

# COASTAL OBSERVER

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50 cents

## SCHOOLS

### WMS students undergoing DJJ evaluation after threats about shooting

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Two Waccamaw Middle School students who were arrested last week for making threats against classmates remain in the custody of the state Department of Juvenile Justice, according to the 15th Circuit Solicitor's Office. They pleaded "delinquent" in Family Court to a charge of "disturbing school."

The teens, both 13 and from Murrells Inlet, will be housed in a secure facility by the Department of Juvenile Justice for up to 45 days while they undergo evaluation, said Tonya Root, spokeswoman for the solicitor's office. "Those DJJ officials will prepare a report with recommendations for sentencing," she said.

The arrests by the Georgetown County Sheriff's Office came as a result of calls from concerned parents, school district officials said, and highlight the increased concern for school violence following well-publicized shootings around the country. "People sometimes think we go overboard," said Alan Walters, the district's director of safety and risk management. "If something makes you ask yourself, 'Should I report this,' the answer is always, 'Yes.'"

The school received calls after one boy, 13, gave a PowerPoint presentation in class about school shootings. That was followed by a post on social media that contained a date that coincided with a school shooting in 2001 in California.

"Whether implied or overt, we take these things seriously," Superintendent Randy Dozier said. "I think people need to know that we will respond and there are serious consequences for their actions. It's different than it was five or 10 years ago."

The reports from concerned parents and the quick response from law enforcement show that feeling is shared, Dozier said. The district expanded its security efforts since the 2012 Sandy Hook school shootings in Connecticut to include resource officers in all elementary and middle schools.

The first boy was arrested March 8. The next day a second boy, also 13, was arrested after investigators learned both boys were making threats to kill other students. "There was more to it than just the PowerPoint," Walters said. "It was a lot more serious."

INSIDE: Boys told classmates of plans for bombs. **Page 7**

## PAWLEYS ISLAND

### Former Town Hall is down, but not out under 50% rule

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Reports of the demise of Pawleys Island Town Hall were, like those of Mark Twain; greatly exaggerated. "We could put Town Hall back together where it would be a serviceable building," Administrator Ryan Fabri told Town Council this week.

The building was damaged by flood waters during Hurricane Matthew in October. Town staff moved to a portable office in the



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The building is valued at \$57,000.

nearby Nature Park. The town is scheduled to interview three firms that are finalists to design a new Town Hall that would be located in the right of way of Pavilion Lane, once it is obtained from the state Department of Transportation.

The decision to build a new facility was based on the assumption that the old Town Hall could not be repaired beyond 50 percent of its value without coming into compliance with federal

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Rep. Lee Hewitt, Sen. Stephen Goldfinch.

## LEGISLATURE

### Raising funds for road repairs remains in doubt

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

A plan to raise the state gasoline tax to fund road and bridge repairs is due for debate in the state Senate this week, but local lawmakers worry that even if the measure passes, the majority won't be large enough to overcome a likely veto by Gov. Henry McMaster. "I think we're going to have a very interesting three weeks," state Sen. Stephen Goldfinch said.

He and state Rep. Lee Hewitt, both Murrells Inlet Republicans, favor the proposal passed by the House earlier this month. It would raise the gas tax from 16.75 cents to 26.75 cents over five years, the first increase in the tax since 1987. When fully implemented, it would generate \$400 million a year for an Infrastructure Maintenance Trust Fund. Along with other fee increases, the measure is expected to provide \$600 million a year toward what the state Department of Transportation estimates is \$11 billion worth of

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## COURTS

### Judge dismisses suit by ex-development official who pleaded guilty to theft

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

A Circuit Court judge has dismissed a suit by the former Georgetown County economic development director claiming he didn't have effective legal representation before he pleaded guilty to embezzlement charges last year.

Wayne Gregory, 39, was arrested in April 2014 on charges that he used public funds to buy prepaid gift cards that he redeemed himself. He tried to cover up the purchases as legitimate expenses, according to the arrest warrant.

The state Department of Revenue charged Gregory with tax evasion for filing false information with the agency. He pleaded guilty to both charges.

Gregory was sentenced in October to eight years in prison for embezzlement and five years for tax evasion, to run concurrently, suspended to six months house arrest and five years probation. He was also required to make restitution. Georgetown County officials estimated at the time of his arrest that Gregory embezzled over \$194,000.

SEE "COURTS," PAGE 4



Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

The early angler catches the fish | A kayaker heads out into Pawleys Creek for an early morning fishing expedition. After an overnight cold snap, the weather will warm this weekend for fishing and other outdoor activities.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Group directs voter concern toward issues

BY NIKKI BEST  
COASTAL OBSERVER

If you schedule it, they will come. They are the citizens of Murrells Inlet, Litchfield Beach and Pawleys Island. It, was a chance to talk about protecting and conserving the lands of the Waccamaw Neck. The Conservation Voters of South Carolina scheduled its "Take Action" tour throughout the state to meet with citizens. Murrells Inlet was one of the first places the group's engagement coordinator, Sarah Cohen, scheduled.

"I know the people here are really committed to conservation," Cohen said.

The Conservation Voters' visit followed what the organization described as a tumultuous week in the General Assembly. A bill,

H.3529, that they call the "Anti-Home Rule" bill, came up in the House and was continued in a 50-49 vote. It will come up again in January 2018. John Tynan, executive director of Conservation Voters, described the bill as one that shifted power away from the people.

"That was basically a bill that stripped local communities of their ability to make local solutions of how to deal with plastic bags pollution and Styrofoam pollution and container pollution," he said.

In the Senate, S.105, which dealt with the "automatic stay" in permit appeals, was amended and sent back to the House. The Conservation Voters' concern with automatic stay is similar to the container bill. It moves the power away from the people, but

SEE "VOTERS," PAGE 4

## NONPROFITS | Carolina Human Reinvestment

### Reinventing itself, program reaches out to teens

BY NIKKI BEST  
COASTAL OBSERVER

It used to be Lowland Drug and Alcohol Program, but four years ago they switched gears to become Carolina Human Reinvestment.

CHR is an up-and-coming faith-based youth outreach organization serving Georgetown, Horry and Williamsburg counties. Program director Allyson Ladd joined the organization two years ago when the upper school at Pawleys Island Christian Academy closed.

"I wasn't sure if I should go back into public school, back into teaching, but I figured out this is what I wanted to be involved in," she said. "This is my ministry."

The three main focuses of CHR are the TASC after-school program, the Amachi mentoring program and the teen health initiative. CHR caters to middle and high school students primarily in the Georgetown area.

"There's some great after-school programs in Georgetown



Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Allyson Ladd, program director of Carolina Human Reinvestment, helps Malik Kelly and J'Ari Ford with homework.

County, but most of them stop at fifth grade," Ladd said.

The drug and alcohol program was started by the Rev. Jesse Marshall of Pawleys Island, who remains on the advisory board of CHR. Its current chair-

man is Brewster Buck, owner of Island Floors.

The organization is holding a day-long teen health workshop at the Waccamaw Library this week.

Through a partnership with

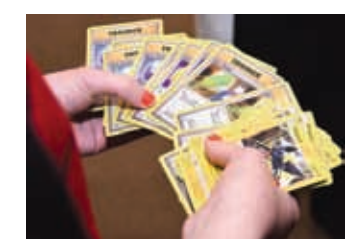
the state Department of Juvenile Justice, the TASC program is able to offer snacks to the kids who come after school. After snacks, it's homework time for the kids. CHR volunteers work with the students to bring their grades up and to understand what's going on in school, Ladd said.

"Our goal was not to just provide a baby-sitting service," she said. "But to really give them the skills to propel themselves forward."

"Amachi" is a Nigerian Ibo word that means "who knows but what God has brought us through this child." The mentoring program was developed in 2000. Its infrastructure and matching protocol was developed by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. It focuses on serving children who have an incarcerated parent. Those children have a 70 percent chance of ending up in jail themselves without some form of intervention, according to the Amachi Institute, which is based in Philadelphia.

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Play's the thing: Waccamaw Library hosts three days of gaming at ShushCon 17.

SECOND FRONT

Arts: From the podium and the keyboard, educators lead community choir.

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