

COASTAL OBSERVER

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PAWLEYS ISLAND

Town seeks to catch a rising tide of funding

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Fingers of salt water crept through the spartina grass and between the rocks. As the moon rose over the ocean, the water had the Pawleys Island Chapel in a soft embrace that was only disturbed when a passing car on Myrtle Avenue created a wake. That flooding last month on the highest high tide of the summer has become routine and prompted the town of Pawleys Island to look for solutions along with money to pay for them.

A survey sent to island property owners last month found 47 percent were extremely concerned about flooding.

"Nobody is not concerned about flooding at all," said Nicole Elko, a coastal geologist who is helping the town draft a plan to make Pawleys Island more resistant to flood and storm damage as sea level rises and a warming climate increases the intensity of storms.

The plan will enable the town to compete for federal and state grants to design and build mitigation projects.

"We're not just thinking about capital improvement projects here," Elko told the town Planning Commission last week. "We're thinking about the broad spectrum, everything you can do all the way from ordinances to gray infrastructure projects."

While gray infrastructure like roads and drainage systems is a component, Elko thinks the town's best opportunities will come through green infrastructure, techniques that alter the shoreline, but also enhance the habitat. She and town officials are now at work to determine which solutions will appeal to property owners.

"We're kind of gauging the temperature," Elko said.

The survey generated 269 responses of about 500 properties on the island. Elko is still reviewing the data. She plans to map the location of the respondents' property to

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Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Helping hands for hatchlings | Betsy LaMaster, a SCUTE volunteer, helps a sea turtle hatchling that was flipped by a wave as it headed to the ocean after a nest inventory on Pawleys Island. There were 30 nests laid this summer. Below, Vivian Castillo, 6, cheers as a hatchling reaches the surf. She was visiting her grandmother, Lewanda Hardy, who brought her to the inventory. The nest had 137 eggs; 98 hatched.



SCHOOLS

District sees enrollment rise at start of new year

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Based on the traffic on Highway 17, summer is still in full swing. But vacation is ending for Georgetown County public school students, who return to class on Monday.

More than 7,000 students are already enrolled, but the district is expects that as many as another 1,000 will show up.

That is about 200 more students than the beginning of the 2021-22 school year, according to Superintendent Keith Price.

"GCSD's current student enrollment is holding steady," Price said. "Like many districts around the state, we experienced a decline in enrollment for the 2020-21 school year. Our numbers are starting to rebound. Families who left the district due to challenges presented by the pandemic are returning."

Ashley Cameron, principal at Waccamaw Elementary School, is expecting around 59 more

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

At a mental health awareness event at Waccamaw High, beads identify losses.

Students learn first aid for peers with mental health problems

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

A recent study reported that 12 percent of kids in South Carolina suffered from depression or anxiety in 2020.

That is a 55 percent increase from 2016, according to the study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

As the new school year starts, there is a group of Georgetown County students trained to recognize the warning signs in teenagers who are struggling with mental health and to intervene and get help for that person.

The students completed the Teen Mental Health First Aid training with the nonprofit Healthy Learners. The course teaches 10th-, 11th- and 12th-graders how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance abuse challenges in their friends and peers.

"The kids really, really enjoyed it. They really liked it. They were more engaged than I

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PUBLIC SAFETY | Filling the vacancies

Academy helps departments grow their own firefighters

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Fourteen new firefighters are on the job this week all over Georgetown County.

One of them - 2017 Waccamaw High School graduate Dominic Gullo - is working for the City of Georgetown Fire Department.

"The shift I got put on, they're all great," Gullo said. "They're pretty good about everyone doing one's part."

Gullo was one of four "probies" - including fellow Waccamaw High grad Victor Otubu - hired by the city department.

He worked his first 24-hour shift on Aug. 3. He said during that time, there was training, studying and checking equipment.

"Every day, we check off the



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Dominic Gullo, a 2017 Waccamaw High grad, receives his firefighters badge from his girlfriend, Caroline Strickler, at the graduation ceremony.

department does not have ambulances. Firefighters respond to calls and are met by crews from county fire and EMS.

"I haven't done anything too, too crazy yet," Gullo said.

Gullo was part of the second graduating class of the county's recruit school, which was started at the beginning of the year to train local residents to serve as firefighters in three of the county's departments: Midway, the city and county fire and EMS.

Midway Chief Brent McClellan

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trucks to make sure everything is on them, even though they were checked off that day before because they get used," Gullo said.

Gullo was considering a job as a first responder and chose the fire service over law enforce-

ment.

"I decided firefighter was probably a better option for me and my family," Gullo said.

The majority of Gullo's calls during his first days on the job were medical calls because the

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