

# COASTAL OBSERVER

Vol. XLIII No. 47

Pawleys Island, South Carolina ~ May 1, 2025

\$1.50

## Collections begin for penny tax to fund capital projects

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

The sales tax on purchases made in Georgetown County rose 16.7 percent today. And it will stay that way until 2033 unless voters decide to raise it

again. That won't come as a surprise to the 17,584 county residents who voted for the capital project sales tax in November, or to the 16,830 residents who voted against it. The local tax is 1 cent that

will be collected in addition to the 6 cent state sales tax. It is estimated to raise about \$10 million a year, which will fund 22 infrastructure projects around the county estimated to cost \$74.4 million. If the tax raises additional revenue, the

referendum listed 19 continuing projects for funding. The penny won't be included in sales of groceries, prescription medicine and motor vehicle fuel, which are exempt from the state sales tax. It will be added to the cost of short-

term rentals. "We had some calls in November from accommodations providers," said Beth Stedman, CEO of the Georgetown County Chamber of Commerce. "They invoice their summer  
**SEE "SALES TAX," PAGE 2**

### BUDGETS

## Charter school looks for funds to close \$102K gap in spending

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

The Coastal Montessori Charter School board is scouring its finances to figure out how to offset an expected \$102,699 deficit in the upcoming budget.

Chairman Rick Richardson wants the board's finance committee to take a "hard look" at the more than \$110,000 the school has earned in interest since July on the \$2.6 million it has in reserve.

"We've got to figure out and be creative in where we shave funds," Richardson said. "But we've got to figure out how we're going to use that interest account, if we're going to use it at all."

"If we're not talking about [that] fund to get us through next year so then this board has time to strategize about where we're going to go financially, we're talking about losing people," director Chris Bergeron said.

Although the charter school is sponsored by the Georgetown County School District, its board of directors oversees its budget.

The school's projected spending in the FY26 budget is \$2.8 million. Bergeron said the budget projections are based on an enrollment of 240 students. As of mid-April, there were 236 students.

Salaries and benefits for employees add up to nearly \$2 million or 77 percent of the budget.

Roxann King, a CPA with Veris, told the board last month that for most charter schools, salaries and benefits account for between 60 and 65 percent of a budget.

It's "very difficult" to have a balanced budget when the personnel costs are that high, she added. The Montessori model has two teachers in every classroom since students stay  
**SEE "CHARTER," PAGE 2**



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer



**Spring Tide on a spring tide** | A plastic chair found by Troy and Sue Montenery during the 33rd annual Spring Tide cleanup of Murrells Inlet was too good to toss. But there was plenty of other debris to fill the bins at Morse Park Landing. "You wouldn't believe the trash on Wesley Road," said Wesley Hughes, left, who tossed a portion of it into the bucket of a front-end loader. Most of the participants did their cleaning on the land. David Goettel, below center, was eager to get on the water, made higher by a new moon, and remove a stray dock. "I've been looking at that for six months," he said.



### ELECTIONS

## Lawyer files to run for vacancy in District 6

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Jarrod Ownbey may not be a graduate of a Georgetown County school, but he has a strong interest in the district.

His oldest daughter is a graduate of Waccamaw High School, his two younger daughters are students at Waccamaw High and Waccamaw Middle, and his wife, Stacy, teaches at the middle school.

They are why Ownbey, a Spartanburg native, wants to represent District 6 on the school board. He filed as soon as the books opened last Friday for the July 8 special election.

"I think it's the most important investment you can make into a community is to invest in the education of their children because they're the ones that come back to be the doctors and work on the roads, work at the restaurants and keep everything going," Ownbey said. "To me that's why. It's to make sure that we have the best possible education for our children and put that investment into them, but also to give this area a chance to have a voice in Georgetown."

Ownbey, who lives in Litchfield Country Club and is a lawyer with the Mullins Law Firm in North Myrtle Beach, has heard from parents who think they don't have enough of a voice on what goes on in schools.

The District 6 seat became vacant when Kristie Baxley resigned last month. She was  
**SEE "ELECTION," PAGE 2**



Jarrod Ownbey

### PALMETTO GIVING DAY | Montessori School of Pawleys Island

## First-time participant eager to learn lessons from fundraiser

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Montessori School of Pawleys Island joined Palmetto Giving Day this year.

The annual 36-hour fundraising event is hosted by the Frances P. Bunnelle Foundation.

Stacy Nance, the school's director, said one of the things that she likes the most about working with the foundation is that they meet the nonprofits where they are.

"They said, 'if this is what you can do, then do that. Don't

worry about all the other stuff. Don't worry about how it looks for other agencies. Do what you can do and be good at that,'" she added. "That was very Montessori."

This year's Palmetto Giving Day is Monday and Tuesday. Since the event started in 2017, more than \$18 million has been donated to nonprofits that serve citizens in Georgetown County.

Nance has a background working with a local nonprofit that was involved in Palmetto Giving Day.

She was surprised that the

Montessori School was not part of the event when she joined the staff last year.

"That was definitely something that the board at that point was interested in learning more about," Nance said. "Working more closely with the Bunnelle Foundation was a big opportunity that came up. We're pretty excited."

The school enrolls students as young as eight weeks all the way through kindergarten.

"These first five years are the most important time in human development, in life,"  
**SEE "NONPROFIT," PAGE 2**



Comparing leaves on a zucchini plant are, from left, Willow Daigle, Greyson Carver, Charlie Brice and KaTorah Curry.

Chris Sokoloski/  
Coastal Observer

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