



Index Journal

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SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1919

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2 SECTIONS, 16 PAGES

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025

DAILY \$2

Unfounded claims

Ninety Six Mayor Gregg Brown requested SLED investigate former employee

By Renee Ortiz
rortiz@indexjournal.com

The Index-Journal filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for the town of Ninety Six on Aug. 13. That FOIA request sought access and copies of a possible forensic audit conducted for the Town of Ninety Six in 2019. This followed another Index-Journal FOIA request sent on Aug. 5, for information regarding the town's Money Market Deposit Account (MMDA).

The Aug. 13 request asked for all associated materials for the purported

- forensic audit, such as:
 - The full and final forensic audit report
 - Any preliminary or draft reports
 - Correspondence with the auditing firm regarding the audit.

At the time of the request, the Index-Journal was unsure of what agency, firm or organization had conducted the forensic audit.

The Index-Journal received a letter on Aug. 27, signed by Ninety Six Mayor Gregg Brown, which stated: "Your request sent on Aug. 13 has been received and is currently under legal review at the State and Municipal level.

As soon as that review is complete, the response will be issued, or otherwise within twenty business days."

Due to that response from Brown, the Index-Journal reached out to the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) inquiring as to whether or not the agency had conducted a forensic audit or investigation of the Town of Ninety Six in 2019.

On Aug. 13, SLED confirmed they were in the process of conducting an investigation at Mayor Gregg Brown's request, but there was no mention of a 2019 investigation or forensic audit.

"The South Carolina Law Enforcement

Division (SLED) was requested on Tuesday, August 12, 2025, by the

mayor of Ninety Six to investigate allegations of misconduct involving elected officials and town funds. SLED is reviewing the request at this time," the email read.

However, that SLED investigation

closed in late September, and the Index-Journal has yet to receive any documentation related to its Aug. 13 FOIA request for the Town regarding items from a 2019 forensic audit, despite Brown having told the Index-Journal "...as soon as that review is complete the response will be

issued, or otherwise within twenty business days."

Since the Town of Ninety Six neglected to fulfill the Aug. 13 FOIA request, the Index-Journal filed a different FOIA request through SLED on Oct. 1. That request sought copies of the investigative report and closing documentation for the SLED investigation into the Town of Ninety Six requested by Mayor Gregg Brown on Aug. 12.

After several months of waiting, SLED provided its 63-page report to the newspaper earlier this week.

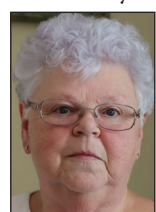
The Mayor's SLED request

According to documents provided by SLED, when Mayor Brown contacted the agency in August, he said

See SLED, page 4A



GREGG BROWN



MARY ANN GOODMAN



Tammy Kirk was one of the loudest cheering in the crowd as the Emerald City Dance Explosion float made its way down Main Street at the Christmas parade. Her granddaughter, Lydia, was a parade participant.

PHOTOS BY RENEE ORTIZ | INDEX-JOURNAL

Mayor Brandon Smith greets parade Grand Marshal Lt. j.g. Jim McDonald, a World War II Navy veteran who served aboard the USS Escambia, ahead of the 2025 Greenwood Christmas Parade in Uptown.



Cold wind, warm hearts Greenwood's Christmas Parade fills Main Street

By Renee Ortiz
rortiz@indexjournal.com

A cold December wind carried a bite through Uptown Greenwood on Sunday, but crowds barely

seemed to notice. Children in Christmas sweaters, parents bundled up, and dogs of every size and color lined Main Street

See PARADE, page 5A

Samantha Priest uses real life to teach life lessons

By Mya Atten
matten@indexjournal.com

When a minor fender bender unfolded in the Ninety Six High School parking lot, most saw it as an inconvenience.

Samantha Priest saw an opportunity. The school resource officer (SRO), who has been on campus since August, turned that moment into a teaching lesson. It is and one of many ways she is reshaping what it means to serve and support students.

Priest said her role extends far beyond monitoring hallways. Many people assume an SRO simply watches cameras or stands guard at doors, but she said the job is far more hands-on.

Priest spends her days walking the building, checking classrooms, talking with students and being present in ways that build trust, long before

See PRIEST, page 5A



SUBMITTED

Samantha Priest, school resource officer, builds daily connections with students at Ninety Six High to foster trust and openness. From left are Priest and a student named Shyla.

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GREENWOOD COUNTY

- Freida Crawford, Ninety Six.
- Bob McNeill, Ninety Six.

MCCORMICK COUNTY

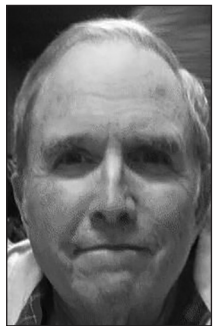
- Reuben C. Yearwood, McCormick.
- Brenda Freeman Carroll, McCormick.

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Bob McNeill

NINETY SIX — A very special brother and a friend to all who knew him. Robert A. McNeill, better known as "Bob". This parents were Raymond and Jackie McNeill. Bob passed away on December 6, 2025. He was born on November 28th, on our Dad's 28 birthday. Bob a long time member of Cambridge Methodist Church in Ninety Six, SC. His pastor is Pastor Hank Brooks.



**BOB
MCNEILL**

Bob loved his church family and they loved him. His job was to fold the church bulletins in which he took great pride in doing. He had done this for over 50 years. On November 12, 2016, Bob was inducted into Ninety Six Hall of Fame. Bob enjoyed playing golf and watching baseball. While he was in Ninety Six High School he helped the coach with what he needed Bob to do. His greatest love was the Clemson Tigers.

Bob had an amazing memory of years past. He could even remember details of when he was of the age 5 and up.

Bob is survived by his sister, Tami Richey plus many special cousins whom he loved dearly. He was preceded in death by his parents, Raymond and Jackie McNeill.

A memorial service will be held at Cambridge Methodist Church on Saturday, December 13th at 11 a.m.

Memorials may be sent to Cambridge Methodist Church, PO Box 384, Ninety Six, SC 29666.

Harley Funeral Home and Crematory is assisting the McNeill family. Messages and photos may be shared with the family by visiting Bob's life tribute page at www.harleyfuneralhome.com.

Freida Crawford

NINETY SIX — Freida Crawford, 67, of Ninety Six, passed away on December 5, 2025, at her home.

Born in Ellisville, Alabama, she was a daughter of Annie Jo Mckerley Moseley.



**FREIDA
CRAWFORD**

After graduating from Ninety Six High School, Freida worked in textiles before eventually retiring from Fuji Film. She was a loyal fan of both the Clemson Tigers and the Alabama Crimson Tide. An avid Elvis Presley fan, Freida had a special connection to the King of Rock and Roll, sharing her birthday with him, which made it a double celebration each year. She also enjoyed playing cards, gathering with family and friends for games that would often fill the room with laughter and joy. Freida was of the Baptist faith, and her faith was a guiding light in her life.

She is survived by brothers, Jeff Alexander, Robbie Alexander (Timberly Williams), and John Alexander (Donna); sisters, Martha Roberts and Shirley Partain (Buddy); and numerous nieces and nephews.

Along with her mother, she was preceded in death by her stepfather, Carl Moseley, who raised her as his own.

A graveside service was held at 1 p.m., on Tuesday, December 9, 2025, at Greenwood Memorial Gardens, officiated by the Reverend John Alexander, Jr.

Friends and family were received from 4-6 p.m. on Monday, December 8, 2025, at Harley Funeral Home.

The family is at their respective homes.

Messages and photos may be shared with the family by visiting Freida's life tribute page by visiting www.harleyfuneralhome.com

Reuben C. Yearwood

MCCORMICK — Reuben Carl Yearwood (67) was born on October 31, 1958 in Jacksonville, Florida. He transitioned from labor to reward on Friday, December 5, 2025.

Bostick-Tompkins Funeral Home located at 6300 Highway 28 South, McCormick, SC is in charge of the funeral arrangements.

Brenda Freeman Carroll

MCCORMICK — Brenda Freeman Carroll, 63, was born on April 8, 1962, in McCormick, SC. She transitioned from labor to reward on Thursday, December 4, 2025. Bostick-Tompkins Funeral Home located at 6300 Highway 28 South, McCormick, SC is in charge of the funeral arrangements.

Learn more
For information on deaths
in the Lakelands, visit
indexjournal.com/obituaries

Federal lawsuit claims SC absentee ballot law makes voting harder for people with disabilities

By Skylar Laird
SC Daily Gazette

COLUMBIA — A South Carolina law meant to prevent election fraud makes it harder for people with disabilities to vote, civil rights groups claimed in a lawsuit.

Under a 2022 law, anyone can vote early with no excuse necessary or request an absentee ballot to vote by mail. To prevent the possibility of fraud, legislators added a limit of five ballots that any one person could request or submit for someone else.

In nursing homes and residential care settings, where residents often rely on a

staff member to help them vote, that makes voting difficult, attorneys for the state American Civil Liberties Union argued in a lawsuit filed in federal court Friday.

Three nursing home residents sued alongside the state NAACP, contending the law violates the federal Voting Rights Act.

Robert Caldwell, a 74-year-old resident of a Chester nursing home, has relied on a single social worker, Barvette Gaither, to help him vote in years past. According to the lawsuit, Gaither is a popular choice for assistance at the nursing home, since she has a good rapport with residents and

knows a lot about the voting process.

Before the law, she submitted between 10 and 25 ballots for residents each election. Since the law passed, she has had to choose five residents and hand the rest off to other staff members or the residents' family members, according to the lawsuit.

The same is true for 60-year-old Jonathan Bell and 75-year-old Sherry Jenkins, who live at a nursing home in Union. Deborah Allen, who oversees activities for Union Post Acute nursing home, helped most of its 25 residents submit ballots because she knew the process and deadlines, the lawsuit claims.

SLED

From page 1A

he'd discovered an envelope in his office drawer nine months prior. Inside the envelope was a three-page summary report provided to the Town by Quick Group, LLC, a Charleston-based investigative firm. The report was dated August 19, 2019.

SLED's report indicates that Mayor Brown called the agency on Aug. 12, to request an investigation into a former employee of the town based on Quick Group's report.

Documents sent from SLED to the Index-Journal said Brown wanted to "request SLED investigate possible misconduct in office and breach of trust by the former city treasurer, Mary Ann Goodman," and the documents went on to say, "Brown believed Goodman committed breach of trust by creating an insurance scheme where she personally benefitted."

As to why Mayor Brown waited nine months after finding Quick Group's report to initiate the investigation, SLED's report states: "He struggled with what to do with the report and the information but decided to come forward."

The investigation

SLED investigator James "Robert" Brown II reached out to Mayor Brown and scheduled a sit down meeting on Aug. 14.

In his report, agent Brown wrote that, based on information in Quick Group's 2019 report, Mayor Brown believed that "Mary Ann Goodman created a scheme where she syphoned money from other city employees to pay her husband's health insurance from 2016 to 2018.... Because of this scheme, the Town of Ninety-Six paid over \$50,000.00 from 2016 to mid-2019, more than they should have, for twelve Town of Ninety Six employee spouses' insurance."

According to Quick Group's report, Ketekash Crump-Lukie, the treasurer who took over after Goodman retired in 2018, discovered several employee's spouses were having a portion of, or all of their health insurance paid by the town. The memo alleged that the town had improperly paid dependent health-insurance premiums for "a dozen current and former employees" between 2016 and early 2019.

According to the SLED agent, Mayor Brown told him during the interview, "The Town of Ninety-Six's policy was to only pay for the primary employee's insurance and nothing for immediate family members. An employee who wanted to have insurance for their immediate family or dependent had to pay it themselves."

Mayor Brown told the agent he thought Goodman held sole responsibility for adding spouses to the town's insurance plan, saying, "Goodman had the Town of Ninety-Six pay for her husband's health insurance, and she was the only person who could have caused this to happen."

Goodman retired from her position as treasurer in Dec. 2018. Her husband, Mickey Goodman, was then, and currently, an active member of town council. Gregg Brown was elected as mayor in 2023 and was sworn into office in 2024. Brown stated to the SLED agent he was unsure of why Mike Rowe, who was mayor during Goodman's alleged wrongdoing, did not disclose or look into the findings of Quick Group's report.

Mayor Brown also confirmed to the agent that Crump-Lukie was fired, by town council, for job performance issues in 2024.

During SLED's initial interview with Mayor Brown, the agent noted that the mayor offered no evidence for the insurance fraud claims he was making against Goodman. Nor did Mayor Brown offer any evidence for additional allegations he made against Goodman in the interview, which included claims of credit card misuse and burning town records. The investigator's report said that Mayor Brown "offered no corroborating information and stated the information was hearsay."

Also in the interview, Mayor Brown told the SLED investigator that he "believed a current or former employee was leaking information about the audit to a local newspaper called the Index Journal."

Quick Group LLC

SLED investigator Robert Brown also

contacted the owner of Quick Group LLC, Chris Quick, to inquire about the 2019 report his firm provided for the Town of Ninety Six. Quick confirmed that one of his firm's employees, Frank Worrell, had done the initial report of the town. SLED agent Brown then spoke with Worrell.

Worrell provided the following information to SLED:

The Town of Ninety-Six did not have the funds for Worrell to do a full audit in 2019, but he tried to help them anyway. Worrell remembered working, but all he currently had on file was the original three-page report dated August 21, 2019 — the same report Mayor Brown says he found in his desk drawer in late 2024.

Worrell did not conduct interviews and only reviewed records provided by the Town of Ninety-Six.

He returned the records to the newly-hired city treasurer, Ketekash Crump-Lukie, in 2019.

Worrell found that a total of twelve employees with the Town of Ninety-Six had all or a portion of their spouses' health insurance paid by the town from 2016 to mid-2019.

In his report, SLED agent Brown wrote that Worrell had concluded that former treasurer, Mary Ann Goodman, "did this [paid spouses' health insurance premiums] because she was unaware of the city policy and made errors, or was aware of the policy and did it intentionally. According to Worrell, "prosecuting Goodman would be difficult."

Agent Brown later added a note to the report stating "Worrell was unaware the Town of Ninety Six's policy could allow the town to pay a portion of the health insurance coverage for dependents as written in 2014/2015."

Agent Brown also touched based with Debbie Ferguson, an insurance broker at Brokers Who Care, the company through which the Town of Ninety Six had written its health insurance. Ferguson was able to confirm that, "Brokers Who Care brokered and facilitated health insurance for the city of Ninety-Six from 2016, to present."

Brokers Who Care

On Aug. 18, agent Brown contacted Ferguson again, at which time she told SLED her company no longer retained records from the period of Quick Group's report due to the five-year retention window. She also told the agent that Goodman was "easy to work with" and stated she did not believe Goodman engaged "in a scheme to intentionally defraud the Town of Ninety Six."

Ferguson confirmed that under Goodman, insurance administration and billing were smooth and error-free. But she said, "as soon as Ketekash Crump-Lukie took over, several accounting issues and record-keeping problems emerged. Under Crump-Lukie, several Town of Ninety-Six employees had their insurance canceled for lack of payment."

Ferguson also noted to agent Brown that "nepotism was a major issue within the Town of Ninety Six."

SLED agent Brown then reached back out to Mayor Brown to see if he could tell him how many people worked for the Town in 2016 and if the town had a written policy that year stating only employee's insurance premiums were covered by the Town. Mayor Brown told the SLED agent that he "was unaware but stated he would research."

Agent Brown also contacted 8th Circuit Deputy Solicitor, Demetri Andrews, on Aug. 18, and gave Andrews a verbal synopsis of the mayor's complaint so far.

Agent Brown's report states that he shared with Andrews, "The original insurance company no longer had insurance billing records for the Town of Ninety-Six from 2016-mid 2019, that Mayor Brown was unable to locate the Town of Ninety-Six insurance billing records used by Quick Group, LLC, multiple attempts were made to contact Crump-Lukie with no answers, and the Town of Ninety Six did not have written policy on employee insurance coverage."

Discrepancies with town policy

Agent Brown received an emailed document of the town's policies by Mayor Brown on Aug. 19. After reviewing the language included in the town's Personnel Policy Handbook (2015), agent Brown discovered the town did in fact

offer full time employees the option to have dependents as part of their insurance plan.

Quoted from page 16 of the handbook: "The Town of Ninety Six provides health insurance for all of its full-time employees. The Town pays a portion of the cost of individual coverage for those employees. Part-time employees are not eligible for Town paid health insurance coverage. Those employees who wish to have their dependents included in the insurance plan are required to pay a portion, up to and including 100% of the monthly premium for that coverage on a payroll deduction basis."

Agent Brown informed Mayor Brown that the town's policy undermined the mayor's claim against Goodman saying in his report, "This contradicted what Mayor Brown reported, which was the Town of Ninety-Six did not allow the payment of any dependents."

Agent Brown then again asked Mayor Brown for the original town documents used in the Quick Group LLC report.

The continual ask for records

In the following week, agent Brown would continue asking and waiting on the requested documents from Ninety Six. On Aug. 22, Brown did hear from Town attorney Doug Bell regarding a FOIA request that was sent to the town, but received no documentation. Agent Brown then sent the following email to Mayor Brown, asking for records and clarifying town's own policy.

Dear Mayor Brown,
I hope this message finds you well. I am following up to see if the Town of Ninety-Six still has the records that Quick Group, LLC reviewed. When we met, you shared their three-page summary report, but as mentioned last week, we need access to the underlying records they examined. The insurance company does not have these records, and Quick Group, LLC has confirmed that they returned them to then Town Treasurer Ketekash Crump-Lukie in 2019. At this point, we do not have any data available to review, assess, or compare.

Additionally, as I mentioned previously, the Town of Ninety-Six policy guide you shared (metadata from 2014/2015) states on page 16 that an employee must pay a "portion" of dependent healthcare. As written, this could be interpreted to mean that employees who had part of their dependent healthcare costs covered by the Town were still in compliance, since both the employee and the Town contributed a portion. If the Town's intention is that no dependent healthcare costs are to be covered, I recommend updating the policy to make that position explicitly clear.

To which Mayor Brown replied "I will check on this"

Agent Brown updated Andrews that day as well, explaining that Quick Group, LLC returned the records they reviewed from 2016-2018 back to the town, the insurance company no longer maintained any records from that period per their policy, the Town of Ninety-Six was unable to find any records used by Quick Group, LLC, and the policy Mayor Brown provided contradicted what he reported to SLED originally.

As a result, Andrews and Brown both agreed the investigation would be closed pending any new substantive information.

Case closed

Agent Brown confirmed the Town of Ninety Six had not located any records related to the inquiry and began drafting his closing report on Sept. 2. On Sept. 24, Mayor Brown contacted him again, saying former treasurer Crump-Lukie had reached out and explained where she believed the 2019 audit records had been stored.

According to the mayor, the records were not where she indicated. "He suspected a Town of Ninety Six employee had taken the records," the report states.

With no supporting documents provided to SLED by either the mayor or the town, the case was officially closed on Sept. 29.

The conclusion of SLED's investigation?

Unfounded.

Contact Renee Ortiz at 864-943-5643. Follow her on X: @By_ReneeOrtiz



Learn what you need for the holiday **Inside**

REACHING HIGH
Khloe Cheeks named Lakelands Volleyball Player of the Year **Page 1C**



Index Journal

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SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1919

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2025

DAILY \$2



PHOTOS BY MYA ATTEN | INDEX-JOURNAL

Diane Crouch and Anne Eller stand beside a U-Haul trailer filled with donated toys collected during Be the Heart of the Holiday, a community toy drive supporting local children. Below: Donation boxes were placed throughout Greenwood County to collect toys for the Be the Heart of the Holiday toy drive.

HOPE HEART

Holiday hope delivered by the com-



By MYA ATTEN
matten@indexjournal.com

For some children, the holidays arrive quietly. There are no wish lists and no shopping trips, just hope. That is where Be the Heart of the Holidays steps in. Anne Eller, known as the drive's chief elf, started the community-led toy drive about three years ago with a simple belief: every child deserves to feel seen during the holidays. What began as a small effort has continued to grow each year through the support of the Greenwood community. Today, the drive brings holiday cheer to children ages four to 11 across Greenwood County School District 50 and Ware Shoals School District 51. It helps ensure students who might otherwise be overlooked still experience the joy of the season. Each year, school counselors in both districts help identify students and families who could use extra support. They use their familiarity with students to help choose toys they believe each child will enjoy. "We started this, and it just keeps growing and growing," Eller said. "We've got great community outpouring for it."

That growth has been fueled by monetary and toy donations, along with support of local organizations, businesses

See **HOPE**, page 4A



Julian Gale, Greenwood County School District 50 director of student services, organizes donated toys for the Be the Heart of the Holiday toy drive so they are easy to find.

'I want to cry'

Goodman says Mayor's SLED referral came after MMDA questions

By Renee Ortiz
rortiz@indexjournal.com

Mary Ann Goodman sat in the Index-Journal office Tuesday morning.

She stared at pages of the South Carolina State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) investigation she said she had never seen.

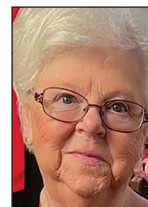
On Wednesday, the Index-Journal reported on the investigation, which had been requested by Ninety Six Mayor Gregg Brown on Aug. 12.

Mayor Brown said he asked SLED to investigate Goodman due to the contents of an envelope he'd found in his desk nine months prior.

In the envelope was a brief 2019 report by a company called Quick Group, LLC, a Charleston-based firm. The firm did a basic review into the town's health insurance payments from 2016-2018.

The review took place before Mayor Brown was elected.

Goodman read her name Tuesday morning on the SLED documents, tied to Mayor



MARY ANN GOODMAN



GREGG BROWN



MICKEY GOODMAN



MICHAEL ROWE

Brown's allegations of insurance fraud, misconduct, and even "burning town records." "I want to cry," Goodman said, her voice tight as she read the details. "And I'm mad at the same time."

Blindsided

The 78-year-old retired town clerk and treasurer said she had

See **REACTION**, page 5A

Gregg Brown gives brief response to SLED investigation questions

By Renee Ortiz
rortiz@indexjournal.com

The Index-Journal reached out to Ninety Six Mayor Gregg Brown via email and phone this week with questions regarding a South Carolina Law Enforcement Division investigation.

Brown requested the investigation in August of this year, into former town employee, Mary Ann Goodman.

As reported in Wednesday's and today's editions of the Index-Journal, SLED's investigation was based on a report from 2019. Brown says he was unaware of this report until he

"found it in his desk" in late 2024.

The report was from a Charleston-based auditing firm, Quick Group, LLC, which performed a review of town finances related to paying health insurance premiums.

Brown replied to the Index-Journal's initial message requesting comment on the investigation on Monday, with "I will call you tomorrow."

Wednesday morning, Brown emailed the newspaper with a brief statement saying he was "not in office [as mayor] in

See **RESPONSE**, page 4A

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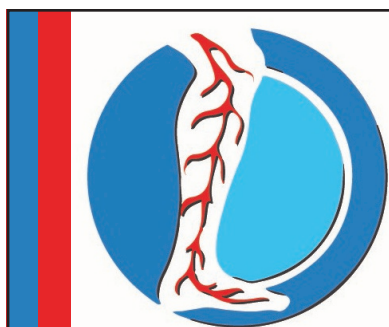
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REACTION

From page 1A

no idea she was the subject of a state investigation. Goodman said she was never contacted, never interviewed, never asked a single question by the state or anyone in the town's leadership.

Instead, she found out when an anonymous envelope containing a printed email, originally sent to Brown from the SLED investigator, appeared in her home mailbox.

"I don't know who put it there," Goodman said. "But that's how I found out about this mess."

As she processed what she was reading, Goodman picked up her phone and called her husband, longtime town councilman Mickey Goodman, to ask whether he had ever been informed about the investigation by the mayor. Mickey's reaction mirrored hers.

"I can't believe he'd [Brown] say that about her," Mickey said. "Nobody ever came to me or her for anything."

According to the investigation report, which the Index-Journal requested via the Freedom of Information Act from SLED, agent James 'Robert' Brown II was told by Mayor Gregg Brown on Aug. 14 that, based on Quick Group's 2019 report, he believed:

"Mary Ann Goodman created a scheme where she siphoned money from other city employees to pay her husband's health insurance from 2016 to 2018.... Because of this scheme, the Town of Ninety-Six paid over \$50,000.00 from 2016 to mid-2019, more than they should have, for twelve Town of Ninety Six employee spouses' insurance."

Goodman remembers her years at Town Hall, the late nights, the endless paperwork, the scramble to train when her predecessor left abruptly, and the constant pressure of managing payroll, benefits, and daily operations with a shoestring staff.

Reading Brown accused her of siphoning money from employees to pay her husband's insurance left her floored.

"He said that I was charging other employees more in order to get money to pay your insurance premiums, Mickey!" Goodman said incredulously, reading the report to her husband over the phone.

Goodman explained her role in the town's health insurance was clerical, not policy-making.

She handled billing and payroll, and helped process the town's quarterly insurance payments, based on instructions from outside accountants and the town's insurance broker, Brokers Who Care.

Goodman said enrollment and changes to coverage, including dependents, were handled by Tasha Clark, who worked part-time with Goodman.

"She [Tasha] did the enrollment," Goodman said. "She was the clerk of court, and that was a part time job. So, in order to give her full time, she worked for me the rest of the hours."

Though Clark oversaw

"It says it right there, didn't have enough information. Because there was nothing there."

— Mary Ann Goodman

Retired Ninety Six town clerk, treasurer

enrollment as her assistant, Goodman stressed that it was her role, as Clark's supervisor, to approve all enrollment and confirm any changes to enrollment.

The mayor, department heads and council set town policies. Goodman says she and Clark followed the town's written handbook and guidance they were given.

"You're telling me that I've worked all this time; sometimes without pay, weekends, holidays, when the offices were closed, and then they're gonna accuse me of something like this?" Goodman asked, her voice shaking.

She and Mickey were equally shocked to hear accusations Mayor Brown made that she had been "seen burning town records" and misusing town credit cards.

"I've never heard that about her," Mickey said. "Not once. It's ridiculous." The investigator's report did verify Mayor Brown "offered no corroborating information and stated the information was hearsay."

The SLED report also confirmed agent Brown repeatedly asked Mayor Brown for documentation to support his allegations, but no records were provided throughout the two-month investigation.

Agent Brown contacted the town's former insurance broker with Brokers Who Care, the auditing firm Quick Group LLC, and former clerk Ketekash Crump-Lukie, but none had any records from 2016 to 2019.

With no documentation provided by the mayor, conflicting interpretations of the 2019 memo, and the town's own policy that explicitly allowed dependent coverage, the issue at the center of the mayor's allegation, investigators closed the case as "unfounded" claims.

Goodman pointed to the line in the report that reads "unfounded."

"It says it right there, didn't have enough information," Goodman said. "Because there was nothing there."

He retaliated against me

Goodman said she feels the SLED investigation ordered by Mayor Brown was the result of her involvement with the town's Money Market Deposit Account (MMDA) and investigative reporting done by the Index-Journal about that account.

News organizations sometimes do not reveal their sources in sensitive, whistle blower investigations.

But, Goodman agreed the newspaper could now identify her as the person who provided the paper with MMDA bank statements, as she'd come to the paper in August of this year, with concerns about how funds in the MMDA were being used.

Goodman said she "was glad she came forward and had no regrets."

Months before the SLED investigation, Goodman became concerned about unusual activity in the MMDA. She learned after a council meeting that the account was almost empty.

When Goodman retired in 2018, statements showed the account had close to \$100K, but in May of 2025, The account had a little over \$14K.

"When I left there, there was a ton of money in that account, it had been put in there every year," Goodman said. "Every time we took some out, council discussed it, knew about it, and voted on it. And so I wanted to know where the money went," Goodman said.

Goodman submitted a Freedom of Information request (FOIA) for the account's bank statements, from 2017 to 2025.

The request was accepted and processed by the town's former administrative assistants, Patience Curtis, Amanda Seymour and council member Bridget Porter.

"They had to ask Gregg if she could give the documents to me, and he said, have her do a FOIA request," Goodman said. "Well, I already had, so they copied them, gave them to me."

Once Goodman reviewed statements, she said she immediately tried to meet with the mayor.

"When I got the bank statements, I told Gregg, we need to sit down and talk about this," Goodman said. "He said, 'Let me get some time and I'll get back with you.' Well, three weeks went by and he never did get back with me."

Goodman said she wanted answers on why the reserve account, which historically had significant funds and restrictive policies on how money could flow in and out of the account, appeared suddenly drained.

"I wanted to know where the money went," Goodman said. "Why was it all of a sudden there was no money in that account, and why were there checks written to and from the town's main account from the MMDA account?"

After weeks without a meeting, Goodman said she felt she had no choice but to bring the matter to the Index-Journal.

"That's when I brought it to you, Renee," Goodman said. "I thought, well, maybe the Index can force him to talk about the issue."

From there, a sequence of events unfolded quickly:

- On July 15, Goodman provided the Index-Journal with the MMDA bank statements.

- On July 29, the Index-Journal emailed the mayor, town attorney and council with questions about unusual transactions in the MMDA. No re-

sponses were provided.

- On August 1, the newspaper published the article: "The \$153,000 journal entry: Financial oversight breaks down in Ninety Six's reserve account"

- On August 5, the Index-Journal sent a FOIA request to the Town of Ninety Six requesting MMDA documents, meeting minutes, and statements. No responses or acknowledgement of the FOIA request were provided.

- On August 6, a follow-up email was sent to the town attorney. No reply was received.

- On August 7, a hard-copy FOIA request was hand-delivered to Town Hall and accepted by a town employee.

Five days later, on August 12, Mayor Brown called SLED and named Goodman as the subject of a criminal investigation. The call followed days of the Index-Journal emailing Mayor Brown regarding the papers' two FOIA requests and questions about the town's MMDA account.

Mayor Brown told the SLED investigator he "believed a current or former employee was leaking information about the audit to a local newspaper called the Index Journal."

Goodman believes Brown was referring to her, but it wasn't the audit for which she leaked information.

"He retaliated against me because he knew I had given the Index-Journal the bank statements for the MMDA account," Goodman said.

What happened in 2019 with Quick Group, LLC?

To understand how the 2019 Quick Group, LLC forensic review of the Town of Ninety Six unfolded, and why it ended, the Index-Journal spoke with former mayor Michael Rowe, who oversaw the town at the time.

Rowe said the issue surfaced after now former town clerk/treasurer, Ketekash Crump-Lukie, was hired.

Crump-Lukie noticed employees' insurance deductions did not appear to match the town's billing statements.

Rowe instructed her to contact the insurer. When representatives expressed concern, they suggested bringing in an outside reviewer.

Rowe called the Municipal Association of South Carolina for guidance, which led

to Quick Group, LLC being contacted. Rowe confirmed Crump-Lukie handled communication with the auditing firm and provided whatever documents the firm requested.

Rowe said he only met the reviewer once.

Because the town could not afford a full forensic audit, Quick Group, LLC employee Frank Worrell produced a brief, three-page summary.

According to Rowe, he was never interviewed by anyone from Quick Group, LLC. The recent SLED report ordered by current Mayor Brown confirmed Quick Group's Worrell did not conduct interviews, nor did the firm have a copy of the Town's policy that permitted adding dependents onto employee insurance policies.

When Rowe and the town attorney reviewed Quick Group's report, he said findings immediately raised questions.

The report suggested dependent insurance had been improperly paid, but the town's 2014 personnel policy explicitly allowed employees to add dependents and permitted the town to pay up to the full premium.

"That's what didn't match," Rowe said. "It wasn't clear cut. It wasn't a slam dunk. There was too much confusion."

Rowe said he presented the report to council, excluding councilman Mickey Goodman, due to conflict of interest.

After reviewing information and the town healthcare policy, Rowe said council agreed the report did not establish clear wrongdoing.

"No one wanted to drag somebody's name through the mud," Rowe said. "It (the report) conflicted with what we knew and with our policy. So the decision was not to pursue it."

Mary Ann Goodman was retired by the time Quick Group provided its report. Rowe describes her as a committed and reliable employee.

"Why would I do this, to this lady who worked, retired from the town? Then all of a sudden say, hey we're gonna drag your name through the mud for no reason," Rowe said.

Rowe said he disagreed with phrasing of the report that stated Goodman "was one of the largest beneficiaries of the scheme."

"It wasn't a scheme," Rowe

said. "She was a good employee."

Rowe confirmed nothing was ever said to Mary Ann Goodman about Quick Group's report.

Rowe said he was stunned to learn that the report from early 2019 was the basis of a SLED investigation about six years later, after Mayor Brown called in state agents.

"SLED never called me. Not once," Rowe said, surprised he'd not been questioned by SLED during its August investigation about Quick Group's 2019 report — since he was serving as mayor at the time. "I figured they'd want to know what happened back then. But nobody reached out."

Rowe said Mayor Brown never contacted him about the Quick Group report. Instead, Brown called SLED.

"If he [Mayor Brown] had asked, I would have told him exactly what council decided in 2019, Rowe said. There wasn't enough there. Too much gray area. Too much confusion. It didn't line up with our policy."

"I'm not going to accuse somebody of doing something unless I know they did it," Rowe added. "And, I wouldn't want someone doing that to me."

'Nobody ever came to me'

Goodman said she would have answered questions about insurance billing if asked, in 2019 or now. But no one did.

"There wasn't anything wrong," Goodman said. "And nobody ever came to me."

"I served on town council," Goodman said. "I've worked with the schools. I've worked with the churches. I help with Christmas in the Park. I've run programs for kids for over 20 years," Goodman added, beginning to cry. "I've never done anything dishonest in my life."

On the phone, Goodman's husband added, "Council didn't know. Nobody knew, and now we're all going to have to live with it."

Goodman said she now intends to reach out for answers, having seen the SLED report.

"I want to call him [Brown], and I want to call Doug Bell, the town attorney, and then I'm gonna call my attorney," Goodman said.

Contact Renee Ortiz at 864-943-5643. Follow her on X: @By_ReneeOrtiz

SLED seeks information on person in SC State shooting

From staff reports

The South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) is looking to speak with a person of interest seen on South Carolina State University's campus the night of Saturday, October 4, 2025, when two shootings occurred.

Anyone with information, including the person of interest, can contact SLED by calling 866-472-8477 and/or by emailing tips@sled.sc.gov.

SLED continues to investigate the shootings that killed Jaliyah Bulter, 19, and seriously injured one man.

For news, visit indexjournal.com

Greenwood County Council will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, in the American Veterans Auditorium of the Greenwood County Library, 600 Main Street South, to receive comments regarding:

- A. Ordinance 2025-33 dissolving the Pucketts Ferry Special Tax District.
- B. Ordinance 2025-34 dissolving the Pinehurst Special Tax District.
- C. Ordinance 2025-35 dissolving the Stoney Point Special Tax District.
- D. Ordinance 2025-36 dissolving the Summit Place Special Tax District.
- E. Ordinance 2025-37 dissolving the Curl Creek Special Tax District.
- F. Ordinance 2025-38 dissolving the Kimbrook Special Tax District.
- G. Ordinance 2025-39 to amend the Greenwood County Zoning Map, as and if amended, so that one (1) parcel of land totaling approximately 21.96 acres at 425 Cobb Rd, Greenwood County, SC (GPIN# 6846-340-932) changes from R-1 (Single Family Residential) to R-3 (Single Family Residential)
- H. Ordinance 2025-40 to amend the Greenwood County Zoning Map, as and if amended, so that a portion of one (1) parcel of land totaling approximately 46.52 acres at 2611 Hwy 25 S, Greenwood County, SC (GPIN# 6854-665-545) changes from C-2 (General Commercial) to R-3 (Single Family Residential)

The agenda will be posted on the Greenwood County website at least 24 hours before the meeting. Should assistance be needed for the hearing/visually impaired, call 864-942-8507.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to section 6-1-80 of the S.C. Code of Laws, public notice is hereby given that the Greenwood City Council will hold a public meeting on the municipal budget for the 2026 fiscal year:

Date: December 15, 2025

Time: 4:00 PM

Location: Municipal Building Council Chambers Room 207

Current Fiscal Year Revenue	Projected Revenue for 2025	Percentage Change in Revenues	Current Fiscal Year Millage
\$20,168,000	\$23,140,275	14.7%	127.9 Mills
Current Fiscal Year Expenditures	Projected Expenditures for 2025	Percentage Change in Expenditures	Proposed Millage for 2026
\$20,168,000	\$23,140,275	14.7%	127.9 Mills**

** Proposed millage rate equals \$127.90 per \$1,000 of Assessed Property Value.



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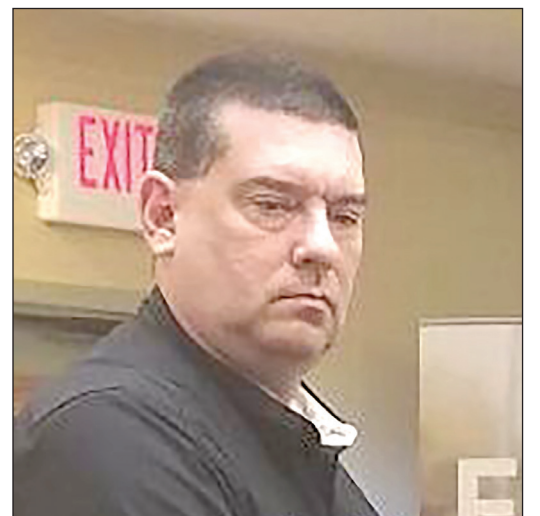
2 SECTIONS, 20 PAGES

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2026

DAILY \$2



MARY ANN GOODMAN



CHRIS PORTER

Ninety Six Mayor Gregg Brown speaks with special agent Robert Brown with SLED.

SCREENSHOT

'We have an internal leak'

Ninety Six mayor discusses fraud claims, town hall bugging during SLED interview

By **RENEE ORTIZ**
rortiz@indexjournal.com

The Index-Journal began examining the Town of Ninety Six in August.

Multiple Freedom of Information Act requests were filed, seeking records related to the town's Money Market Deposit Account (MMDA) and an alleged forensic review conducted in 2019.

A FOIA request asked for copies

of any final or draft forensic audit reports and related correspondence.

In response, Mayor Gregg Brown said the request was under legal review and a response would be issued within 20 business days. No records were ever provided.

A South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) report later confirmed an investigation opened in August at Mayor Brown's request, based on a three-page financial summary prepared by

Quick Group LLC in 2019.

That investigation focused on allegations of misconduct involving a former employee, Mary Ann Goodman, and health insurance payments.

Although Ninety Six Police Chief Chris Porter was present during the Aug. 14, 2025 interview with Mayor Brown, the SLED report does not attribute any statements or findings to him, nor does it include a separate interview or summary of

his input.

SLED found: underlying records used to create the 2019 summary were unavailable, the town's written personnel policy contradicted key allegations, and no corroborating evidence was produced.

The investigation was closed in late September as an unfounded case.

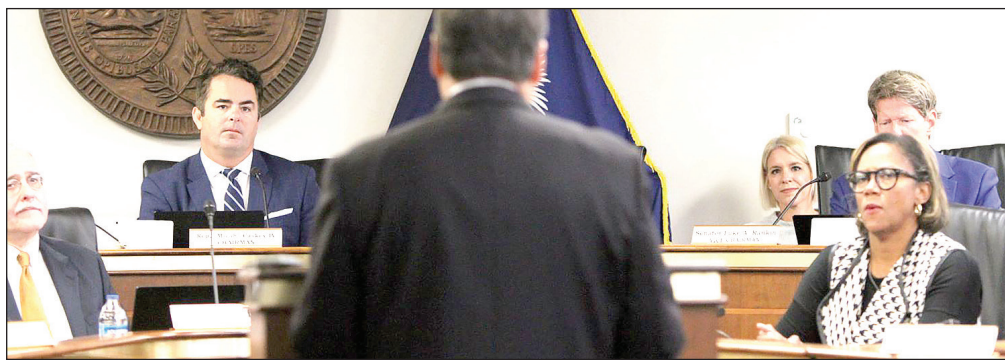
The report details the scope of the investigation, the absence of supporting documentation, and

the basis for closing the case. The report does not explain whether the police department was otherwise consulted during the investigation.

The recording

The Index-Journal requested the recording of the interview on Dec. 10, 2025, after receiving the full investigative summary from SLED. The recording, obtained by the

See **SLED**, page 7A



SC DAILY GAZETTE

South Carolina legislators are again considering changes to how the state picks its judges. State Supreme Court Justice John Kittredge is questioned by the Judicial Merit Selection Commission in 2023, about becoming the next chief justice. The panel's chairman, left, is Rep. Micah Caskey, R-West Columbia. The panel's vice-chairman, right, is Senate Judiciary Chairman Luke Rankin, R-Myrtle Beach.

DOGE SC-backed bill advances to change how state vets judges

By **Jessica Holdman**
SC Daily Gazette

COLUMBIA — South Carolina legislators are again considering changes to how the state vets its judges, this time giving the governor total control of the panel that screens them.

Under the proposal backed by House GOP leadership, the governor would appoint all 12 members of the Judicial Merit Selection Commission — eight lawyers and

four members of law enforcement. None could be legislators.

A House panel voted 4-1 Thursday to advance the legislation to the full Judiciary Committee.

In addition to booting the screening panel's six legislators, the proposal would also prevent the appointment of any immediate family members of legislators. Former legislators would have to be out of office

See **JUDGES**, page 9A

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SLED

From page 1A

newspaper through the FOIA process, was made by SLED as part of its investigative work and later released in response to the request.

The Index-Journal did not record the video or audio.

The interview includes a 50-minute conversation involving Mayor Brown, SLED Special Agent Robert Brown and Chief Porter.

Discussion centers on allegations raised by Mayor Brown and Police Chief Porter involving financial misconduct, destruction of documents and fraud related to Goodman.

What follows reflects the discussion as it occurred during the recorded interview, and concerns raised by town leadership.

Police Chief Chris Porter's role in the interview

More than halfway through the interview, Porter joins the conversation at the request of Mayor Brown.

"He's our police chief. He don't sugarcoat nothing. He don't play favoritism," Brown said before Porter arrived.

Porter confirms he had prior knowledge of allegations.

"Mayor Rowe talked to me about it back when he was having the audit done," Porter said. "He never included the police department in anything."

Porter said he advised that any investigation should involve an outside agency.

"As far as an investigation goes, it needs to be an outside agency so there's no favoritism shown," Porter said.

Porter said the issue was first identified by then town clerk Ketekash Crump-Lukie. Mayor Brown also confirmed to the agent that Crump-Lukie was fired, by town council, for job performance issues in 2024.

"She discovered numbers were wrong and started digging in," Porter said. "Around the same time the insurance people called and said she's [Goodman] going in and changing numbers. We had to lock her out of the system because she was still going in after her employment."

Porter acknowledged some information was based on secondhand accounts.

"I'm assuming from a conversation that I heard, it was logging into the town's master account," Porter said.

Porter also described longstanding concerns about nepotism within town operations. "You had four family members working in the town government," he said. "People were complaining."

Porter emphasized certain

allegations remained unverified.

"That file burning thing, I didn't witness it. It's complete hearsay to me," Porter said.

Porter also described his own history of being investigated. "I've been investigated for everything from getting the wrong kind of haircut to rigging an election," Porter said. "Every time it's come up, nothing."

When asked if Goodman's husband was aware of the allegations, Porter said he did not believe so, a sentiment Mayor Brown agreed with.

"I would have bet my life on it. He doesn't have a clue," Porter said.

Allegations against former treasurer Mary Ann Goodman

At the interview's outset, Mayor Brown describes discovering what he repeatedly refers to as a forensic audit in his office months after taking office.

"Probably four months into my tenure I found the envelope stuck in the desk. It said 'confidential mayor' on it," Brown said. "There was a forensic audit done. And, from 2016 to 2018, the forensic audit was completed, and a report was given back to the town on Aug. 21, 2019."

Brown said he did not initially open the envelope.

"For probably three more months I just stuck it in the drawer saying that wasn't me. It wasn't before me," Brown said.

Brown said he eventually reviewed the report and began contacting officials.

"When I put my hand on the Bible and took the duty to do what's best for the town, everything that I need to do. I talked to our police chief [Porter], I talked to Sheriff [Dennis] Kelly, I talked to our town attorney [Doug Bell] and I talked to our labor attorney," Brown said.

During the interview, Brown describes what he said the Quick Group LLC report showed.

"We have to pay a percentage of our insurance," Brown said. "She [Mary Ann Goodman] was taking the money from you and I and these fine people over here, part of their money, paying his [Mickey Goodman] insurance for like four years."

Brown told the agent the amount exceeded what was documented in the Quick Group LLC, report. "Well over \$100,000," Mayor Brown said.

When asked how the alleged scheme worked, Brown said it would have been difficult for employees to notice. "If I make \$200 a week and you take \$15, I'm not going to miss that," Brown said. "But, if you take \$150 and

I'm getting \$50, it's going to throw a red flag."

Brown also raised allegations of unauthorized computer access after Goodman retired.

"This is just hearsay," Brown said. "This lady called Ketekash and said she [Goodman] has been gone a year from the town and she was still at home hacking into the software of town a year after she left."

"I don't know if all that's true. I'm just going by what I was told," Mayor Brown added quickly.

Brown also references allegations that the Goodmans had been involved with using town funds for rental of a U-Haul truck. But, Brown then follows the accusation with an acknowledgment he had no documentation to back up his claims.

"I don't have pictures of this. It's hearsay after the fact. People's telling me about this," Mayor Brown said.

Allegations of leaks, internal coordination, a 'bugged' Town Hall

As the interview continues, Brown pivots, raising concerns that information

about his contact with SLED had been leaked to the Index-Journal.

"We have an internal leak somewhere," Brown said. "Because I didn't talk to anybody. I talked to you [Agent Brown] in the conference room and shut the door."

Brown said after he called SLED on Aug. 12, he received an email inquiry from Index-Journal reporter Renee Ortiz.

This was the email sent by Ortiz to the town on Aug. 13.

"Pursuant to the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act (S.C. Code Ann. § 30-4-10 et seq.), I am requesting access to and copies of the complete forensic audit conducted for the Town of Ninety Six in 2019, including any draft or final reports, related correspondence with the auditing firm, and any appendices or supporting materials. Please provide these records in electronic PDF format if possible," the email states.

"Either they were standing at the door listening or Town Hall is bugged," Mayor Brown said.

When the agent pressed

him on who he believed may have overheard and leaked the conversation, Brown named two town employees.

"Amanda Seymour and Patience Curtis," Mayor Brown said. "I'm not accusing anybody or nothing, but it's kind of weird that I only spoke with you," Brown said.

Brown suggested the two employees also had personal ties to Goodman.

"They're good buddies. Mary Ann comes to their house," Brown said. "I'm not accusing anybody anything."

Brown expresses disbelief that any media inquiries could have occurred without internal knowledge.

"Ain't nobody that smart," Brown said. "Because I didn't tell anybody that you and I had a conversation."

Brown also expressed concern about the timing of media coverage. At that time, the Index-Journal had also FOIA'd town records for the MMDA.

SLED Special Agent Brown responded that premature publicity could affect records and had questioned whether the press knew of the audit or the SLED interview.

"Nobody knows about it. She's [Ortiz] going to run a story. It'll be the next day. That's just the way she does it," Mayor Brown said.

"When they do that, people can destroy records or they get their story straight," the agent responded.

It's at this point in the interview where Seymour is heard in the background. The agent then states: "Well that's a good thing. We didn't meet."

To which Mayor Brown reiterates his concern.

"That's why I said the Town Hall is bugged," Brown said.

Where to watch

The recording concludes with SLED Special Agent Brown outlining the next steps in the investigative process.

The investigation was later closed by the agency as unfounded.

The full recording of the interview is published online. Find it on the Index-Journal's YouTube page and Facebook page.

Contact Renee Ortiz at 864-943-5643. Follow her on X: @By_ReneeOrtiz



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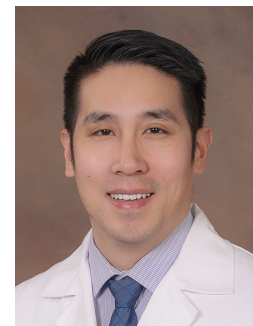
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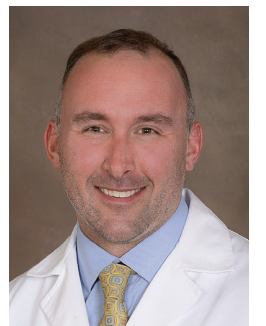
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