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Seawall challenge starts over in Circuit Court

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

An environmental group is back at square one in its effort to overturn a state permit to rebuild a seawall on the beachfront at DeBordieu. The Coastal Conservation League argues that the legislature violated the state Constitution when it allowed the project in a budget proviso.

The league asked the state Supreme Court to hear its challenge to the measure contained in the state budget in 2014 and 2015. The court declined, but attorneys for the league, the state Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, only recently learned of

the decision made last summer, said Amy Armstrong, general counsel for the S.C. Environmental Law Project, which represents the league.

"I was kind of optimistic and hopeful that the Supreme Court would do something," she said.

Instead, she filed the challenge in Circuit Court in Georgetown last week. "It's probably going to get to the Supreme Court anyway," Armstrong said.

The DeBordieu Beach Bulkhead Organization received a permit in 2015 from Coastal Resources to build a new seawall along 1,800 feet of an existing 4,500-foot-long seawall on the south end of DeBordieu. The new wall would

SEE "SEAWALL," PAGE 4



Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

The state has approved a permit for a new seawall in front of the existing structure.

LAND USE

Forum on growth finds time is right

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

An effort to promote sustainable development in Georgetown County will benefit from a statutory review of the land use plan and County Council's plans to resume its long-range planning process. "Some people say it's too late," said Boyd Johnson, the county planning director. "I don't agree with that."

He isn't alone. A forum on growth on the Waccamaw Neck last week drew about 75 people to hear Johnson explain past trends and hear about strategies for the future from Michelle LaRocco of the North Inlet-Winyah Bay Estuarine Research Reserve and Pam Martin, a professor at Coastal Carolina University. LaRocco and Martin organized the Georgetown County Sustainability Coalition that obtained a designation for the county as a U.N. Regional Centre of Expertise in sustainable development.

John Sands, a Murrells Inlet resident who worked on land conservation with the Donnelley Foundation, organized the forum after years of listening to Waccamaw Neck residents complain about growth. "That's reactive thinking," he said. "There's a lot of brainpower being thrown at the question of how to maintain the quality of life in a community." His goal was to start that discussion here, figuring out how people envision the community in another decade and what tools are needed to make that happen.

The timing is right, Johnson said. Under state law the county has to update its comprehensive plan every 10 years. Work has already started to update the 2007 plan. A key component is the

SEE "GROWTH," PAGE 3

Growth by the numbers

428%

Waccamaw Neck population growth 1970-2000

95%

Projected growth 2000-2030

22.6K

Population in 2015

34.8K

Daily traffic count, Highway 17 at Litchfield in 2015

Source: Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments

PAWLEYS PLANTATION

DOT won't cut 40 mph speed limit on causeway for golf carts

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The state Department of Transportation won't lower the speed limit on the South Causeway to allow golf cart traffic, according to the district traffic engineer.

The Pawleys Plantation Property Owners Association had asked that the speed limit be reduced as part of a plan to add a golf cart entrance to the gated community with access to the South Causeway from Rybolt Road. The ultimate goal was to allow residents and visitors to drive golf carts to the beach at Pawleys Island.

Under state law, golf carts are limited to roads with speed limits of 35 mph and under. The limit on the South Causeway at Rybolt Road is 40 mph. It drops to 35 mph before crossing Pawleys Creek.

Michael Bethea, DOT's district traffic engineer, said the decision wasn't based on golf carts alone. "That first part of the road is straight. We felt like people could drive it" at 40 mph, he said. "We don't recommend lowering it."

The town of Pawleys Island opposed the request citing concerns about additional golf cart traffic on the island's narrow roads. Bethea said he had similar concerns along the South Causeway. "By allowing golf carts, it could create a safety hazard," he said. "When you mix golf carts and cars on the same road, that's not a good mix."

Residents in the neighborhoods along Rybolt Road also

SEE "ACCESS," PAGE 3



Photos by Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Rick Baumann gives out magnolias at Sunday's Tree Party. Beth Hawkins, below, plants a redbud seedling at her home in Pawleys Island.

ENVIRONMENT | Trees for Tomorrow

After 15,000 plantings, group will put down roots as nonprofit

BY NIKKI BEST
COASTAL OBSERVER

Cornus. Juniperus Virginiana. Eastern red cedar, eastern redbud and southern magnolia, the copse took center stage at the Trees for Tomorrow giveaway event held Sunday in Litchfield and Murrells Inlet. The group gave away almost 3,000 trees in five hours.

"We have surpassed our 15,000-tree, five-year goal," Rick Baumann, the founder of Trees for Tomorrow, said. "Just a few redbuds and dogwoods are left." Hundreds of local residents took the saplings from almost two dozen volunteers at the Tree Parties. The almost 5-year-old group will donate the remaining grove to local landmarks and plantations. Trees for Tomorrow will soon file its charter to become a 501(c)(3) thanks to donations collected during this weekend's event.

"The generosity of the people who picked up trees is very much appreciated," Baumann said.



Beth Hawkins lives on 3 acres at Pawleys Island. She picked up some of each tree at the event.

"I'm in the process of planting them," Hawkins said. "In the 20 years I've lived here I've probably added 10-15 trees."

Trees appear to be hardy plants, but the ecosystem that supports them is fragile. David Jenkins, forestry health program coordinator and entomologist David Jenkins with the state Forestry Commission, says laurel wilt is the infestation in the area to watch. It mainly affects redbay trees. Other environmental and human factors include trees planted too deep and in the wrong place, pollution, construction, compacted soil and salt water infiltration.

Hawkins lost some of her 100-year-old pine trees last year during Hurricane Matthew and a dogwood she assumes to disease.

"I was lucky the pines fell away from my house," she said.

SEE "TREES," PAGE 5

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Iron man: Blacksmith Walter Hill carries on a tradition of art and preservation.

SECOND FRONT

Arts: Watercolor exhibit ends with sale to benefit Waccamaw Library.

PAGE 10

Crime..... 7
Opinion..... 8
Crossword.....12
What's On.....13
Classifieds.....14
Sports.....17

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ECONOMY | Marketing the Hammock Coast

County tourism director takes Brookgreen Garden job

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Lauren Joseph will step down next week as Georgetown County's tourism director to take over as vice president for marketing at Brookgreen Gardens. She will replace Helen Benso, who is retiring.

"It's one of those jobs that come around once in a lifetime," Joseph said.

She was hired in 2012 to replace Meredith Hart, the first person to hold the position under a restructuring of the county's tourism marketing. The tourism director is an employee of the Chamber of Commerce, but works for the commission. Last year, the town of Pawleys Island also contracted with the chamber to manage its tourism promotions.



Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Lauren and Al Joseph got the first dance at the Pawleys Pavilion Reunion the year after they married. Her work with tourism marketing grew to include the town of Pawleys Island.

Pawleys Island approved a contract last week with the S.C. National Heritage Corridor to provide email and social media marketing. The rest of the town's marketing plan is set for the spring. "In the summer you don't have to push that hard," Joseph said. "There's plenty of time for a new person to get in."

This week she was wrapping up an accommodations tax grant application for the county Tourism Management Commission. It is up for approval by the commission today and will be submitted to the county Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee next week.

"I'm trying to make sure everything is set," Joseph said. "Nothing's going to fall through the cracks."

The tourism commission has also

SEE "TOURISM," PAGE 3