior to the US Olympics.

Danielle is quite passionate about wellness in regards to being whole in mind, body and spirit. Her other interests include music, arts, poetry, photography, entertainment, nature, financial literacy, and service. She uses her personal talents to assist others in need, and believes networking is essential to developing all involved into the best version of themselves.

Danielle also has a background in education. Her accomplishments include receiving recognition as Teacher of the Year during a 13-year tenure working with Lowcountry Community Action Agency, providing mentorship with AmeriCorps, and volunteering as a tutor with the Colleton County Memorial Library through the Summer Reading Program. She also worked through a partnership with the Technical College of the Lowcountry through Upward Bound as an English tutor and mentor.

Danielle also is credited with being a co-editor and writer for a student based publication. Her work has also been published in several poetry compilations, both student and public. She also worked alongside a professor for a year as a research assistant locating sources to aid in the printing of a series of books, served as president of multiple student organizations on campus during her time in college, and has contributed to several local newspapers as a reporter and photographer in the area since 2005.

Danielle is currently ecstatic for another opportunity to express herself through print with our publication, and hopes to highlight the successful contributions that area residents are responsible for with an emphasis in community, business, and education.

Danielle can be reached via email at danip200457@gmail.com to schedule your next feature in the Southern Business Digest.

The Southern Business Digest extends a warm welcome

to their new Graphic Arts Designer and Sales Rep, Heather Billera

Heather Billera, a Walterboro native, has been involved in her family's business, Gahagan Print Shop, since she was young. The print shop, which opened in 1972, provided her with valuable graphic arts and business skills that she is grateful for. Despite a fire that occurred last year, the family is still printing and helping clients with their printing needs.

In 1995, Heather graduated from The College of Charleston with a Bachelor of Arts in Painting. During her time in college, she managed clothing stores in Charleston and Edisto Island and was also a teller with Enterprise Bank on Edisto Island. Following that, she became the Branch Sales and Service Manager for Wachovia Bank in Walterboro.

Heather has been involved in local theater groups and arts organizations in Summerville and Walterboro for many years. In 2000, she began her career as an art teacher for Summerville High School. She received art educator awards from the Columbia Museum of Art and was recognized as the 2004-2005 PTA Teacher of the Year for Summerville High School. Heather has also taught art at Colleton County's Black Street Early Childhood Center and Bells Elementary School.

Heather is an artist who recently fulfilled her lifelong dream of opening an art studio, Starfall Studio, located in The Artist's Hub of the Ace Basin on East Washington Street in downtown Walterboro. Starfall Studio offers a variety of art forms, including paintings, drawings, sculptures, photography, and more. Heather runs the studio with her daughter, Aubrey Billera, and they also teach art classes together. Heather is grateful that her mother, Jeannine "Neani" Gahagan, was able to witness her dream of owning an art studio come to fruition before passing away after a lengthy illness on March 30, 2023.

Aside from her passion for art, Heather is also a mother of two children, Marshall Sanders, 26, and Aubrey Billera, 12. She enjoys spending time with her children and creating art together with them. Heather also has a love for literature and writing and often finds solace in searching for seashells on Edisto Beach.

Heather is excited to announce that she will be joining our publication as a new team member. She is honored to have the opportunity to work with our talented team and is eager to contribute her skills and expertise as we transition to a digital platform.

Heather can be reached via email at hbillera@gmail.com.



(Mews + Brews —Continued from page 1)

more cats?" The answer-becoming the owner of a cat cafe.

COFFEE SHOPS, CATS, AND HEALTHY, HAPPY HUMANS

Cait's introduction to the concept came from a travel blog video she'd watched during college in which the creator visited a cat cafe during a trip to Japan.

"At the time I thought it was just a thing in Japan,"

of frequencies that may be able to impact human joints, muscles, and bones in a therapeutic way. A 2002 study by the National Institutes of Health even pointed toward evidence that proved children under a year old who spent time with a cat were less likely to develop other allergies in the future.

The physical benefits of spending time with a friendly cat are great, but the mental and emotional benefits can truly change lives.

helped fund Mews + Brews' opening expenses.

There was one piece of the puzzle missing before Cait could make her dream a reality—where would Mews + Brews call home? Although she loved Charleston, the tenacious entrepreneur set her sights on Summerville.

"I just feel like Summerville is growing really fast in the downtown area," she explained. "It has so many cute bars and restaurants popping up that I kind of wanted to add something to diversify the things that people could do here. It's going to expand even more over the next five years, and to have something this unique and different that people can go do (that isn't just your typical restaurant or bar) is pretty neat, I think."

Cait spent some time talking to a number of Dorchester County officials prior to beginning her search for a space, in an effort to ensure that Summerville would be open to a cat cafe. After receiving the go-ahead from the proper entities her search began in earnest, and as luck would have it she found the perfect location with amazingly supportive landlords. It needed some work, but before long Mews + Brews' physical location in Knightsville took on a character all its own—a product of Cait's vision for the business and her own personal style. The business opened its doors to the public in January of 2023.

The space contained within the walls of the 100-plus year-old building has a vibe that's a little bit retro, with a drizzle of contemporary chic and a heaping spoonful of cozy. Inviting seating areas, a fully-stocked bookshelf, and a smattering of cat toys and board games provide the perfect place for visitors to indulge in interaction with the cafe's four-legged "employees" after stepping into the separate bar/lounge area to grab a coffee drink, wine, or craft beer.

"It feels like home," Cait said with a smile. "It feels



Photo credit: Jessica O'Connor

like you're visiting someone's living room, which is the vibe I wanted."

The cats that call Mews + Brews "home" (until they find their forever home, of course) begin as residents of Dorchester Paws, the only open-admission shelter in Dorchester County. Before joining the team, the cats are health and personality tested to ensure the safety of customers and the other feline residents. The cafe strives to keep around ten cats at all times, freeing up valuable space at the shelter for other animals in need and acting as a liaison between them and potential adopters.

"The shelter was at maximum capacity for over a year before we opened," Cait explained. "Our main goal was to make sure that they could free up enough space to help new animals, and we could provide a place for the animals to have a positive environment. Here they're getting socialized and taken care of, and having more space helps the cats be less stressed and really show their personality."

SAVING LIVES, ONE SIP AT A TIME

At the time of our interview, Mews + Brews had helped 123 cats find loving homes as a result of their time at the cafe. Polaroid pictures of each are posted proudly on the wall by the entryway, a testament to the power this little house of cats and coffee holds.

Visitors to the cafe are encouraged to make a reservation, which can be done via Mews + Brews'

website. During regular business hours guests must be 12 years or older, but "Kitty Play Dates" are scheduled by the cafe several times per month for younger visitors. Mews + Brews also hosts a variety of unique events, including cat yoga, drag bingo, craft nights, trivia nights, and special activities geared toward children. Information on all of these events can be found on the cafe's website and social media channels.

Cait is proud of what her vision for Mews + Brews has grown into in their first seven months of business, and looks to the future with hopes of not only continuing the Summerville location's record of success but perhaps adding cafes in the Columbia and Greenville areas. If you find yourself looking for a feel-good outing, don't hesitate to stop by and see what all the buzz is about. You might just find yourself on the "wall of fame" with a new friend.

For more information, visit www.mewsandbrewscatcafe.com on the web, or find Cait and the crew on Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram @mewsandbrewscafe.

You can also call 843-926-6886 with any questions, or to make a reservation to visit the cafe.



Photo Credit: Jessica O'Connor



Photo credit: Jessica O'Connor

she recalled. "I didn't think it was worldwide yet. But then the one in downtown Charleston opened, and I heard about the one in Atlanta, Java Cats. Then there's one up in New York that I started following. I thought it was the coolest idea ever, and I was always joking that one day when I retired I would open a cat cafe."

Why have cats in a cafe? Yes, they're cute, and the world loves a good cat video—but studies have shown that interaction with the creatures has some very specific mental and physical health benefits. The National Institutes of Health reports that time spent with pets (not just cats) can have a positive impact on human stress levels by helping to reduce cortisol and blood pressure. This may in turn help lower the risk of heart-disease, which as we all know, is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. Studies have also shown that a cat's purr, which falls between the range of 20-140 HZ, also fits within a range

Interaction with cats at a local cat cafe can be a wonderful way to alleviate feelings of loneliness and depression in those who may not be able to have a pet in their home. At a cafe like Mews + Brews, there are no dishes and laundry waiting, nor the deafening silence of a house that no longer contains a loved one. Patrons can find companionship and solace in sitting quietly with the kitties, or rekindle laughter that has been lost as they watch their antics. It's a win-win situation, for both the felines and their human visitors.

DIVING IN, PAW-FIRST

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic proved to be the jumping-off point for Cait's idea. With a bounty of extra time on her hands, she dove into doing research, talking to other entrepreneurs and business owners to glean their best advice, and writing a business plan for her future cafe. Cait then launched a Kickstarter in 2022, which

Colleton County to receive \$2.5 million for community projects

By: Andy Ann

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Great news was shared at the Colleton County Council meeting this July by State House Representative Robby Robbins. Unexpected funds were secured for the county through earmarks in the state budget this year. These funds were specifically requested by the administration for various important projects, making them a valuable addition to the county's resources.

Representative Robbins expressed his gratitude to his colleagues in the House for making these requests to the leadership. He also thanked the governor for recognizing the importance of these projects. One that stands to benefit is the South Carolina Artisan Center, which was awarded \$75,000 for the renovation of the adjacent building. The Artisan Center uses this space to host receptions that showcase new artists, and the renovations will make future events and classes more enjoyable.

Additionally, the Career Skills Center received \$150,000. With new indus-

tries coming to the area, this expansion of resources and opportunities will be invaluable for training people and preparing them for the workforce.

Next on the list is the Neyles community fire station, with \$600,000 set aside for upgrading the facilities and ensuring better emergency coverage for the area. This will be a huge relief for residents who can now rest easy knowing their safety is being prioritized.

The Solid Waste Recycling Center also received a significant boost of \$250,000 to improve recycling efforts in the county. This funding will go a long way in reducing waste and protecting the environment, benefitting both the community and the planet.

Perhaps the most exciting news is the whopping \$1 million allocated for the Agricultural Exposition Center. The proposed state-of-the-art facility has enormous potential to drive growth in the local agriculture industry and attract tourists to the area. Congressman Robbins expressed his enthusiasm for the project and looks forward to seeing it come to fruition.



Community Projects

ward to seeing it come to fruition.

Lastly, it was announced that a recreational project secured \$500,000 for the construction of a permanent facility with a pool. This will enable swimming lessons to be offered to those in the community who need them,

providing a fun and healthy activity for all ages.

Ultimately, the grand total appropriations obtained for Colleton County was a little over \$2.5 million, and Robbins was delighted to impart this news to all in attendance.

For more information about the Colleton County Council meetings or to review agendas and minutes, visit www.colletoncounty.org/county-council/agendas-minutes or call 843-549-5221.



Annette Moore – St. George Town Clerk

By: Jack Wysong

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Many believe that the functionality and day-to-day operations of a town clerk are the result of efforts from a single individual—usually the mayor. However, similar to the way the president relies on his chief of staff, the mayor often heavily relies on the town clerk to oversee the administrative and operational functions of the town. The Town of St. George follows this organizational structure as well, with Annette Moore serving in that role.

During her time serving the people of St. George as

the town clerk, Annette has overseen the development and implementation of a myriad of projects. She has managed annexations that have dramatically expanded the town, including new affordable housing developments and the annexation of new communities like the Steven's Track housing development, which includes 176 homes.

In addition to her work on annexations for the town, Annette has also overseen the refurbishment or complete reconstruction of many of the municipal buildings in St. George. This includes the Law Enforcement Building Project,

which involved the construction of new municipal law enforcement buildings for the St. George Police Department.

Annette has also spearheaded larger recreational programs for the town, such as securing planning for sidewalks for Davis Bailey Park to provide a safer walking path on roads with heavy traffic.

However, one of the most prominent projects she has overseen has been the replacement of portions of the water lines within the town. Since the vast majority of the water utility lines

(Continued on page 6)

(Annette Moore Continued from page 5)

have not been replaced since they were originally phalid down, the town has grown without concurrent growth of the water utilities. Consequently, this has left an already antiquated water system struggling to keep up with the town's growth. The project, which was initially started in 2018, has undergone periods of suspended progress due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent issues with bidding and obtaining the appropriate materials to complete it.

Annette is confident that the five miles of water lines that are being replaced will open the door for more construction projects and afford prospective residents the opportunity to build homes while still utilizing the town's water system.

Although most of her work to aid the town's development has been within the infrastructure, Annette also takes great pride in the

educational system that St. George has to offer. She says, "St. George has produced some absolutely phenomenal students. Some of them have gone on to get scholarships from Ivy League schools, and some have gotten pretty big internships and apprenticeship programs with companies like Bosch and Boeing."

Within the role of town clerk, Annette Moore wears many different hats each day and takes on numerous responsibilities. Whether it be annexation, working as the treasurer, or even utilizing her skills as a forensic accountant, her career in public service has led her to become one of St. George's most tenured employees and someone that has always helped the town continue to prosper.

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Recognition and honoring of the Gullah/Geechee Nation

By: Andy Ann

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The Colleton County Council's July 25, 2023 meeting was a wonderful occasion as they declared July 29-August 5 to be Gullah/Geechee Nation Appreciation Week. The proclamation was accepted with gratitude by Queen Quet Marquette L. Goodwine, Chiefess and Head-of-State for the Gullah/Geechee Nation. The council's gesture was a heartfelt recognition of the Gullah/Geechee people's rich cultural heritage, descendants of enslaved Africans brought to the coastal regions of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida around the 1700s.

Gullah/Geechee Nation Appreciation Week is an annual celebration that honors the rich and vibrant culture of the Gullah/Geechee people. It is a time when people come together to appreciate the unique traditions, language, music, and food of this resilient community.

The highlight of Gullah/Geechee Nation Appreciation Week was the annual "Gullah/Geechee Famlee

Day," held in St. Helena Island on Saturday, July 29th. It was a time when the Gullah/Geechee people were able to showcase their unique cultural heritage and share it with the world. The festival was a vibrant celebration of their history, traditions, and way of life.

Queen Quet's gracious acceptance of the proclamation was a reminder of the importance of recognizing and celebrating the contributions of underrepresented communities. She extended a warm invitation to the council members to join in the festivities and experience the beauty of the Gullah/Geechee culture firsthand.

The celebration also served as an opportunity to educate people about the history and legacy of the Gullah/Geechee people. Through various educational presentations and initiatives, participants and visitors could learn about the struggles and triumphs of this community, as well as the ways in which they have contributed to American culture.

The Gullah/Geechee culture has had a powerful impact on the Lowcountry of



Photo Credit: Gullah/Geechee Nation FB page

South Carolina. From their distinct language and vibrant art to their delicious cuisine, this community has left a lasting impression on the region. Through activities such as Gullah/Geechee Nation Appreciation Week, we can come together to celebrate their unique contributions and learn more about their rich cultural heritage.

For more information about the Gullah/Geechee Nation call 843-838-1171, email GullGeeCo@aol.com, or visit <https://gullahgeecheenation.com>.

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"Fun Fins Swim Program" makes headway in teaching water safety



By: Andy Ann

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The mobile pool project for Colleton County was launched this summer with great success. Over 700 kids participated in the "Fun Fins Swim Program." It was the perfect opportunity for children ages 5 and up to learn essential water safety techniques and earn a certificate of completion. Lessons were provided by certified instructors in small classes to ensure individual attention.

The goal of the program is to prevent drowning by providing swimming lessons to children with little to no swimming experience. The county established a valuable partnership with

the YMCA in Dorchester County, which provided the pool operator and swimming lessons, while the county provided the mobile pool. The county transported the mobile pool to various locations throughout the region and operated it for a week at each site before moving it to the next location, including areas such as St. George and Summerville. This allowed the program to reach a wider audience, and provided access to it for children who may not have otherwise had the opportunity to learn how to swim.

Representative Robbins, with the aid of other state officials, recently allocated \$500,000 for the establishment of a permanent facility

with a pool that will offer swimming lessons in the near future. In the meantime, the mobile pool serves as a stopgap until the new center construction is completed.

Overall, county officials were pleased with the success of the mobile pool project and the impact it has had on the children within the community. Officials are looking forward to expanding the program and continuing to provide access to essential water safety skills for children throughout the region.

For more information about the Colleton County Council meetings or to review agendas and minutes, visit www.colletoncounty.org/county-council/agendas-minutes or call 843-549-5221.



Photo credit: townofyemassee.org/police/pages/police-chief-Gregory-z-alexander

Police Chief Gregory Alexander – Town of Yemassee

While on holiday leave one day, he was able to visit with a friend who was working as a patrolman with the Yemassee Police Department. Upon seeing the excitement of his friend's career, he immediately applied for a police officer position in Yemassee.

Chief Alexander fondly remembers his transition from the Navy to the police department saying, "I can remember walking into the offices in my all-white Navy uniform, and the Chief of Police at the time and one of the administrators were so impressed that they nearly hired me right on the spot."

Originally joining the police force in Yemassee in the year 2000, he spent time working for several other law enforcement agencies, such as the Colleton County Sheriff's Department and the Cottageville Police Department, before once again returning to work for the police department in Yemassee. Alexander was then promoted to Sergeant after he was rehired by Yemassee, followed by Captain, and then was appointed the Chief of Police in 2014.

Since his appointment to police chief, he has implemented and overseen numerous administrative and operational changes to the Yemassee Police Department. Programs such as "Coffee with a Cop" were started as part of his goal of getting the local community to be more engaged in the functionality of the police

department, and to bridge any disconnect between the Yemassee residents and the local law enforcement.

Not only are members of the Yemassee community able to directly vocalize their concerns through the morning coffee program, the zoning program implemented by Chief Alexander has also had a dramatic effect on reducing crime in the community. The Zone Fellowship Program is intended to divide the geography into four individual sections overseen by a community leader that would act as a liaison to the local law enforcement agencies. This program was designed to involve more of the townspeople in the prevention of crime and allow a conduit of communication to exist between the police department and the community. The resulting success of the program has led to Yemassee having a significantly lower rate of unsolvable crimes compared to years before the program was instituted.

Chief Alexander feels that the program has greatly improved the ability of his officers to adequately carry out their duties saying, "This program has been a blessing, it really has. I first went to the local ministries and churches to find individuals and community leaders who would act as representatives within the community, and now there's even a Facebook page that has been set up so that the people from the different zones can communicate. For example, if one person

from Zone A saw a crime being committed, someone from Zone B might be able to concur this information and give a more accurate description to help us out."

Despite the landmark accomplishments the Yemassee Police Department has achieved while under his leadership, Chief Alexander still has high expectations for what his department can accomplish in the future. He hopes to soon open a citizen's academy to help familiarize the residents of Yemassee and the surrounding areas with the way law enforcement officers operate, and to further bolster the relationship between the people and the police department for an even more mutually beneficial relationship.

Apart from a citizen's academy, Chief Alexander's landmark goal for this year will be to achieve national accreditation for the Yemassee Police Department through the Commission of Accreditation on Law Enforcement Agencies. He says, "This is something that would set the department above and beyond the standards of law enforcement. It's something that we've been trying to achieve for a while now, and now we have the opportunity to do it."

By: Jack Wysong

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Police Chief Gregory Alexander of the Yemassee Police Department has dedicated his life to community service and protecting the people of Yemassee. However, the path to becoming Chief of the Yemassee Police Department not only requires dedication, but the willingness to wake up each morning and put on a uniform that represents the people of Yemassee and the surrounding areas.

A Varnville, South Carolina native, Alexander first realized that he had a love and profound appreciation for law enforcement at a young age. Chief Alexander and his friends spent their youth admiring the work that law enforcement officers did for the community, and it quickly became ap-

parent to Gregory that he would one day pursue a career in criminal justice.

He recalls, "Of the group of three friends that I had, there were two of us that would go on to become police officers. We would spend our days working at Love's Kitchen, and then at night we would go on a ride-along with police officers in Varnville. We just couldn't get enough of it."

After his first attempt at joining the local police department in Varnville was stopped by his father (who encouraged him to pursue military service and seek higher education), Alexander joined the Navy after graduation. He would then go on to spend the next three years as a sailor before eventually returning to Yemassee.

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— COLLETON COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE

By Jack Wysong

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A resident of Colleton County since 1972, Fire Chief Barry McRoy has served the people of Colleton County for nearly thirty years as a member of the Colleton County Fire and Rescue Department.

Chief McRoy aspired to have a career as a firefighter from an early age. After graduating from school, he decided to get a jumpstart on achieving his goal. He first moved to Savannah, then to Atlanta, where he picked up valuable experience in fire service that would serve as the basis of his career as a firefighter.

After returning to Colleton County in 1990 and seeing the archaic state of fire service across the county, McRoy knew that fundamental changes would need to be made in the administration and operations of the fire department's functions to bring it into the modern world of fire protection. At the time of his return to Colleton, the county-wide fire service was nonexistent. Rather, each township had to rely on their own small volunteer services made up of a few dedicated residents. While this proved sufficient at one point in time, this system quickly became inadequate as the area grew in population.

He says, "Many times what would happen is someone would try to report a fire, and they would open the phonebook to a page with all the volunteers' phone numbers on it and just start calling the numbers until they would get an answer. This was before cell phones and modern communication systems, so once they got on the phone with one volunteer, they would then muster up the other firefighters, get in the truck, and go. Now by that point, many structures would have already burned down."

The lack of a unified fire service led to inadequate

protection for the people of Colleton County, but there was also a lack of training and equipment standardization among the various fire departments. However, these problems quickly began to be resolved with the formation of the Colleton County Fire Department in the mid-1990's. Once the Colleton County Council voted to create the county-wide fire department, a new system had to be built from the ground up.

In an orchestrated effort by the community and members of the various fire departments around the county, infrastructure was laid to help merge all the various fire departments into one service. Despite the immense size of this undertaking, the benefits would pale in comparison to the costs, and on January 1, 1994 Colleton County Fire Department (CCFD) was officially launched and immediately made huge strides towards the level of care it can provide today.

Following its inception, the newly minted CCFD set to work assigning street names to every road in the county so each building could have a unique address for the dispatchers to reference. The International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) was soon adopted as the national standard for firefighter certification, and in 2004 the county voted to merge the ambulance service with the existing fire department to create Colleton County Fire & Rescue Service.

Today, Colleton County Fire & Rescue has continued to grow to its fullest potential. They have Colleton County instructors who have been certified by the South Carolina Fire Academy to teach classes on-site.

Chief McRoy also takes great pride in the fact that all Colleton County firefighters are dual-certified to work on ambulances.

He says, "All of our firefighters are cross-trained to be at least the level of EMT,



Photo credit: colletonfire.com/chiefsmessgae.htm

and we try to get all of our career staff to at least the level of paramedic. We do this because the county operates the ambulances—not the hospital, and not a private company. So we need to make sure everyone is trained to the standard of care that we want to provide, especially since over 80% of our calls are medical calls."

Under McRoy's leadership, Colleton County Fire & Rescue has also been able to form their own special units for responding to special calls around the county. They currently operate an aquatic rescue and dive team, a high and low angle rescue squad for rescues high above or below the ground, and a type 1 HAZMAT team. All of these services help set Colleton County apart through their ISO class 3 rating, which is used to determine the responsiveness and effectiveness of an area's fire service. This rating is then

used by insurance companies to gauge whether or not an area is at risk. Since Colleton has a rating of 3, its fire protection and mitigation services are considered to be well above standard for a rural community.

Colleton County is also one of the few rural counties in South Carolina to operate a rescue MedEvac helicopter, called C.A.R.E. flight, in their fleet of vehicles. Although the company that owns the helicopter itself staffs its own pilots, the flight paramedics aboard each C.A.R.E. flight are Colleton County Fire & Rescue paramedics. The MedEvac helicopter program has also driven the standard of care higher for each of the nine regular ambulances operated in Colleton County.

Chief McRoy says, "The standard of care when the helicopter is deployed is second to none. They can do just about anything and

administer just about anything they need to in a life-saving situation. I figured if that's going to be the standard of care for our most intense calls, then we need to make sure that is the standard of care we are providing every time, even with the regular ambulances."

Although Colleton County Fire & Rescue is unrecognizable compared to the individual fire departments that serviced Colleton County decades ago, Chief McRoy emphasizes that there are still improvements to be made to the current fire service, such as the planned construction of nine more fire stations in the county.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:
WWW.COLLETON
FIRE.COM.**

Superintendent Finalist

Allendale County Schools



Dr. Vallerie Coath Cave



Aug 24, 2023

The South Carolina Department of Education has announced Dr. Vallerie Coath Cave as the finalist candidate for the Allendale County Schools superintendent position. Parents, students, and community members are invited to meet Cave at a community-wide reception at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 31 in the Allendale-Fairfax High School cafeteria.

“During her interview, Vallerie emphasized her belief in the potential of every single student in Allendale and presented a concrete and systematic plan for achieving high student outcomes,” said State Superintendent of Education Ellen Weaver. “She sees possibilities rather than obstacles, and her positive energy underscores the bright hope we see when we look into the eyes of these students and teachers.” Cave recently served as Colleton County School District superintendent from July 2021 through June 2023. Prior to her arrival in Colleton County, she was Associate Superintendent for K-12 School Transformation and Innovation at Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools in Savannah, Georgia.

“I am excited for the possibility to return home and lead the school district that molded me into the leader I have become today,” Cave said. “I am confident that, with my skill set, I will bring a wealth of energy, vitality, and tenacity that is needed. I look forward to meeting with the community to share about my vision for the future.” A native of Allendale County, Cave began her educational journey in her hometown as a first-grade teacher in Allendale Primary School. She then taught for several years in Beaufort County before serving in various administrative roles with the district. Cave also served four years as a principal in Georgia.

Cave holds several degrees, including a Masters in Early Childhood and Elementary Education from the University of South Carolina, and a doctorate in leadership from Walden University. Cave is an avid church musician and loves spending time with her mother, two children and six grandchildren.

Colleton County Republican Party

After many years of wonderful leadership, the Colleton County Republican Party has a new group of leaders in place. They are as follows:

- Chairman: Lori Bell
- Vice Chairman: David Hill
- Executive Committee-woman: Paula Tisdale
- Secretary/Treasurer: Margaret Bolchiz

Lori Bell previously held the position of vice chairman for several terms. All of the newly-elected and appointed positions have been active in the local party previously.

New leadership brings new ideas! Some of the new plans the executive committee has come up with include alternate/additional opportunities to get together with fellow conservatives. Activities will include social gatherings within the county in an informal setting to help increase membership and awareness, as well as opportunities to meet with other counties to discuss what is happening throughout the Lowcountry. There are also plans to have educational opportunities to listen to speakers.

Plans are in progress for a website where

Colletonians can sign up to be a member, as well as make donations.

The monthly business meetings where candidates often come to speak to our local membership will also have a Zoom link. In the event a member may not be able to physically be at the meeting, they will be able to dial into a video so they can still get the information.

The hope is to be able to get as much information as possible out about candidates and voting to Colleton County residents. We also hope to get as many people involved in local

precincts as possible. Cottageville and Edisto Beach have already done an excellent job meeting with and communicating with their local precinct.

The entire team is anxious and excited for

the upcoming two years! Our first fall meeting will be at 6:00 p.m. on September 21, and will be held at the Colleton Memorial Library, located at 600 Hampton Street. Please join us and bring a friend!





29th Annual

Shrimp Festival

SEPTEMBER 15-16, 2023

The Town of Yemassee will be hosting their 29th Annual Shrimp Festival on Friday and Saturday, September 15th and 16th!

Inspired by Jackie Moore, Lori Poston, and community leaders of Yemassee, the idea of the Shrimp Festival was presented by Jackie Moore. Jackie presented the idea to First African Church and Pilgrim Ford, amongst many other local churches in the town. Shortly after Jackie Moore was elected as Mayor, JL Goodwin led a meeting at Fennell Elementary to put together the first festival which took place in 1994! Come enjoy a fun-filled weekend of family activities as we continue this wonderful tradition.

This annual event, featuring arts and crafts, food, rides, music and other entertainment, will be an unforgettable experience. The Shrimp Festival Committee and its sponsors have made this festival possible with events and activities for everyone to enjoy! The Shrimp Festival will host a beauty pageant and softball tournament in the weeks leading up to the kickoff. The festival will be complete with parades, carnival, entertainment, and vendors providing food, crafts, and retail items. Read on and check out what we will be offering at this upcoming festival.

Information about the Yemassee Shrimp Festival can be accessed at www.townofyemassee.com, on Facebook, or through the coordinator, Lori Mixson at (843) 589-2565, Ext 2.

For information regarding sponsorship opportunities: Contact [Southern Business Digest](http://SouthernBusinessDigest.com) at help@southernbusinessdigest.net.

Festival Information:

Kids Carnival

Friday, September 15, 2023
Saturday, September 16, 2023

Yemassee Municipal Complex
101 Town Circle, Yemassee, SC
Lot behind Yemassee Municipal Complex

You asked, and we answered! We've arranged for the kids carnival to return to Yemassee's Shrimp Festival this year. Bring the children to enjoy fun rides. There will be rides available for all ages. Ride tickets and all-day wristbands options will be for sale.

Food and Craft Vendors

Friday, September 15, 2023 from 12:00 PM to 11:00 PM
Saturday, September 16, 2023 from 10:00 AM to 11:00 PM

Yemassee Municipal Complex
101 Town Circle, Yemassee, SC

Vendor Information: Food vendors will be given access to vendor space on September 14 after 4:00 PM. Craft vendors will be given access to vendor space on Friday, September 15 from 7:00 AM to 10:00 AM. Check in with a Shrimp Festival Committee Member to get your packet with your vendor location and important information upon arrival.

SOUTHERN BUSINESS DIGEST

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and reap the benefits of advertising!

29th Annual

Shrimp Festival



Shrimp Festival *Carnival Days Schedule*



FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15TH, 2023

All Food and Craft Vendors will be open at noon-until

1 - 3 pm: Shaggin with Seniors

1 - 3 pm: Non-Profit vendors will be set up.

(Located in the Fire Bay, giving out informational material).

3 - 5 pm: BINGO *(Fire Bay)*

5 pm: Kiddie Parade Line Up

(In front of the Methodist Church on Salkehatchie & Church St.)

5 - 11:30 pm: FUN ZONE

5:15 pm: Kiddie Parade

(Please stop at the 2nd Stop Sign in front of the Town Hall & go to the stage area in the Fire Bay.)

Prizes and Popsicles.

Fun Zone will open.

6 pm: 29th Annual Shrimp Festival *KICK OFF*

6:30 - 7:30 pm: DJ Jenny Garvin

8 - 11:30 pm: Fresh Vibes



Volunteer Opportunities Available!

High School students can earn volunteer hours for their resume and higher education applications!



Contact Lori Mixson at (843) 589-2565, Ext 2 for more information!

Carnival Days Schedule



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16TH, 2023

All Food and Craft Vendors will be open at noon-until

7 am: Registration for 5K

8 am: 29th Annual 5K Race

9 am: Parade Line Up

(*Salkehatchie Rd., Willis St. N, & Pine St. will be closed.***)**

Parade units must turn on Hill Rd. & turn right on Salkehatchie to access your assigned spot in the parade. Event volunteers will meet you on the corner of Hill & Salkehatchie Rd. to direct you to your spot. If you did not sign up in advance, you will fall in place at the end of the line.

10 am: Parade Grand Marshal - Pastor Wila E. Young Priester

11 am: FUN ZONE

Main Stage Entertainment (Fire Bay)

11:30 am - 12:30 pm: Pirate's Dream Darrell Russell

12:30 - 1 pm: Palmetto Dance Center

1-2 pm: TJ Levi Wood Carving

2-4 pm: Walker Dean

4-5 pm: Eu4ia Quartet

5-6 pm: Pirate's Dream Darrell Russell

6-9 pm: DJ Jenny - Music from the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s & up

Grand Slam Concert in the Park

(Harold Peeples Ball Field)

Gates open at 3 pm, Concerts from 5-11:30 pm

5:30-7:30 pm: Jason Lee Cook takes the stage.

8-11:30 pm: Cody Webb & Band



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- Abigail's Country Cookin • C&D Kool Ice and Sweets • Rakes SoftServe Ice Cream • Papa's Kitchen • 5R Concessions
- Serenity's Concessions • Nuttin But Seafood, LLC • Tropical Treasures • Sassy Sweets • Lowcountry Taps
- Love from Above Eatery, LLC • Southern Ice • Belly Full By Tyger • Philips Sweet Treats, LLC • J's Rainbow • P Body Grilling
- G-MA on Ice • Peter's Boat Seafood • Food Savvy Mobile • Wassup BBQ • Williams Meals on Wheels

CRAFT VENDORS

- Felones Small • Swagalicious Paparazzi • Girly Girlz • Roberta McGhee • Mimi's Defense Shop • My Forever Scrubs • A Little Sheepy
- This is Us Savannah • Knotty Pines • Camara Import • Cantey Foundation • Rainey Cows • Design Prints, LLC • Fancy Faces
- Legacy Planning • Joelena Vanhaulst • Tupper-Tastic Tupperware • Gypsy's Boutique • Aloha Designs • The Purse Lady
- All American Gutter • Leaf Filter Gutter • Tandem Chinook, LLC • Fantasia McCoy • Jumpin Joes's Party Rental
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- Department of Corrections • Palmetto Dance

Many thanks for a successful year!



New Businesses Propelling Forward in Allendale & Barnwell

By: Ron Baxley, Jr.

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BARNWELL & ALLENDALE
COUNTIES –

In April, the first cohort of 17 graduates completed the Propel Business Lab, a 12 week accelerator course built to support entrepreneurs whose businesses impact Allendale or Barnwell counties, providing them with planning, marketing, and financial management skills. On April 13, graduates took part in a pitch competition where they competed for \$10,000 in cash awards to support their business, presented by the Southern Palmetto Chamber and Foundation. Tiffany Zieman of Barnwell and Lauren Creech of Allendale were the winners of the competition. What have these family-centric business women been doing since then?

Zieman, a self-taught baker and mother of four, owns The Southern T House, a baking and catering business. Inspired by her late grandmother Nokomia Joyner's passion for baking, along with recipes from Joyner's sewing group, Zieman puts her spin on classics such as pound cake and red velvet cake, while creating her own classics such as moonshine bread pudding. Some have said the bread pudding tastes like Christmas in a casserole dish, with gooey layers of cinnamon sugar, yeasty bread, and plump

raisins.

Zieman has already hit the ground running with events, most recently doing desserts for Mother's Day dinner at the multi-cuisine Barnwell favorite restaurant, Eat Street. "I also plan to do bridal shower cakes with little symbolic charms the friends of the bride can pull out of the cake," Zieman said.

"I want my business to help make people happy and feel like their burdens are lifted," she continued. "With social media and cell phones, I feel like people are missing a lot of what is going on in real life."

Zieman has saved the \$10,000 award to put toward a food truck, which will be a remodeled vintage camper trailer similar to the iconic Winnebagos popularized in the 1950's. Her goal is to have the food truck up and running by fall of this year, which will fulfill her vision of creating an atmosphere where families can talk over desserts, tea, and coffee.

"I will have two long tables with chairs in front of the truck and have people pop a squat, as Julia Roberts said in one of her movies," Zieman laughs.

Lauren Creech, a mother of one and caregiver for her grandmother, won the pitch competition to support her business, Earth Heir Apothecary in Allendale.

Her grandmother, Essie Kemp, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2017, and as a result Creech was inspired to help her with natural remedies—thus the seeds for Earth Heir were planted.

"It's been a long road," Creech said.

She designed a proprietary, natural tea blend for her grandmother for the nausea and dehydration effects of radiation and chemotherapy. In addition to this founding tea blend, Creech has created a group of six teas which clients can customize for their health needs. For example, she has a Spring Refresher blend which is for cleansing the body.

She has also created a heart healthy blend that will benefit the local organization Henrietta's Heart founded by her aunt. Creech's other grandmother was tragically killed in a drive-by shooting in Barnwell in 2020, and Henrietta's Heart was forged as a result. Creech will be selling the tea at the 2nd annual anti-gun violence event on Saturday, June 3 at the Veteran's Memorial Park in Barnwell.

Creech is currently hard at work on the remodeling of a new herb shop where she will create her teas and more, across from the Lobster House landmark on Hwy. 301 in Allendale.

"I am fortunate enough

to have my parents as investors. I did not have to pay for the facility," Creech said.

The \$10,000 she was awarded will be used toward the remodeling and redesign of the facility, rebranding products, and inventory. Creech said, "I plan to keep the historic counter in the facility, while also changing the overall look. I will be fine-tuning the design concepts for the tea packaging as well."

In addition to a full selection of teas and herbs, the storefront will be host to tea demonstrations and tea parties in the near future.

The next cohort of Propel Business Lab has just begun, so you can keep an eye out for new businesses coming to Allendale and Barnwell in the months ahead as a result.

"It is truly exciting to be able to support so many businesses and get them the tools they need for success in our region. There were 17 graduates in the

first cohort and we currently work with 26. We can't wait to see many of these businesses grow and thrive with the support we can provide," said Bob Snead, President and CEO of the Southern Palmetto Chamber and Foundation.

Alicia Davis of Davis Tax Consulting and Financial Services of Barnwell is the Propel Business Lab Facilitator, and with the help of Snead and Southern Palmetto Director of Programs, Enterick Lee, she produces a unique experience for the program participants, drawing on years of experience and leaning on her extensive network.

During the first cohort she brought in six guest speakers, from a lawyer to a marketing director, to present about their expertise. 2023 Propel Business Lab programming was made possible with support from the USDA, Barnwell County, SRP Federal Credit Union, and Barnwell County EDC.

For more information on Tiffany Zieman's The Southern T House, visit www.thesouthernhouse.com, email thesouthernhouse@gmail.com, or call (803) 571-6972.

For more information on Lauren Creech's Earth Heir Apothecary, visit www.wowherbs.net, email earthheirinfo@gmail.com, or call (904) 321-9286.

For more information on the work of the Southern Palmetto Chamber and Foundation, visit www.southernpalmetto.org

Summerville networking group helps female entrepreneurs find kinship, inspiration, and connections



SUMMERVILLE WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Network. Connect. Learn. Collaborate.

Meetings held the first Monday of each month.

Visit the Summerville Women in Business
Facebook group for more information!

By: Jessica O'Connor
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Being an entrepreneur can be a lonely role at times—especially for women. It can be tough to find a “tribe” of like-minded individuals who understand the highs and lows associated with running a business, but Jennifer Robinson is dedicated to making doing so a bit easier for Summerville businesswomen.

A life coach who specializes in helping busy women regain control of their stress levels through her own

business, Peaceful Living Wellness, Jennifer understands the struggles female entrepreneurs face. In 2019, she partnered with a fellow businesswoman to create a networking group especially for ladies like themselves, but the pandemic put a stop to their events in 2020. Around March of 2021, Jennifer found herself missing those interactions and created Summerville Women in Business as a result.

“I needed to get out of the house,” she recalled. “I

networking is so important. I really just needed to be around other women entrepreneurs, so I decided to get this thing started again.”

The group’s monthly meetings combine education, networking, and fun for the women who attend. Generally the evening begins with time for formal networking before moving into more casual social networking over dinner. Jennifer also plans a different game for each month’s event with a fun twist—the winner then gives an educational presentation of her

choosing at the next meeting.

Jennifer currently caps the number of attendees at 15 to encourage more intimate, meaningful conversation and networking, although she hopes she will be able to increase this number to 20 upon finding a larger venue. Unlike networking groups such as BNI, however, Summerville Women in Business doesn’t limit attendees to a single representative for each type of business.

“Collaboration is so much more important than competition,” she said. “We’re women—we do things differently. We don’t have to be in a scarcity mindset. We can be in an abundance mindset, because there’s a big, amazing world out there. There will be clients for all of us.”

The group’s networking events have shown to be an excellent resource for business women in the Summerville area. Jennifer noted that a number of attendees have continued building relationships outside of the monthly meetings, and they often refer those they’re making connections with to people in their own circle who may benefit from what those new connections offer.

If you’re interested in organizing your own group like Summerville Women in Business, Jennifer had some sage advice to offer. First, don’t hesitate to use Facebook to create a space for women who may be interested in attending your

events. A dedicated Facebook group can serve as a starting point for those who have an interest in connecting with other female entrepreneurs in your area, and provides a “safe space” to begin networking, spark friendships, offer support, and share the unique knowledge that every member brings to the table. These groups are also a great place to post your event dates and times, along with sign-up information. Eventbrite is another tool that makes creating sign-up portals for events quick and easy, and the landing page can then be shared to your Facebook group/event listing.

Second, consider having your meetings at a restaurant or providing food of some sort. Most importantly, however, ensure that you’re creating a welcoming environment.

“Just be really open,” Jennifer said in conclusion. “That is what has made this so successful. Just be really open and inviting, and people will come.”

Summerville Women in Business meetings are held on the first Monday of every month. As previously mentioned, the events are currently limited to 15 attendees, and the link to sign up can be found within the Facebook group at <https://www.Facebook.com/groups/swinbnetworking>. There is a seat-saver fee of \$20 to hold your spot, but the fee is refunded if you show up as promised.

For more information on Jennifer Robinson and Peaceful Living Wellness, visit www.peacefullivingwellness.com or email jennifer@peacefullivingwellness.com



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One Thousand New Jobs riding into Allendale on New Tire Plant



By: Ron Baxley, Jr.

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FAIRFAX IN ALLENDALE COUNTY –

Tin Thanh Group Americas announced several months ago that it is opening a tire retread and tire recycling facility on Walker Rd. in Fairfax with an anticipated opening date of January 2025.

While they had the initial groundbreaking ceremony in March, they are continuing steps in the initial construction process. During that event, Tin Thanh Group Americas Chief Executive Officer Tran Dinh Quyen announced, “Tin Thanh Group Americas is excited to make South Carolina home for its first location outside Vietnam and is proud to be South Carolina’s first Vietnamese company.”

“With the assistance of the Department of Commerce, the Southern Carolina Alliance and the officials at Allendale County, and the assistance of readySC, the decision was clear compared with the other locations that sought our project in the Southeast,” Quyen continued.

Quyen concluded, “Tin

Thanh Group Americas looks forward to a long-lasting, fruitful, and cooperative relationship with all of South Carolina.”

Keith D. Sernick, Esq., a consultant for economic development funding and government relations with State Street Advisers, is working closely with Tin Thanh Group Americas and serves as an additional spokesperson for the company. According to Sernick’s email sign-off, State Street Advisers has offices in the following locations: Beaufort, South Carolina; Garden City and Rochester, New York; and Greenwich, Connecticut.

Sernick said in mid-June, “We have not broken ground formally. We are in the process of engaging a general contractor and anticipate having the contractor in place by July 15, 2023.”

He said once the initial work begins that the groundbreaking ceremony will occur 18 months afterward and that he anticipates the opening date of the facility will be January 2025.

The facility is projected to be 1.1 million square feet. According to online sources, this would be the equivalent of over 15 foot-

ball fields.

According to a release from Gov. Henry McMaster’s office several months ago, the facility represents a \$68 million dollar investment by the company.

In addition, The Coordinating Council for Economic Development in S.C. approved job development credits related to this project. The council also awarded a \$1 million Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF) grant to Allendale County to assist with the costs of site preparation and infrastructure improvements.

According to Gov. McMaster’s release, “Tin Thanh Group Americas’ South Carolina location will allow the company to manufacture and retread large commercial vehicle tires, as well as operate its commercial tire leasing program.”

“Supplying energy from reusable sources, Tin Thanh Group Americas will provide operations in recycled energy, closed industry-agriculture, recycled waste, and tire leasing while serving the environment, energy, high-tech agriculture, and technology markets,” the release continued.

The release concluded, “With a focus on sustaina-

bility, the company is committed to implementing sustainable practices to lower the carbon-emission level and provide a cleaner environment.”

Sernick said the methods that will be used in the production and product are unknown at this time but will comply with all necessary regulations.

According to a graphic from the company, the tire recycling factory will receive 500,000 tons of material a year. Also, the capacity of tire retreading will be 200,000 tires a year. Within the facility, the capacity for recycled tires will be 488,000 tons per year.

Also, the facility is anticipated to bring approximately 1,085 jobs to Allendale County/the region according to Sernick -- more than initially anticipated.

Sernick said these jobs will range from everything to janitorial to the C.E.O.

He said entry level work will require a high school degree or GED. Management positions will also be available at the facility.

Sernick said those positions will require professional degrees such as those in accounting, the legal areas, and engineering.

He said they plan on utilizing USC-Salkehatchie for training.

“We have interacted with the president on several occasions already,” Sernick added.

Gov. McMaster said several months ago about Tin Thanh Group bringing their facility to Fairfax in Allendale County, “This announcement once again shows the world has taken notice of the many benefits of doing business in South Carolina. This major \$68 million investment and 1,031 new jobs will be transformative for Allendale. We proudly welcome our first Vietnamese Company, Tin Thanh Group Americas,

to the state and look forward to creating a long-standing partnership.”

“Today is another win for South Carolina! When clean energy companies such as Tin Thanh Group Americas decide to invest in our state, it is a testament to the talented workforce that contributes to the rapid growth of sustainable companies. Congratulations to Tin Thanh Group Americas on its first operations in the U.S.,” said Secretary of Commerce Harry M. Lightsey III.

Allendale County Council Chairman Matthew Connelly said, “Allendale County welcomes Tin Thanh Group Americas to our community, and we thank them for their investment in our future and our people. Each of the more than one thousand jobs will make a difference in the lives of (each) family in the region because good jobs and good economic development change lives.”

“Southern Carolina Alliance welcomes Mr. Tran and the Tin Thanh Group Americas to our region, where they plan to build their first facility in the U.S. The jobs they are creating, and their capital investment will be a tremendous catalyst to growth in this rural area. Industries like Tin Thanh are the backbone of the regional economy and touch every aspect of the local community,” said Southern Carolina Alliance President and Chief Executive Officer Danny Black.

According to their website, Tin Thanh Group is a pioneer in using renewable energy and reducing global emissions, aiming for a multi-industry business, sustainable development for an increasingly better environment, and reducing emissions for this earth.

For more information or to submit resumes for the Fairfax plant, email kds@stateadvisers.com.

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4 Corner Financial Group covers the cornerstones of life



By: Andy Ann

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4 Corner Financial Group (co-owned by Johnny Craven and Brenda Eustace) and its staff offer comprehensive insurance and financial planning services. The company employs a comprehensive approach to fulfilling the needs and desires of its clients. It offers life insurance policies that come with living benefits, health plans that comply with the Affordable Care Act, retirement plans, and property and casualty insurance coverage for both homes and automobiles. Additionally, the company provides a variety of coverage options for commercial and business accounts.

At 4 Corner, Johnny and his sister Brenda focus on understanding the unique needs of individuals, single parents, and families alike.

Their goal is to provide a comprehensive range of products and services that cater to their client's needs, family growth, and eventual retirement. They help curate a tailored portfolio for each client specific to their needs to achieve financial stability and security.

Creating a well-balanced plan requires working with reputable professionals in the community to provide their clients with the best possible advice and guidance. 4 Corner understands that life is unpredictable and aims to help their clients plan for any eventuality. They offer streamlined processes for clients to create important documents such as a will, medical power of attorney, or financial plan.

Johnny has 30 years of experience, while Brenda has 25 years. Together they have a wealth of knowledge

to share, guiding clients through the process and asking the right questions to create a plan that meets their needs. The four main pillars are life, health, retirement, and property and casualty insurance, as they provide comprehensive protection.

Brenda is an expert in medical and health insurance and makes it her mission to provide excellent service and a caring approach to clients. She has been in the insurance industry since 1998 and has always loved her job. Even at 63 years old, she still wishes to continue her career.

Establishing relationships with customers is a crucial aspect of her role, as trust is essential in this industry. Brenda strongly believes that customers are not just clients, but family.

Therefore, building a relationship with them is of utmost importance, and she strives to achieve this with every interaction.

According to Johnny, Brenda's proficiency and wisdom, coupled with her comprehensive knowledge of the insurance industry, are like the ingredients of a pie. When these elements are blended together they become truly valuable to clients in need.

Having adequate insurance coverage is vital to safeguard oneself, loved ones, and assets. Brenda and Johnny, as independent insurance agents, are committed to providing their clients with the best possible insurance solutions. Combined, they possess extensive knowledge and experience in the insurance business, which enables them to offer exceptional service to their clients.

4 Corner has also welcomed the addition of Morgan Thomas to its staff. Morgan's extensive experience in the insurance industry will be invaluable in assisting clients with their auto, life, and accident insurance needs.

They also believe that it is essential to review and update your plan regularly, as life is always changing. Just as you might clean out your closet or dust off your bookshelf, your will, life insurance, retirement plans, and health insurance all require periodic check-ups. 4 Corner offers free reviews to make it easy for you to stay on top of things.

The company and its staff are dedicated to ensuring your comfort and delivering exceptional service. The company collaborates with several primary care

companies, namely AIG American General, Global Atlantic, American National, Columbian, and Foresters, as well as 80 supporting companies to cater to clients' diverse needs.

In order to provide their clients with the best possible coverage, they have decided to partner with Farrell Insurance Agency, which is located in Lexington. This agency will be responsible for providing property and casualty insurance, which includes home and auto insurance, as well as special event coverage, boat, camper, ATV, and other types of coverage. They are also happy to offer commercial policies to business owners, and are able to provide competitive rates through a number of different providers, such as Progressive, Foremost, AAA, Nationwide, and others.

4 Corner's primary objective is to comprehend your circumstances and assist you in providing for your family, regardless of its size. Therefore, if you need someone to assist you in navigating the unpredictable nature of life, please do not hesitate to arrange a meeting with them. They aim to engage in a discussion, familiarize themselves with your situation, and ensure that you are on the correct path.

For more information visit:

www.4cornerins.com or call (843) 782-4111. The office is located at 261 E. Washington Street in Walterboro, South Carolina. Hours of operation are Monday-Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m.



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Colleton Medical Center cares for its community

By: **Andy Ann**
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Colleton Medical Center (CMC) has been a bustling hub of healthcare services, catering to over 67,000 individuals across seven counties in the Lowcountry in the last year. Whether it was inpatient, outpatient, or emergency room visits, CMC has been at the forefront of providing quality medical care to the community and surrounding areas. Last year alone, CMC had a staggering 31,000 emergency room visits.

Colleton Medical Center's success is largely due to the hard work of its 541 employees who are dedicated to serving its patients with the utmost care and compassion. These employees, who are the backbone of the organization, are compensated with competitive wages and benefits, with a combined total amounting to \$39.1 million having the potential to be reinvested back into Colleton County. Over 60% of CMC's employees live in Colleton County, and over 80% reside within 40 miles of the hospital. This means that a significant portion of this earned income stays within the Lowcountry, benefitting other businesses and the community as a whole.

As a for-profit organization and part of the HCA

healthcare network out of Nashville, CMC also understands the importance of fulfilling its obligations to society. CMC takes pride in being a responsible corporate citizen and making a positive impact on the lives of those in Walterboro and surrounding areas. It recognizes the importance of giving back and has donated an astonishing \$7.3 million in charity and compensated care, providing actual dollars (not just charges) to support the care of individuals in need. CMC believes that every action it takes, no matter how small, can make a difference.

In terms of medical upgrades, over the past year CMC has invested \$9.5 million in capital to improve its medical facilities. The MRI magnet, which was over 20 years old, was in dire need of replacement. The replacement was made alongside upgrading the ecosystem to ensure that patients receive the best care possible. Additionally, CMC upgraded its stress testing capabilities so that it can provide a more comprehensive diagnosis.

It was also decided to give the facilities a facelift, with the goal of creating a more inviting and pleasant environment for patients. CMC believes that the ambiance of the space can significantly impact a pa-



tient's well-being, and they want them to feel comfortable and at ease while receiving treatment.

Lastly, for the past four years, they have been providing expert services to Colleton County. CMC is proud to have brought the DaVinci XI technology back to the region, which has enabled their general and gynecological surgeons to perform complex procedures. With this state-of-the-art technology, they can deliver a higher quality of care to their patients.

Colleton Medical Center and its staff are always striving to improve services and facilities to give patients the best possible experience. They are committed to providing top-notch medical care to the community, and constantly exploring new ways to achieve that goal.

This article was written based on the data presented by Jimmy Hiott, Chief Executive Officer of Colleton Medical Center, during the Colleton County Council's July 25, 2023 meeting.

For more information call 843-782-2000 or visit <https://colletonmedical.com/about/contact.dot>. Colleton Medical Center is located at 501 Robertson Blvd in Walterboro, South Carolina.

For more information about the Colleton County Council meetings or to review agendas and minutes, visit www.colletoncounty.org/county-council/agendas-minutes or call 843-549-5221.

Maintaining excellence to beat the "Five Year Curse."

By: **Jessica O'Connor**
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"A page you liked has changed its name."

That headline brought my afternoon Facebook scroll to a screeching halt last week. The unfamiliar name led me to the page in question, where I found that one of my favorite locally owned coffee shops was changing hands.

I was somewhat saddened, but not fully surprised. The consistency of

the product they delivered (along with their level of customer service) had decreased greatly in the past year. In the business' infancy, at least one of the two owners was behind the bar every time I stopped in to grab my decaf oat milk mocha caramel latte. For most of that first year, I could rest assured my morning treat would taste the same every time I walked out of their door.

Likewise, the owners and the baristas that worked alongside them

seemed to truly care about their customers and were passionate about the product they sold. They recognized my voice when I called in an order on rushed mornings, and they knew what I was most likely going to ask for when I stepped up to the counter without ordering ahead. Many mornings the cardboard sleeve on my cup would even have a small illustration and a whimsically lettered personalized message on it.

I, no doubt like many of

their other regular customers, felt seen and authentically appreciated. I liked knowing what to expect when I walked through the door. The cafe wasn't any cheaper than a larger chain like Starbucks, but the experience as a whole (and the consistently delicious coffee) appealed to me far more.

As the business moved into their second year, I started to notice little things slipping. My latte didn't always taste the same, and the frequency of that occur-

rence began to increase. My mobile orders (always placed well in advance and accompanied by a tip for the baristas' time) were sometimes not ready when I arrived. The owners were rarely there when I stopped in, replaced instead by staff that sometimes seemed unenthusiastic about being there and at other times appeared to simply be poorly trained. The bad experiences began to outnumber the good, and I eventually slipped back into the status

(Continued on page 21)

Starting the day with Stacy Pinckney

By: Jack Wysong

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Stacy Pinckney takes immense pride in her ability to serve the people of Yemassee in the capacity of an active member of the town council.

Born and raised in Walterboro, South Carolina, she found her way to the town of Yemassee after relocating from Port Royal. Stacy has always had a profound desire to get out into the community and help others, as well as use her talents to overcome the pervasive apathy that she saw was permeating her community. She has organized and hosted numerous community outreach events, worked at nonprofit ministries, and through perseverance and faith overcame several setbacks that many would consider to be career-ending.

It is no surprise that someone with such a prominent love for their community would find themselves serving in the local government. However she was initially uninterested in being a council member, believing that the bureaucracy would only hinder her ability to serve others. But several of her closest colleagues presented her with the idea, and seeing the magnified

impact she could have from the position there was little debate left on whether she should pursue the opportunity.

She says, "I am all about pulling people together. So many people want to see the community broken up and separated in so many ways, but I believe in pulling everyone together. In Yemassee we are located at the intersection of four different counties, so we're almost like a melting pot of a lot of different communities."

While serving as a member of the town council, she has overseen numerous landmark changes to the Yemassee area that have propelled its development beyond what she envisioned. In coalition with the town administration, the Town of Yemassee has secured several projects that will result in the construction of seventy-nine new homes in the area. However, the project that she feels will most benefit the people of the town is going to be the construction of a new Genesis HealthCare facility that will be positioned in the heart of the town.

The new Genesis HealthCare Project facility will provide health care resources to the people of

Yemassee and the surrounding areas that are otherwise in a health care desert. Stacy identifies some of the leading problems towns like Yemassee faces as the lack of available health care resources and accommodations for its residents.

She says, "One of the biggest challenges that our residents face is the lack of a pharmacy in the town. If someone needs medications or pharmaceutical services, they have to travel to an outside area to receive the care and treatment that they need-and for many people that is just not an option. Having that pharmacy here in town is going to be huge for the people."

She also believes that this project is going to help bring more people into the town and help the community prosper.

Even with all of these developments on the near horizon, Stacy is always looking for what comes next for the people of Yemassee. She explains that the upcoming youth programs the town has planned will benefit the future generations of Yemassee residents, and she is excited to be able to physically be out in the community and serve its

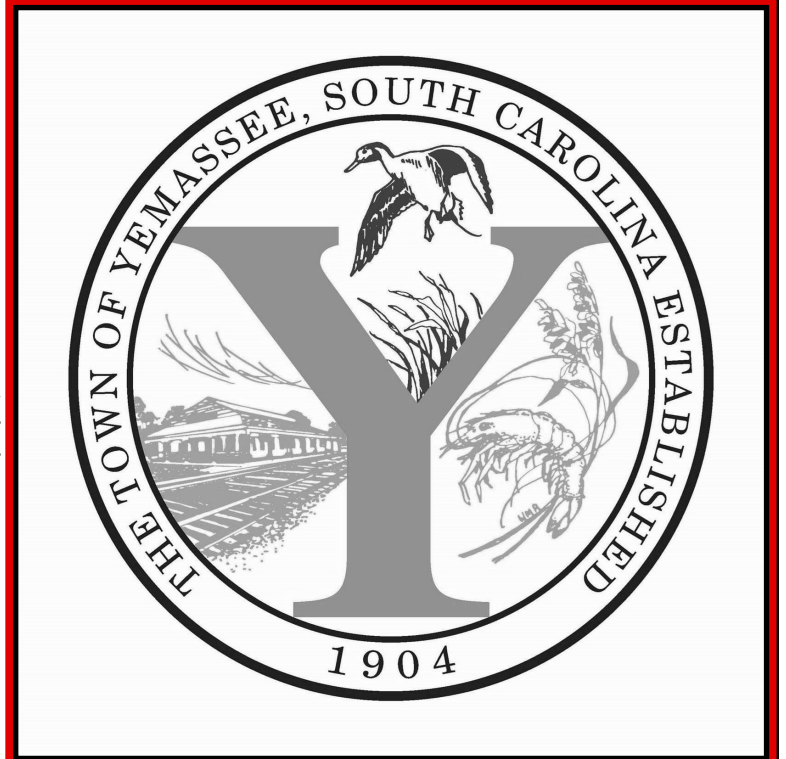


Photo credit: <https://www.townofyemassee.org/>

people. She says, "I took an oath for them to be able to see me working as town council, and when it comes to the kids, nobody gets pushed aside."

Stacy has spent her career serving the people of Yemassee, and hopes to continue to serve her community in perpetuity. She applauds the work that the Yemassee Town Council has done during her tenure as a council member, and she believes that with a continuous and coordinated effort from the town council, growth and prosperity can be sustained for the town.

In conclusion she says, "Once we became unified as a council and learned how to work with each other, we became a dream team. We learned how to agree to disagree, and how to remain functional even when there was some disagreement of opinion. And that's exactly what we need to continue to grow."

For more information please visit: <https://www.townofyemassee.org/town-council>

(Five Year Curse Continued from page 20)

of an occasional customer instead of a three to four day per week "regular." Based on the continual changes in business hours and other factors, I wasn't the only one who did so.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported that one in five businesses do not survive their first year of business, and almost half don't make it to the five year mark. The coffee shop had been open for approximately two years. Their regression followed a pattern that I've seen numerous businesses I enjoyed patronizing experience prior to closing before

(or close to) that five year mark.

Most of these businesses started out strong. The owners took a very hands-on approach early on, during which time the quality of their product (as well as their customer service) was at its peak. Perhaps in the beginning business wasn't exactly booming, so they had plenty of time to devote to nurturing relationships with customers and providing them with an experience that enticed them to refer their friends and family. They set the bar high and that's a good thing, right?

It can be. But when busi-

ness picks up and the owners must continue to add members to their team (or work harder themselves) to meet the demand, they must continue to meet that same standard of excellence. I would even argue that maintaining that standard may be more important than setting the bar high initially.

Look at it this way-relationships, whether it be a romantic relationship, a friendship, or otherwise, have a hard time thriving when we abandon everything we did to cultivate them in the beginning. Every action, big or small, taken to nourish a new relationship sets expectations.

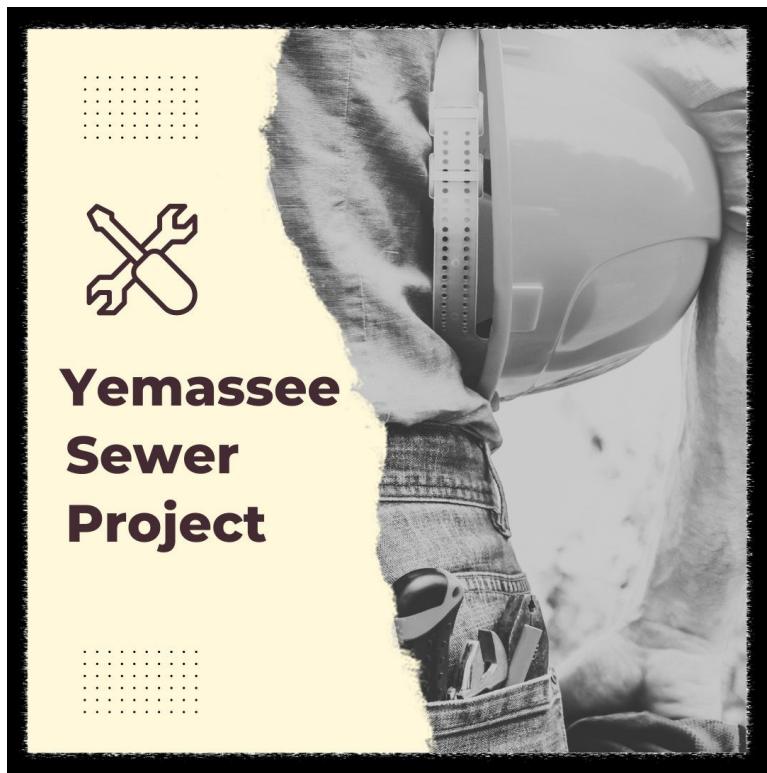
When we get comfortable and those expectations begin to be met less and less, we run the risk of jeopardizing that particular relationship.

As business owners, we build relationships with our customers. What we do in the first six months to a year sets the tone for how our customers expect future transactions to play out. When business seems to finally be "good" and our profits have become steady (or are even growing at a rate we didn't expect), that is not the time to become lax. We can't simply throw the reins to a team of employees, start looking for ways to cut costs to in-

crease revenue at the expense of our product or service's quality, and hope that our business will continue to grow while we simply make bank deposits. We have to take that standard we set for our customers in the beginning and aspire to exceed it.

Don't become a victim of the five year curse. Do the work. Set the bar high, then look for ways to go above and beyond in every single interaction you have with a customer. It may not be a foolproof plan for avoiding failure, but it's certain to have some sort of positive impact on the longevity of your business.

“Yemassee Sewer Project” set to bring needed infrastructure updates



Council and lead program manager, Hank Amundson, for awarding the funding and recognizing the critical nature of the Yemassee Sewer Project. He called it a reflection of the county's commitment to improving infrastructure and the overall well-being of Yemassee's residents.

The “Yemassee Sewer Project” will focus on upgrading and expanding the sewer infrastructure in the low-lying area along River Road and Guess Drive. Currently, five homes and an industrial customer rely on septic tanks or inadequate sewer services, which pose health and safety concerns for the community. The awarded funding will enable the Low Country Regional Water System to install an engineered low-pressure sewer system, complete with individual grinder pumps and a joint force main. This will replace the existing septic tanks and shallow sewer lines, ensuring compliance with state

environmental standards.

The Low Country Regional Water System has been a fantastic partner to the town, continuously improving its services. Their involvement in the Yemassee Sewer Project will undoubtedly benefit the community, creating a safer and more sustainable environment for residents and businesses alike.

This project also addresses a manufacturing facility, Vetrostone, with an outdated sewer infrastructure that's situated right in the heart of a wetland area. Not only does it pose a risk to the environment, it also increases the likelihood of sanitary sewer overflows.

However, to mitigate this risk, the project also involves the installation of Remote Terminal Units (RTUs) fitted with advanced radio equipment. These RTUs will be capable of monitoring the critical lift stations along Guess Drive remotely, thereby minimizing the chances of sanitary

sewer overflows. In addition to improving overall operational efficiency, this cutting-edge monitoring system will also help decrease the cost associated with maintenance.

With the right approach, it is possible to balance the needs of industry with environmental conservation. The RTUs will serve as an essential tool in this effort, allowing for real-time monitoring of the lift stations to prevent any potential damage to the surrounding ecosystem. Overall, this project represents a unique opportunity to balance the needs of industry with the imperative need to protect natural resources—and with the implementation of advanced monitoring technology, it is poised to be a success.

By: Andy Ann

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The Town of Yemassee has received a generous sum of \$243,000 through Beaufort County's "Good Neighbor" initiative, which will be used to fund the “Yemassee Sewer Project”. This vital project will address the town's pressing

infrastructure needs, which have long been a concern for its residents. The funds will be used to enhance the quality of life for Yemassee's inhabitants, creating a safer and healthier living environment for all.

Town Administrator Matt Garnes expressed his gratitude to Beaufort County

For more information call 843-589-2565, email towncommunications@townofyemassee.org, or visit the Municipal Complex at 101 Town Circle in Yemassee, South Carolina.

Partnerships strengthen public safety

By: Andy Ann

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Yemassee Town Council has just given the green light to Resolution 23-13, a move that will allow the police departments of Yemassee and Ridgeland to join forces for public safety. This partnership will help both departments work together seamlessly during emergencies and critical situations, with the goal of providing better law enforcement services to both communities.

The mayors of both towns are delighted with this new partnership, believing that it will significantly enhance public safety. Mayor Colin J. Moore, in particular, is thrilled with this development, saying that it is a huge step forward in strengthening the

relationship between Yemassee and Ridgeland.

By working together, they will be able to provide enhanced law enforcement services in all kinds of situations, from natural disasters to criminal investigations. Additionally, these two police departments will be better equipped to handle whatever challenges come their way, providing peace of mind for residents of both towns. This agreement allows law enforcement officers from both jurisdictions to possess the same legal rights, powers, and duties as their counterparts in the other agency.

Council approval of the agreement sets out crucial provisions, including procedures for requesting assistance, delegation of authority and jurisdiction, primary

responsibilities, personnel, costs, and records. Both parties have also agreed to take care of their equipment, share costs incurred during operations, and provide insurance coverage as required by law.

The Yemassee Town Council encourages continued cooperation and transparent communication between the two police departments. This partnership will benefit residents for years to come, and the agreement will remain effective until either party terminates it through written notice.

For more information call 843-589-2565, email towncommunications@townofyemassee.org, or visit the Municipal Complex at 101 Town Circle in Yemassee, South Carolina.

✱ **Announcing** ✱

NEW

PARTNERSHIP



Ridgeland
Police



Yemassee
Police

✱ **Joining forces for public safety** ✱

ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA SORORITY

Celebrates First Greek Fest



Photo credit: <https://www.facebook.com/XiOmegaOmega/>

our organizations for the same reasons.”

The chapter’s history in Walterboro, dating back to its charter in 1983, made the city an ideal location for the festivities. The sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Inc. was founded in 1908 and is known for being the first Greek letter organization for college-educated black women. More recently, the legacy includes community service projects such as hand stitching dresses for African school-aged girls, creating Power Pack meals for students to consume over the weekend, homeless initiatives, food drives, scholarships, and a wide range of other services.

The goal of the latest Greek Fest event was to keep the tradition of meeting and fellowship with both seasoned and present members. The event began with a short prayer, followed by music, various door prizes, and food vendors from all parts of South Carolina. The children enjoyed cold frozen treats and jump castles. A moment was also established for all sororities and fraternities to introduce themselves while describing

what they do within the community.

In the upcoming months, the chapter will be looking for youth from ages 11-13 for the Youth Leadership Institute. The mentorship program is a youth-led and highly interactive leadership development program to help empower and engage participants. If you have a child you would like to see participate, reach out to the chapter members by looking up the chapter locator for your area on www.aka1908.com.

The next event will be the 40th chapter anniversary on November 18, 2023, which is open to the public.

Currently, members are working on a Winter Service project, and more details will be announced at a later date. If anyone would be open to membership, it is by invitation only on a graduate level. College students currently who are enrolled can check with their undergraduate chapter for more information.

There are currently plans underway for preparation for next year’s event. To be

a vendor or provide representation for your fraternity or sorority, the community is encouraged to reach out to any chapter member for more information on how to be involved. If you would like to be a sponsor or provide a donation, reach out to the chapter president, Sylvia Williams, at xiomega-omega@gmail.com.

Special thanks go out to the community, vendors, sponsors, fraternities, sororities, and members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. who all worked so diligently to make the occasion a success.

If you would like to be a sponsor or provide a donation, reach out to the chapter president, Sylvia Williams, at xiomega-omega@gmail.com.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpha_Kappa_Alpha

By: Danielle M. Parker

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On August 12, 2023, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Xi Omega Omega Chapter celebrated its first Greek Fest event in Walterboro that was hosted on the Colleton County Middle School track. The festival was open to the community and included vendors and other sororities/fraternities from surrounding areas.

The event was created to educate the community about the presence of the Greek organizations commonly referred to as the “Divine 9” and what they do, while providing an opportunity to fellowship with other local organizations. Sorority President, Sylvia Williams stated the purpose of the important milestone, “The event was planned to help break the stereotype that certain organizations don’t get along with each other—we do. We are all in

Colleton County Democratic Party

Colleton County Democratic Party (CCDP) has been very busy this year. In the spring, new officers were elected for a 2-year term. Pictured left to right (at the SCDP convention) are Hiram Davis, 3rd Vice Chair; Deborah Rodriguez, 1st Vice Chair; Clarence Wiggins, Chairman; and Stewart McAdoo, 2nd Vice Chair. Jill Chadwick was elected again to serve as

Treasurer and Angelo McAdoo is the new secretary. In addition, the Executive Committee Persons are Rolets Buckner, Elaine Fryar, Edward Williams, and Mike Cubelo.

We are recruiting and preparing candidates for the November 2024 county positions that will be up for election. We are also working with the state party to support candidates for

statewide and federal elections.

We are attending local events where we are engaging and educating attendees about upcoming elections and issues, and registering voters.

We meet on the last Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. in person and via Zoom. The August meeting is at the Colleton Memorial Library in Walterboro in the

large conference room.

To get more information and to follow us on social media, please “like” our Facebook page called Colle-

ton County Democratic Party, follow us on Twitter (@ColletonDems), on Instagram (@colletondemocrats) and email is colletondemocrats@yahoo.com.



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