



Index Journal  
**SALUTE**  
TO NURSES

# Inside today's edition!

Pages 1C-8C

# Index Journal

INDEXJOURNAL.COM

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1919

VOL. 108, NO. 53

4 SECTIONS, 28 PAGES

SUNDAY, MAY 10, 2026

DAILY \$2

**DEVELOPMENT**

## Officials: County regulates, not pushes

By Renee Ortiz  
rortiz@indexjournal.com

As housing proposals continue to surface across Greenwood County, officials say public concern often centers on what the county controls, what developers pay for and how much growth local systems can handle.

**Regulating the process**

The county does not recruit housing developments, said Rob Russian, Greenwood County deputy county manager of operations. Instead, residential projects generally begin with private landowners, developers or investment groups seeking to develop land they own or are trying to purchase.

"We regulate the process," Russian said. "We don't push it along."

That distinction has become increasingly important as residents raise questions about infrastructure, traffic, schools and Lake Greenwood. Several recent and proposed projects have sparked public concern, including developments near Ninety Six and the lake.

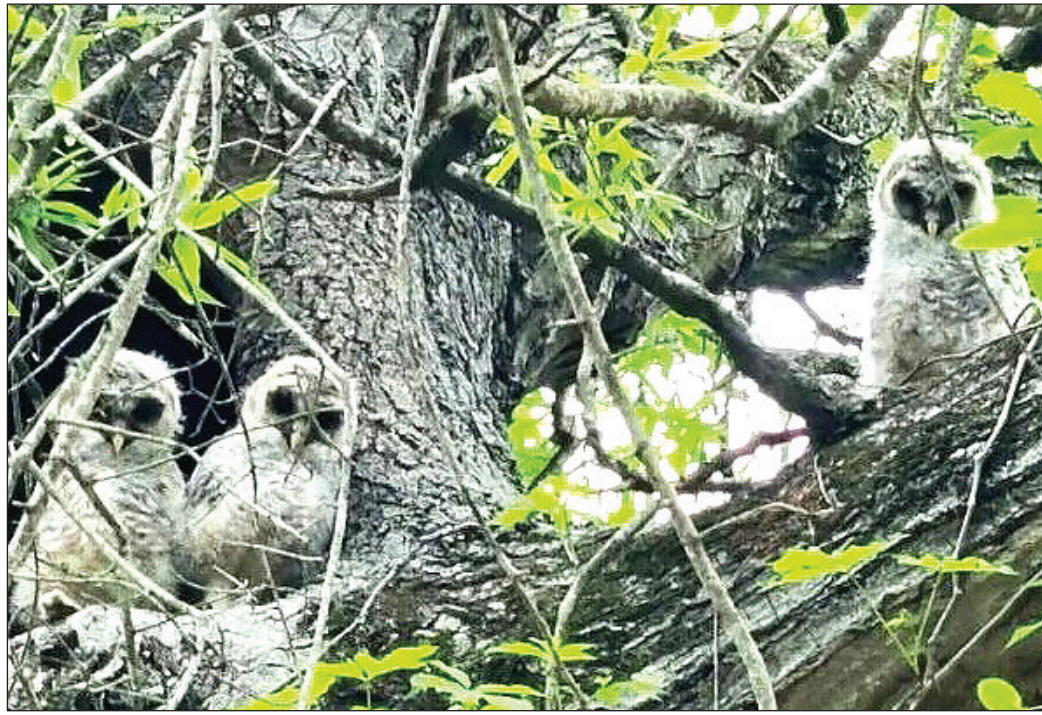
Russian said the county's role depends largely on whether a proposed project fits the current zoning classification. If a plan meets those requirements, it does not have to go before the Planning Commission or County Council for rezoning. In those cases, the developer may move forward "by right," provided the project meets county ordinances and development standards.

If a rezoning is required, the proposal goes through a public review process, including Planning Commission consideration and, ultimately, County Council action.

"Most of it is private land that's being developed by a private company or citizen," Russian said. "As long as it meets the guidelines of what that property is zoned for, they're free to develop that property as they see fit."

However, developments do not move forward without oversight. Russian said subdivision projects must still meet county requirements for roads, drainage, utilities and access. The county inspects new roads during construction

See **REGULATES**, page 7A



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Three owlets look around from their nest along Kirksey Pittsburgh Road in Greenwood.

## Ladies and gentlemen ...

# The Hoo!

## Road work turns into a real hoot

By Renee Ortiz  
rortiz@indexjournal.com

A Greenwood County road project turned into a rescue mission after a baby owl fell from a tree along Kirksey Pittsburgh Road.

Dave Roberts, Greenwood County Road Department superintendent, said he and a county

crew were working on a drainage issue near a driveway when the owl fell from its nest and landed near him.

"He wasn't two feet from me when he hit the ground," Roberts said. "I thought, 'Oh my God, this poor little guy.'"

See **HOOT**, page 6A



**ABOVE:** A young barred owl sits on a towel after falling from a tree along Kirksey Pittsburgh Road. Michelle Gordy contacted PAWS Animal Wildlife Sanctuary, which advised that the owl should be returned to its nest if possible. **RIGHT:** Greg Gordy holds a young barred owl wrapped in a towel after it fell from a tree on his family's property.



## Vickery leaves lasting legacy in Ninety Six

By Mya Atten  
matten@indexjournal.com

Inside the band room at Ninety Six High School, Aiken native David Vickery built far more than championship caliber performances.

Over nearly three decades, he

built a culture, a tradition and, for many students, a second home.

Now, after 29 years in education, Vickery is preparing to step away from the podium that shaped generations of students and helped define one of South Carolina's most respected high

school band programs.

Under Vickery's leadership, the Ninety Six Wildcats Marching Band won 12 South Carolina Class A championships, earned multiple superior ratings in

See **LEGACY**, page 4A



After 29 years of leading the Ninety Six Wildcats Marching Band to statewide success, David Vickery is retiring as band director.

SUBMITTED

## Fish kill bigger than thought

By Renee Ortiz  
rortiz@indexjournal.com

State records obtained by the Index-Journal show South Carolina environmental and wildlife agencies spent weeks investigating reports of fish deaths, environmental concerns and possible buried industrial drums tied to areas near the former Monsanto/Ascend property along Lake Greenwood.

**Initial fish kill numbers increase**

The records outline a coordinated investigation by South Carolina environmental and wildlife agencies into what officials described as an "aquatic mortality event." The event affected fish, turtles and snails across portions of Lake Greenwood beginning in April.

The records, compiled by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and South Carolina Department of Environmental Services, detail investigative activity between April 21 and May 4.

Initial public estimates surrounding the fish kill in April were previously reported at about 3,000 dead fish.

However, following a May 6 briefing involving state legislators and Greenwood County officials, investigators now estimate between 15,000 and 25,000 aquatic animals may have been affected during the event.

State staff documented thousands of dead fish during the investigation. Records included

See **KILL**, page 5A



SUBMITTED

Dead fish are seen along the shoreline of Lake Greenwood during the April 2026 aquatic mortality event.

**FOLLOW US ONLINE**



**YouTube**  
youtube.com/@ijindexjournal



**Facebook**  
facebook.com/indexjournal



**X (Twitter)**  
x.com/@ijindexjournal



**Happy Mother's Day**  
"A mother's love endures through all."  
-Washington Irving



## HOOT

From page 1A

Roberts said the owlet initially looked badly hurt, but began moving around after a few minutes. The crew scooped it up with a rag and contacted the property owner, Michelle Gordy, who came home from work with a ladder.

Gordy, a Greenwood County resident who lives on Kirksey Pittsburgh Road, said she immediately contacted PAWS Animal Wildlife Sanctuary for guidance.

After reviewing photos, the sanctuary advised that the owlet was too young to be out of the nest and should be returned if possible.

That's when the rescue revealed a surprise.

When Roberts climbed the ladder to return the owlet to the tree cavity, he found two more owlets inside.

Gordy said PAWS told her barred owls usually have two babies, making the third owlet a "bonus baby."

The crowded nest may have explained the fall.

"They said that's probably why it fell out," Gordy said. "This one had a bonus baby, and the nest may have been a little small for three."

After the owlet was returned, Gordy kept checking on the nest every day. She placed dog beds and hay under the tree in case one of the owlets fell again.

One ended up taking another tumble out of the nest. PAWS was called again, and the owlet was returned to the nest a second time.

Mercedes Curry, known as Mac in the animal rescue community and founder and president of PAWS Animal Wildlife Sanctuary, said the owlets were too young to be on the ground.

So, the goal was not to remove the birds from their



SUBMITTED

A young barred owl lies on the ground after falling from its nest along Kirksey Pittsburgh Road. The owlet was later returned to the tree after residents and Greenwood County road workers contacted PAWS Animal Wildlife Sanctuary for guidance.

home, but to get them back where the parents could care for it.

"We always try to reunite wild families whenever possible," Curry said.

Since then, the owlets have grown from fluffy goblins to fluffy owls. Gordy said the owlets and their parents appear to have moved farther into the woods, though she still hears calls nearby.

"It's like they've all flown away now, so the little nest is empty," Gordy said. "But I still hear the calls out in the woods calling back and forth. So I feel like the babies are probably still pretty close, but I miss seeing them for sure."

For Roberts, the rescue became more than a workday memory. He said he has continued to go back to check on the

owls and even has a photo of the three hanging in his office.

"They're a lifetime memory," Roberts said. "It's just something you don't get to do very often. I was just glad to be part of that."

As a big animal lover, he joked that day's job became much more than measuring a driveway.

"Big man upstairs said, 'Dave, today go measure that driveway and save an owl,'" Roberts said.

And, as tempting as it may be to keep a baby owl, Roberts said the owlets belong right where they are.

"They belong in the wild," Roberts said. "Doesn't belong somewhere else."

Contact Renee Ortiz at 864-943-5643. Follow her on X: @By\_ReneeOrtiz

## When wildlife needs help, here's what humans can do

By Renee Ortiz  
rortiz@indexjournal.com

When a baby owl fell from a tree along Kirksey Pittsburgh Road, the people who found it did one of the most important things possible: They called for help before trying to care for it themselves.

Mercedes Curry, known as Mac in the animal rescue community and founder and president of PAWS Animal Wildlife Sanctuary, said the young barred owl was too young to be out of the nest when the call came in.

The owlet was not yet a fledgling, Curry said, meaning it was not ready to be on the ground or begin learning to fly. In that situation, the best outcome was getting the owlet back to its nest and its parents.

"We always try to reunite wild families whenever possible," Curry said.

Because Michelle Gordy and Greenwood County Road Department Superintendent Dave Roberts called quickly, PAWS was able to give guidance before the owlet was fed, mishandled or kept away from its parents too long.

"The best thing they did was call immediately to get advice," Curry said.

Curry said keeping young animals with their parents is usually better than taking them into human care when reunification is possible. Parent owls can teach their young to fly, hunt and survive in ways humans cannot.

"Having the family stay together so that the parents can show them and



SUBMITTED

Two young barred owls sit inside a tree cavity along Kirksey Pittsburgh Road. The nest held three owlets, which PAWS Animal Wildlife Sanctuary said was more than the usual two for barred owls.

### To get help with wildlife

Visit PawsSC.org or the organizations Facebook page at Facebook.com/PawsSC  
Phone: 864-715-2171

lead them and teach them the ways they do actually makes for a faster bird that's self-sufficient and on its own," Curry said.

Curry said one common misconception is that parent birds will reject their babies if humans touch them. "Most birds do not have a sense of smell, and even if they did, that's their baby," Curry said. "They will take it back."

The bigger mistake people often make, Curry said, is trying to feed wildlife.

An animal that is cold, dehydrated, injured or in

shock may not be able to process food. Feeding the wrong food, or feeding before an animal is stable, can cause aspiration or other complications.

For anyone who finds a baby bird or injured wild animal, Curry said the first step should be to call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or experienced rescue organization.

While waiting for guidance, if the animal is taken inside, it should be kept in a dark, quiet place away from people, pets and household noise, Curry said.

# WESLEY COMMONS



## Palmetto Place ASSISTED LIVING

- Help with activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, grooming, etc.)
- Transportation to medical appointments
- Social engagement opportunities
- Wellness Complex with specialized classes

*The Lakelands premier  
Assisted Living Community*



1110 Marshall Road  
Greenwood, SC 29646

864 227-7368  
www.wesleycommons.org



Call Katherine Harvey at 227-7231 to  
reserve your **new apartment TODAY!**