

COASTAL OBSERVER

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50 cents

County administrator will leave at year's end

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Sel Hemingway will retire as Georgetown County administrator at the end of the year. His announcement to County Council members in a closed session this week followed a meeting in which Hemingway reminded the members that this year's \$90.5 million budget is not sustainable. "None of that was really factored into this," Hemingway said afterward. "That was the path that I was on."

He plans to lead efforts to create a balanced budget for the

coming years and develop the next phase of a new capital plan, which could see the return of a local sales tax.

Hemingway was the County Council chairman in 2008 when he was hired to replace Tommy Edwards, who retired as administrator. He was only the fifth administrator since county governments received more autonomy under legislation passed in the 1970s. The first, Al Schooler, was both the council chairman and administrator.

Hemingway was hired over two other finalists, one from North Carolina and another from

Hemingway said he wants to spend more time with his 14 grandkids, who all live within 20 miles of him.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Arizona. He had managed his family's car dealership in Andrews for 30 years and spent 11 years on the council. He was also a certified public accountant.

Hemingway said he will present County Council with some options next month for finding his replacement. "The perfect candidate would be someone



with South Carolina experience," he said.

Council Chairman John Thomas said he doesn't envision a national search for Hemingway's replacement. The council would like to find someone already working in the state.

The decision follows what Hemingway called the most difficult budget process of his tenure. It also comes as the county prepares to hold a special election in his former district to replace Austin Beard. Beard resigned this month after a ruling from the county election commission that

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SAFETY | North Litchfield house burns

After fire, Midway extinguishes a rumor

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Crews from Midway Fire and Rescue got help from four other departments in fighting a fire at North Litchfield last week that caused heavy damage to a home a block from the beach.

This week, Midway was fighting a rumor that fire hydrants near the home on Ancient Marine Drive didn't work.

"There was no water issue. We had water and water when we needed it," Fire Chief Doug Eggiman said.

An owner at the annual meeting of the Litchfield Beaches Property Owners Association told the group that Midway had to open three hydrants before they found one that worked. John Thomas, the Georgetown County Council chairman and a North Litchfield, said he also heard from another owner about the hydrant problem.

"We've heard that," Mark Nugent, the Midway fire inspector, said. Like Eggiman, he was among those on the scene of the fire. "People just don't understand."

Eggiman said the crews used a couple of different hydrants. "We wanted a couple of water sources," he said.

Because there were other departments coming as well as crews from all three Midway stations, it wasn't a matter of connecting to the closest hydrant. Because of the number of vehicles, "sometimes it can be more of a hassle if you have a closer hydrant," Eggiman said.

Georgetown County Water and Sewer District owns and maintains the hydrants. Fire departments perform annual inspections. Nugent said he learned that the utility also got a



Photos by Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer



The fire caused severe damage to the top floors of the home. The wood interior required crews to use axes and saws to reach the fire.

call about problems at North Litchfield. He said he tracked the source of the rumor to a Twitter post.

The fire was the result of spontaneous combustion of material being used to refinish a piece of furniture, Eggiman said.

It began outside the three-story house and burned up into the attic. Because the interior was tongue-and-groove construction rather than drywall, it was tough

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SCHOOLS

Charter board election draws heavy turnout (for candidates)

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

After a year in which Coastal Montessori Charter School saw its funding slashed – then restored – and its director quit, parents and staff are electing a new board. They have 21 candidates to choose from. Results will be announced today.

"I think it's inspiring that so many people are running, although unusual," Joe Bowers, operations director for the Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina, said. "It's inspiring that so many people want to make a difference."

There were concerns last year that the school would continue after the Georgetown County School District discovered it had made an error in payments to the school. It cut funding, only to have the county school board restore it months later.

In January, the director, Nathalie Hunt, resigned after the board polled staff on her performance. The board has not released the results of the poll. It suspended the search for Hunt's successor and the former assistant, Chip Henneey, will continue as interim director.

Under the state's charter school law, board members are elected by the employees and the parents or guardians of its students. Families get one for each student. Employees also get one vote. Employees who have students enrolled also get one vote for each child.

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NONPROFITS

As Family Justice director steps down, growth continues

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

After 32 years of helping victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, Vicki Bourus is retiring.

Work "has been the center of my life for a long time," Bourus said. "It's been very satisfying. It's real fulfilling work. People allowing me into their life is a pretty great honor and privilege."

Bourus has been the executive director of the Family Justice Center in Georgetown for the past seven years and led the nonprofit through tremendous growth, including an expansion into Horry County, the purchase of property and the construction of new offices.

"It's been a labor of love, it's been amazing," Bourus said. "This is a really generous community. ... It has been satisfying to see [the center] grow and to be able to handle so many more people and being able to really provide them with what they need."

The Family Justice Center has run a shelter in Georgetown for victims of domestic violence since 2013.

Bourus said about half of the center's \$1 million per year budget comes from donations and fundraisers. Some of the biggest



Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Vicki Bourus has been an advocate for victims of domestic violence for 32 years.

ongoing supporters are churches. Many of the churches make regular donations to the center's victims assistance fund, which pays for things like medical and travel expenses.

"It provides that immediate direct care for people who need it," Bourus said.

South Carolina consistently ranks in the top five for states

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COURTS

Inlet magistrate started work bussing tables at Oliver's Lodge

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Kin McKenzie moved to Murrells Inlet about 10 years ago, but he grew up spending summers on the creek where his father built a house in 1960. "I've been coming here all my life," he said. "I bussed tables summers at Oliver's Lodge."

He sat up late talking with Roosevelt Pickett, the creekman who worked at the lodge for 60 years. When McKenzie learned two years ago that Pickett, who was better known as Rooster, had died, he also found out there was no marker on Pickett's grave. After talking with the family, McKenzie bought one. "He was really special to me," he said.

McKenzie started work last week as the Murrells Inlet magistrate. He brings a knowledge of the community and the law, acquired over a 34-year career in law enforcement. The last 14 years were spent as a captain in charge of State Law Enforcement Division criminal investigations in the 12-county Pee Dee region.

McKenzie was appointed by the governor and confirmed this month by the Senate to replace John Benso. He was nominated by Sens. Stephen Goldfinch and Ronnie Sabb. Five of the six coun-



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Magistrate Kin McKenzie retired after 34 years in law enforcement.

ty magistrates are former law enforcement officers.

"I like law enforcement in magistrates," Goldfinch said. He hears complaints about bias against defendants in criminal cases, but doesn't see it. "Most of the ex-cops I know may go even farther for the defendant," he said.

McKenzie was one of several

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