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Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Hands Off protesters fill the bike path along Highway 17 on Saturday morning. Below, Sgt. Barney McCray keeps an eye on the marchers. He was one of 20 deputies at the event.

POLITICS | Trump 2.0

Protesters take to their feet to tell administration hands off

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A crowd estimated at around 500 people walked the Bike the Neck path along Highway 17 in Pawleys Island as part of a national protest against Trump administration policies, drawing cheers and jeers from passing drivers.

The protesters were told by Georgetown County sheriff's deputies that they needed to keep moving and not block the path, so they marched back and forth between the North and South Causeways — some pushing strollers, others pushing walkers, most carrying signs — for about two hours Saturday morning. What was unclear to some was where they go next.

"I was hopeful for 100. This is empowering," said Mark Bayer, who heads the local chapter of PFLAG, Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

He was in Washington, D.C., earlier in the week for protests.

"The passion and commitment were equal to what I saw in D.C.," Bayer said.

The Hands Off protest was launched by a coalition of national organizations and drew support from local groups.



Kathy McGrogan, a Georgetown resident, organized the march at Pawleys Island after hearing the columnist Ezra Klein talk about it on MSNBC. She signed up as a host through Indivisible, a progressive group.

"I thought, oh, you'll get about 50 or 100 people," McGrogan said. "Every day, I was getting 20 to 30 people registering."

Registration ramped up in the two days before the march, which also coincided with the announcement of wide-ranging tariffs on imports.

"I don't know if it was the tariffs or the fact that this was getting closer," McGrogan said.

Over 500 people registered, but McGrogan said it was unlikely all of those actually attended. But she heard of some people who came from Charleston, where the Hands On march was canceled for lack of a permit.

The sheriff's office contacted McGrogan as word of the event spread. The bike path was the scene of a march organized by a Waccamaw High student

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MIDWAY INLET

Preserving a legacy, property owners object to sand dredging plan

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

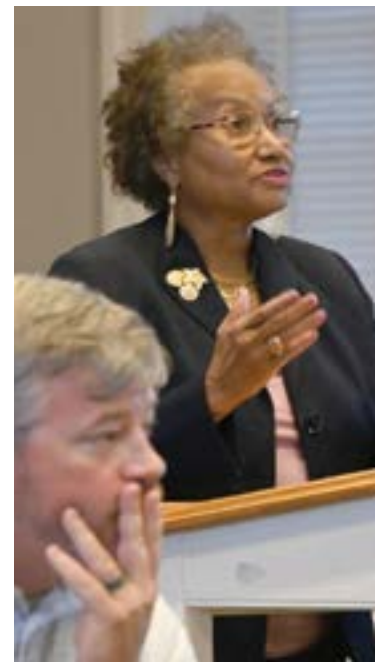
Naomi Holmes stood at the podium and closed her eyes.

"I was 13 years old when my family drove us from Georgetown to see the devastation of McKenzie Beach. I saw Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie sitting on the banks of Midway Creek, heads bowed," she said.

The couple were surrounded by debris.

"All of us were so forever saddened. That was the morning after Hurricane Hazel, Oct. 15, 1954," she said.

For Holmes and other members of the Manigault family that still own McKenzie Beach the images of 70 years ago are still fresh. They have spent the decades since then preserving the legacy of one of the few places black people were able to go to the beach in South



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Lucy Reuben explains the history of McKenzie Beach at the hearing.

BUDGETS

County proposes 5-year pay plan to help retain its workforce

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A five-year plan will raise pay for Georgetown County employees 16 percentage points over the first three years in an effort to catch up with inflation and reduce turnover. But it still won't make the county's pay scale competitive with its larger neighbors, officials say.

The plan presented to County Council this week will start with a 2 percent increase in May, two months before the start of the new fiscal year.

"This is not to meet market demand. This is just to keep up with inflation," said Walt Ackerman, the county director of Administrative Services.

The county has 655 authorized positions. About 60 are

currently vacant, Ackerman said.

The turnover rate went from just over 10 percent a year before the pandemic to over 22 percent in 2023, with the highest numbers for the jail (70 percent) and 911 dispatchers (26 percent).

Turnover is now around 17 percent.

The county began raising pay for public safety workers in 2022 and for other employees the next year. But Ackerman said it will help retain employees if they know that raises will continue.

Employees with less than five years of experience currently account for 53 percent of the county's workforce. "They're not fully settled into the

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PALMETTO GIVING DAY | Community Christmas Dinner

Fundraiser gives Santa's helpers an start early

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Every year a group of volunteers in Andrews joins a large organization to make sure thousands of people in Georgetown and Horry counties have a hot meal at Christmas.

The nonprofit called Community Christmas Dinner was founded in the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo in 1989. About 500 meals were served from one location that holiday.

This December, 13,000 meals, including 5,000 in Georgetown County, will be served from multiple locations.

"We've grown tremendously," said Bill Gaskins, who helps organize and oversee the distribution site in Andrews.

Community Christmas Dinner is one of the more than 90 nonprofits involved in Palmetto Giving Day, a 36-hour fundraising extravaganza hosted by the Frances P. Bunnelle Foun-



Community Christmas Dinners

Volunteers prepare to serve meals at Belin Methodist.

dation.

Andrews became a distribution site in 2007.

At the time, Gaskins was part of a prayer group along with a minister from Belin Memorial United Methodist

Church. Belin was already a serving site for the Community Christmas Dinner.

"This whole idea of feeding people either at Thanksgiving or Christmas came out of this," Gaskins said.

The minister connected the Andrews people with the Belin people. "That's how we got started," Gaskins said.

That first year, the Andrews volunteers didn't know what they were doing, Gaskins said.

"We thought it was easy. Just put everything in the oven," he added.

There were so few people and so much food that volunteers went out in the poverty-stricken area of Andrews to make deliveries.

Over the years the number of people served from Andrews has grown.

Meals from Trinity Global Methodist Church in Andrews are now delivered to the Plantersville, Hemingway, Choppee, Kingstree, Georgetown and North Santee communities and even as far away as Moncks Corner and St. Stephen.

This is the fourth year that Community Christmas Dinner

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SCHOOLS

Board charts path for more input in safety issues

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

A special committee of the Georgetown County School Board will spend the next seven weeks studying safety and security in schools.

The committee was approved last week after more than 20 minutes of discussion by board members about whether a committee was needed, or whether information should just be given to the entire board during its meetings.

Board Member Robert Cox served on a school board safety committee previously and said based on what came out of that work, the district is "a whole lot safer now."

Cox said it's "very important" to go back and see where the district stands now and

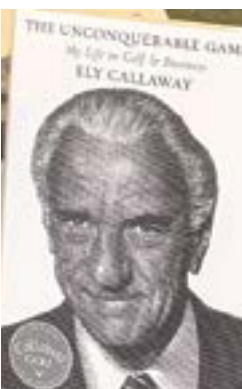
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