

COASTAL OBSERVER

Vol. XLIII No. 52

Pawleys Island, South Carolina ~ June 5, 2025

\$1.50



Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

A least tern feeds a chick in the colony at the south end of Litchfield Beach.

ENVIRONMENT | Least terns

Threatened seabirds create 2nd largest colony at Litchfield

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Mary-Catherine Martin looked through her binoculars to see if the chicks had grown their downy feathers.

“Yay!” she said. The state’s second largest colony of least tern nests sits atop the bare sand on the southern tip of Litchfield Beach. Mar-

tin, a wildlife biologist for the state Department of Natural Resources, wants to make sure the 113 nests make it through the season.

She contacted SCUTE, the nonprofit that monitors sea turtle nesting, to help put up 30 wooden posts and string to create a fence around the nests. It was “true village help” for Martin to see volunteers come to-

gether to protect the bird that is listed as “threatened” in South Carolina.

“When she needs help, we all grab what we can and go down and help her,” said Rick Scott, head of SCUTE. “We patrol those beaches every day looking for turtles, so we’re in a good position to help her keep an eye on them.”

SEE “TERNS,” PAGE 3

County denies playing favorites in bids for IP mill site

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Officials were scrambling this week to find out if Georgetown County was included in a bid submitted to International Paper Co. by a prospective buyer for its closed mill in Georgetown. They said the county does not want to be part of any bid.

State Rep. Lee Hewitt said he learned last week that the county was listed as a collaborator with Santee Cooper and Santee Electric Cooperative in a proposal from an unnamed buyer.

“They have publicly endorsed a bidder by having their name associated with it,” he said.

Hewitt has worked with another unnamed buyer who has a contract to purchase the Liberty Steel mill in Georgetown. That buyer is also interested in the paper mill site, which is being proposed for redevelopment as a power plant that burns biomass.

Georgetown County owns the former state port property that sits between the two mills on the Georgetown waterfront, the result of legislation initiated by Hewitt. He introduced the steel mill buyer to county officials.



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The county is interested in IP property outside the actual mill site.

“What worries me about that is the fact that I’ve tried to stay out of it and not pick a winner,” Hewitt said. “I took someone to see them without them disclosing they were a collaborator.”

The county is not a partner to any bid for the IP property, County Council Chairman Clint Elliott said.

“We’re still trying to dig in and find out what people are all fired up about,” he said. “We never authorized ourselves to be included in any bid.”

What the council did was SEE “MILL,” PAGE 3

LEGISLATION | Golf carts

Law that makes kids buckle up unbuckles local regulation

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A bill signed into law last month by Gov. Henry McMaster requires children 12 and under to wear seatbelts while riding in golf carts on public roads.

But the rewrite of the state law also removed a restriction that prevented local governments from regulating the vehicles. The change comes at a time when the town of Pawleys Island is looking at its golf cart permit program and wondering if a higher fee would reduce the number of vehicles.

“That’s what caught my at-



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The town of Pawleys Island once banned golf carts.

tention,” Town Administrator Dan Newquist said, adding that “the safety aspects of the bill are a step in the right direction.”

The bill that was filed in the House before the start of the session in January initially removed restrictions on operating golf carts at night. The Senate Transportation Committee last month rewrote the entire law covering golf carts, adding a section that allows local government to set hours and locations for their operation.

The seatbelt requirement was added before the bill passed SEE “CARTS,” PAGE 3

INCORPORATION

Sheriff casts doubt on group’s plan for policing town

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Voters in Pawleys Island and Litchfield can’t be sure they will continue to get the same service from the Georgetown County Sheriff’s Office if an effort to form a new town in the area succeeds, Sheriff Carter Weaver said.

He wants the group that’s organizing the effort to come up with “Plan B.”

The Pawleys Litchfield Municipal Study Group went public over Memorial Day weekend with its proposal for a town in the 29585 ZIP code. It calls for a town that will provide planning and zoning services, but continue to rely on Georgetown County for all other services through contracts.

Under state law, before a referendum can be held, the proponents need to submit a petition from 15 percent of the eligible voters along with a feasibility plan for providing services. It specifically requires a plan for “a minimum level of law enforcement.”

Andy Hallock, who leads the study group, said their plan for law enforcement is “business as usual.” They expect taxpayers will get the same county services they have now.

A town would have two years to develop its other services, but it has to show that it has a contract for law enforcement up front.

“They were saying the sheriff was going to continue to provide services at no cost,” Weaver said. “I told Andy I want to SEE “TOWN,” PAGE 3

CLASS OF 2025 | The graduates

Childhood friendship survives service academy rivalry

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Alex Mills and Tyler Fico were once boys growing up in Pawleys Island, playing tag football and drawing pictures of tanks, guns and soldiers.

Now they’re paving their own paths to become military officers.

Mills, a 2021 Lowcountry Preparatory School graduate, just received his degree in English from the U.S. Naval Academy. Fico graduated from Waccamaw High School in 2021 and received his degree in civil engineering this spring from the U.S. Military Academy.

The two graduates met through their parents, who became close friends at Precious Blood of Christ Catholic Church.

“We grew up going to youth group together,” Mills said. “We always kind of had an aptitude for military stuff.”

“Sometimes I’d bring a baseball bat and walk around the house playing Army soldier,” Fico added.

Fico said his parents, Neil and Becky, inspired him to pursue higher education. But his grandfather who served in the Navy inspired him to attend West Point.

“I knew that was definitely one of the things I wanted to do,” he said. “That was probably the best of both worlds.”

Mills’s grandfather, a Marine, would share stories with him. When he was in the fourth grade, Mills told his dad, James, that he wanted to be a Marine.

He’s working to become the SEE “GRADS,” PAGE 4



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Alex Mills, left, and Tyler Fico report for duty this summer.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Moment in the sun: Waccamaw High says goodbye to Class of 2025. **SECOND FRONT**



Yard work: Friends group upgrading outside of library. **PAGE 8**



Safety: Mobile pool gives kids a chance for swimming lessons. **PAGE 2**

Obituaries 2
Crime..... 5
Opinion 6
Crossword 10
Classifieds 11

Online
coastalobserver.com

