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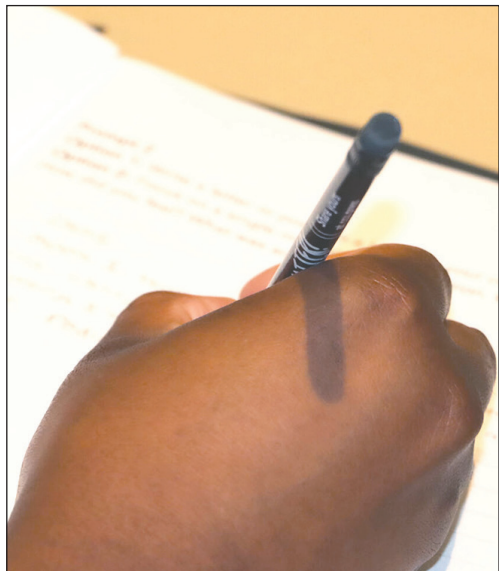
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'It was a gut punch'

Retired colonel
recounts 9/11
Pentagon attack

By **RENEE ORTIZ**
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As Col. Laura McCravy Hunter, (Ret.) thought back on her long military career, a few memories have stayed with her over the years.

Hunter retired from the Air Force in 2012. She began Officer Candidate School in 1985.

One of these moments includes when she and her husband, Kip, were stationed in Germany.

"We'd been there three weeks when the Berlin Wall fell," Hunter said.

Another memory was when Hunter, state Rep. John McCravy's sister, began working at the Pentagon.

"When I got there, I was a captain. I worked in the personnel arenas, so we're talking mobilization, personnel policy," Hunter said. "Pentagon runs the show for all the services. I was privy to so many interesting developments, exposed to a lot of very high level discussions. I met so many people, I was briefing the secretary of the Air Force on a regular basis. That was incredible."

In the early '90s, she was working in the basement area of the Pentagon, when she moved to Rosslyn for a new position. In September 2001, Hunter was working on transitioning back to the Pentagon building.

"I had just accepted another job back in the building. So I had gone over to Rosslyn, to my former place, the job that I was transitioning out of, and I

See **PUNCH**, page 8A



RENEE ORTIZ | INDEX-JOURNAL, SUBMITTED
TOP: Col. Laura McCravy Hunter retired from the Air Force in 2012. **INSET:** American Airlines Flight 77 was hijacked and was crashed into the Pentagon, killing all 64 people on the plane and 125 people in the Pentagon, according to the U.S. Department of Defense.



RENEE ORTIZ | INDEX-JOURNAL

Chris Ann Sondels flips through a scrapbook of postcards she collected with her ex-husband. Her husband was a truck driver, so she traveled to every state and parts of Canada for three years with him.

'Everything stopped that day'

Ninety Six woman
reflects on 9/11

By **RENEE ORTIZ**
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Chris Ann Sondels was born in McCormick in 1965. She grew up in the community, and when she was older, began working with the elderly in the area.

In 1997 she met Alan Sondels, who was a truck driver. The two married the next year and soon after the topic of jobs came up between the two. It was then that she decided she was going to try something new.

"We got married on Feb. 14 in 1998. At that time, he was driving a truck. So I said, well, I just go on the road with you. I mean, it sounded interesting to go to different places, see different things," she said.

And travel she did. For the next four years, the Sondels drove across the United States and parts of Canada. As they traveled, she collected postcards from every place they visited. Her collection of postcards fills up an entire scrapbook.

As she flipped through the book, postcards from Colorado, California, Dollywood, Virginia and many other places could be seen. And her favorite place?

"Iowa was my favorite place to go. I like the Iowa 80 truck stop. It was more like a mall than a truck stop, because it had everything. It had a store, had restaurants, place to shop, place to get your hair done, the whole package," Sondels said.

See **REFLECTS**, page 8A

Here 4 a Reason promotes positive mental health



SUBMITTED

Each fall, Greenwood nonprofit, Here 4 a Reason sponsors a 5k race. Runners and walkers of all ages are invited to join in efforts to break stigmas and address mental health, while racing in memory of loved ones.

By **ST. CLAIRE DONAGHY**
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"You good, bruh?"

This question, posed on the back of a Kelly Green T-shirt, worn by Greenwood's Sally Montgomery, recently caught the attention of a woman in an office.

Beneath the screen-printed question on the back of the shirt is: 988 Suicide Hotline.

The shirt is from local nonprofit, Here4aReason, or H4AR for short, dedicated to suicide

prevention and mental wellness.

September marks suicide prevention awareness month. And, H4AR has ways you can help.

H4AR was begun by an elementary school teacher, now school counselor, and mother of three, Beth Justesen of Greenwood. Her husband, Tad, died by suicide in 2017.

Beth and her 17-year-old daughter, Liza, spoke with the Index-Journal about the growth, purpose and reach of the Here 4

See **MENTAL**, page 7A

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LAKELANDS WEATHER

Today	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
Partly sunny High: 81 Low: 64 Chance of precipitation: 0%	Rain possible High: 76 Low: 66 Chance of precipitation: 30%	Rain, storms High: 76 Low: 66 Chance of precipitation: 60%	Storms possible High: 75 Low: 66 Chance of precipitation: 60%	Storms possible High: 78 Low: 64 Chance of precipitation: 30%	Sunny High: 79 Low: 66 Chance of precipitation: 0%
Lake levels (in feet)					
Clarks Hill: 323.71 +/- full pool: -6.29	Hartwell: 654.50 +/- full pool: -5.50	Marion: 75.16 +/- full pool: -1.64	Russell: 474.73 +/- full pool: -0.27		
Greenwood: 438.73 +/- full pool: -1.27	Keowee: 96.65 +/- full pool: -3.35	Murray: 356.39 +/- full pool: -3.61	Wateree: 97.64 +/- full pool: n/a		

Meeting to focus on Ware Shoals dam repairs

Meeting place

The public meeting will take place at 8 Mill Street, Ware Shoals, at 4pm. For more information contact bross@wareshoalssc.gov.

From staff reports

A public meeting will take place at 4 p.m. today at Ware Shoals Town Hall, 8 Mill St.

regarding the restoration of the Ware Shoals spillway, dam and head pond. The area has continued to run dry and residents are

seeking answers. Patriot Hydro S&W will present information on a possible timeline for the project.

PUNCH

From page 1A

was supposed to go back to the Pentagon. But I was putting it off because it was a hassle getting in and out. Little did I know what a hassle it would become the next day and from then on out," Hunter said.

Hunter recalled how the day began on Sept. 11, 2001.

"I needed to meet with some people. I looked around and thought, where is everybody? All these military people were huddled in the conference room. I walked in there and saw everyone standing around watching the TV," Hunter said.

The group watched the breaking news. An airliner had flown into the World Trade Center. Hunter said at the time everyone thought it was a tragic accident.

"Everybody assumed it was a small plane, as opposed to a civilian airliner. It just didn't make sense. And while we're standing around talking about it, here comes the other plane," Hunter said.

It was then she knew something horrible was happening.

"At that moment, I knew exactly what was going on. I high-tailed it out of the conference room, jumped on the phone landline, called my parents here in Greenwood. They hadn't had the news because it was early in the morning. I said, 'turn on the TV. I put my hand over the phone and said, nobody's saying it, but it's terrorism, take it to the bank,' Hunter said.

Hunter and the rest of the military personal were still reeling from the attack in New York. Hunter recalls speaking with her boss on the phone shortly after the second plane hit.

"While I was on the phone with him, the plane hit the Pentagon, and I could hear it over the phone. I knew what had happened. It was kind of unmistakable, although at the time, I didn't know if it was a bomb or another plane or what. But it was unmistakably loud and rumbling, and everything was shaking. And now I hear people in the back-



SUBMITTED

Retired Col. Laura McCravy Hunter and her husband, Kip Hunter. Kip was a fighter pilot, and is also a retired colonel.

9/11 memorial events

Retired Col. Laura McCravy Hunter will be a guest speaker at the Light's on Main event on Sept. 14. The event goes from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. and will include a color run, parade and wreath laying ceremony, live music, food trucks, and craft vendors. The event will also feature a tribute to the victims and first responders using emergency vehicles at 9:11p.m.

ground pandemonium," Hunter said.

American Airlines Flight 77 was hijacked and crashed into the Pentagon, killing all 64 people on the plane and 125 people in the Pentagon, according to the U.S. Department of Defense.

Hunter said she saw thousands of civilian and military personal evacuating the Pentagon and surrounding areas.

"It looked like something out

of a third-rate disaster movie. People were pouring out of these buildings by the thousands. The sirens on 9/11, they went on. They never stopped. It was like this constant wailing of sirens. That is something that stuck out at me," she said.

Hunter was able to get home that evening. On Sept. 12, her birthday, she headed back to the Pentagon.

"Probably the worst birth-

day of my life. ... No it was the worst birthday of my life. I would have been 42, I was a major at the time," Hunter said.

She said she will never forget driving into work that morning.

"It was a gut punch. It was still burning. ... So what happened was the wood and insulation had caught on fire when the jet fuel spewed everywhere, and that just went all around the roof. A fire burned in the Pentagon for three days, and there were hot spots after a week. The firefighters had quite the job ahead of them, the Pentagon was like a maze," Hunter said.

Ash covered every surface for months. Parts of the walls had burned away, exposing asbestos and toxic chemicals continued to burn and be released into the air. Hunter said she can still remember the horrid smell in the air.

"We couldn't close the windows. So we're getting all those toxic fumes, and I developed a chemical sensitivity that went on for years," Hunter said.

Even though it's been 23 years, Hunter said she remembers that day like it was yesterday.

"The Pentagon, which is the symbol of power protection. It's your defense center, and it's now been attacked, and it's vulnerable. This was a new era. I think it shook us. No, I know it shook us," Hunter said.

The U.S. Department of Defense states the Sept. 11 attacks were the deadliest terrorist attack in the nation's history. Among the World Trade Center, The Pentagon and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, 2,996 people were killed and nearly 6,000 were injured.

Hunter said it's imperative to never forget that day.

"Remembering 9/11 is about honoring those who died, remembering the stories of heroism, of which there were many, but also reminding ourselves that this cannot happen again, ever again," Hunter said.

Contact Renee Ortiz at 864-943-5643. Follow her on X at: [IJReneeOrtiz](#)



RENEE ORTIZ | INDEX-JOURNAL

Chris Ann Sondels and her ex-husband, Alan, were married on Valentine's Day in 1998. For the next three years Chris tagged alongside Alan as he worked as a truck driver. She's visited all states and parts of Canada. The two were heading into New York when the United States was attacked Sept. 11, 2001.

REFLECTS

From page 1A

Sept. 11, 2001, was another day on the road for the Sondels. The two were heading into New York from Pennsylvania.

Sondels said it was a normal day — until it wasn't. They began hearing breaking news reports on the radio of a plane that crashed into the Twin Towers.

"I was very frightened, because I didn't know if we were going to be safe, if something was going to happen to us. So we began listening to it on the radio," Sondels said.

Shortly afterward, another report came in. A second plane had hit the second tower. The two decided to halt their trip to New York and pulled off at a nearby hotel.

When they turned on the TV, she said she was horrified to see the destruction of the

attack.

"You know, just it was horrible, because it just kept happening. More and more things kept happening. The planes crashed into the towers and then the Pentagon. We watched it on TV, and just saw everything that was going on. And I thought, who could be doing this? Why are they doing this?" Sondels said.

Sondels said she wasn't the only person who had the same reaction to the violence.

"Everyone that day — everything kind of stopped that day, because everybody was in shock," Sondels said.

Twenty-three years later, Sondels said the country is still in shock over what happened that day. She said the country united in a way like never before, and hopes that can continue.

Contact Renee Ortiz at 864-943-5643. Follow her on X at: [IJReneeOrtiz](#)

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