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EDUCATION

New program will help train high schoolers for health jobs

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County students can start training to be a clinical medical assistant or electrocardiography technician while still in high school.

The school district is teaming up with Tidelands Health and Horry-Georgetown Technical College for a scholars program that covers the cost of the classes and training.

"This initiative will serve to impact, enhance and provide opportunities for our students interested in the area of health science," said Pamela Vereen, the district's director of college and career readiness.

Students enrolled in the program can also qualify to get paid and have access to job opportunities at Tidelands Health prior to graduating from high school.

To earn a certificate for clinical medical assistant, which is the person who takes all the patient's vital statistics and checks their list of medications before the doctor sees them, students must complete 12 credit hours and a clinical practicum at a Tidelands facility.

Caitlyn Krask, manager of student volunteer programs for Tidelands Health and a Waccamaw High School graduate, told the school board last month that Tidelands has a 10 percent vacancy rate for certified medical assistants.

"With this, we'll address the identified economic barriers that are in our county," she said of the program.

For an electrocardiography technician certificate, students complete nine credit hours, including at a lab at Horry-Georgetown Tech.

Some classes are also offered online.

Tidelands is trying to create opportunities for first generation college and professional program graduates, Krask said.

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Welcome 2025! | The Waccamaw Library hosted an early New Year's Eve party for kids on Tuesday which included a countdown to 12 p.m. Above, Topher Poirer, 6, works on his party hat. At left, Maddox Lee, 5, blows his noise-maker at noon. Below, Bella Pointer, 7, assembles a mask.

Photos by Chris Sokoloski/Coastal Observer



County challenges ruling on flood code

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County has gone to court to overturn a state decision that will require that structures in some inland areas be built to the same standard as those on beachfront to reduce the risk of storm damage.

And in case that doesn't work, the county is asking the legislature to change the way the state handles requests to modify building codes.

"We can't go through another hurricane season with this burden on our citizens," Jay Watson, the county attorney,

told members of the legislative delegation last month.

At the heart of the issue is a designation on federal flood maps that shows the "limit of moderate wave action." Known as the LiMWA line, it marks the inland limit where wave heights of 1.5 to 3 feet can be expected.

The building code adopted by the state in 2021 requires that structures east of the LiMWA line to be built to standards that apply in the oceanfront "V zones." That will affect the types of foundation used, what areas under structures

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PAWLEYS ISLAND

Town considers variance to help save another vintage beach house

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The town of Pawleys Island is considering a proposal that could buy more time for a beach house built in 1939 that could be torn down to make way for new construction under the town's current regulations.

"The reason we bought it and spent so much time thinking about it is because we don't want to tear it down," Kirkman Finlay told the town's Board of Zoning Appeals at a hearing last month.

He and his sister bought the Gibbes Cottage in 2020. The 2,300-square-foot house sits in the middle of 1.75 acres of beachfront property in the middle of the island.

The property was originally three lots when Caroline Gibbes bought it in 1938 for \$3,600. According to a family history of the cottage, the plan was to sell half the property, but rapid erosion in the late 1940s and early '50s prompted them to move the house back from the beach to the middle of the property.

Finlay wants to return the

property to three lots, but leave the Gibbes Cottage sitting on two of those lots.

"Some of the best summers of my life were actually spent in that house," he told the appeals board.

His family owned a beach house nearby for about 30 years, but sold it when a new, larger house was built next to it.

That new house was among the factors that led the town to adopt architectural guidelines for new houses in 2021. Since then, the town has focused on preserving nine historic homes listed on the National Register and other houses that reflect the "Pawleys look."

"We took a dramatic hit" when the previous house was sold, Finlay said.

He told the board that he spent years talking with the town about the new house. "I lost a lot of comfort," he said.

After buying the Gibbes Cottage, he obtained a demolition permit from the town.

Asked by board member Byron York to explain that, Finlay said "I need to know I'm not

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SCHOOLS | Coastal Montessori Charter

Sidelined for 16 months, director ready to return for new semester

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
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Sixteen months after being placed on administrative leave, Chris Bergeron is back this week as director of Coastal Montessori Charter School.

"I'm very excited just to come in, build some relationships and help our school any way we can," Bergeron said.

In September 2023, he was put on paid administrative leave after an Horry County woman filed a complaint with the Georgetown County Sheriff's Office about a "possible sex assault" of her 13-year-old daughter in October 2020 at Waccamaw Middle School. It named Bergeron, who was a physical education teacher at the middle school at the time, as the suspect.

A year later, the sheriff's office said its investigation was complete and there would be no charges.



Chris Sokoloski/Coastal Observer

Chris Bergeron, left, and J.D. Harbaugh set up library equipment at Coastal Montessori Charter School this week.

The charter school board voted last month to bring Bergeron back as director under the terms of his current contract "contingent upon full participation in a structured transition process."

The charter school is a public school sponsored by the Georgetown County School District, but it is run by its board.

Bergeron said the last 16 months, during which he was not allowed to have contact with anyone at the school, have been a challenge.

"I see me being back at the school as validation. What occurred was untrue," he said. "It was unfortunate that I was accused of something that I didn't do. It was shown that I did not have anything to do with it. But it took a long time to get to that point."

The investigation process was "difficult" on him and his family, Bergeron added.

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