

COASTAL OBSERVER

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EDUCATION

AI

Teachers want to ensure students use technology in the right ways

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Lindsay Latimer was involved in academics, sports and student council at Waccamaw High. She said AI made a difference in her life.

“Ever since AI has become a really big thing senior year, when we can use it in school, it’s been a huge help writing essays and doing research and stuff,” Latimer said.

School officials said the district has been researching and developing policies for students and employees on the use of artificial intelligence and monitoring its impact for the last couple of years. They had staff training, and the technology coaches have worked on positive uses of AI in the classroom.

Latimer, who was valedictorian for the Class of 2025, said she used ChatGPT to help her sort through over 50 documents of data for a research report. Instead of reading each page Latimer entered the title as a prompt to the chatbot which generated a summary of



Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

Rayna Smith took a course in AI over the summer and now wants to help students put the technology to use.

key findings and page references.

“It just saves so much time,” she said.

Although AI has recently become a topic of debate, it has been around for much longer than most people realize.

“I certainly don’t know how

far back and, kind of, how did we get to this point,” said Rayna Smith, who teaches engineering at Waccamaw High. “Most of us think of AI as the past three years, right? But it goes farther back than that.”

Smith spent seven weeks

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Proposal for clear book bags raises concerns

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Members of the Georgetown County School Board have doubts about requiring students to use clear book bags, which was among the seven recommendations in a report submitted by a board safety committee this summer.

The board voted to accept the committee report this week, and some members want to move forward with the clear bags.

Board Members Kathy An-



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Searching bags at WHS.

derson and Jarrod Ownbey said they had concerns.

Ownbey asked how lower-income families in the district would afford them and how they would affect students of divorced parents who carry their belongings with them.

“It could be seen, in some ways, antithetical to our anti-bullying policy,” he said. “I don’t frankly see that this is going to make us safer in that instance. I would like to see some more data before we even consider moving in that direction.”

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Council takes pains to make sure limits on surf fishing are dead

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

It took less than five minutes for Georgetown County Council to approve an ordinance in June that limited surf fishing during the summer and set off a firestorm of opposition.

It took the council half an hour last week to make sure that ordinance was absolutely, positively dead. And one member still has his doubts.

“This has not been handled properly from the get-go. Let’s put it out in the sunshine,” Council Member Raymond Newton said.

The council called a special meeting to vote on an agreement for a joint industrial park with Horry County, but it put out word that it would use the opportunity to remove the amendment to the county beach regulations from consideration. It had postponed the final reading of the amendment the week before.

The measure was introduced without the text in May at the request of Council Chairman Clint Elliott, who said he had received complaints about shark fishing at Garden City.

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Any changes to the county beach regulations aren’t likely to address fishing, council members said.

TOURISM

Market data firm estimates July 4th visitors topped 214K

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Over the Fourth of July week, 214,012 visitors came to Georgetown County from over 50 miles away, according to data collected for the Tourism Management Commission.

That was the first result of a contract with a market data firm intended to figure out how many people visit the county, where they come from and what they do when they get here.

The Georgetown County Chamber of Commerce, which provides support to the tourism commission, hired a market research and special projects coordinator this summer. Cath-

erine Dixon graduated in May with a master’s in marketing from the University of South Carolina. One of her focuses was data analysis.

“As of now, there is not a way to extract a perfect number of how many people are visiting the Hammock Coast,” Dixon said via email.

She reported the new market data to the commission last month from Placer.ai. The company uses smartphone location data and credit card data to track visitors and their activities. The Tourism Management Commission last year agreed to pay Placer \$38,000 for market data.

By tracking cellphone apps,

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PAWLEYS ISLAND | Preserving ‘the look’

Push for historic preservation turns attention to extra building height

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

As Pawleys Island moves forward with efforts to preserve its vintage beach houses, some officials are questioning whether a measure to raise houses out of the way of flood waters is working against efforts to maintain the town’s traditional appearance.

“Raising houses just doesn’t make sense to me,” said John Hildreth, who chairs the Planning Commission. “We are going to be a skyscraper beach community.”

He has led the effort to adopt a historic preservation program on the island.

The town requires houses to be raised 3 feet above the minimum required by the fed-

eral flood insurance program. The extra height helps property owners in the town qualify for a discount on federal flood insurance premiums.

The extra height applies to new homes and those that are renovated at a cost of more than 50 percent of their appraised value. Part of the town’s preservation effort is tied to an exemption from that requirement for historic structures.

“That’s been a big part in getting that going,” commission member Mark Hawn said.

The town wants to make compliance with historic preservation measures voluntary.

The commission learned last week that it will not receive a \$20,000 state grant to help fund an inventory of historic

SEE “PAWLEYS,” PAGE 2



A new home rising on Myrtle Avenue is already taller than the older houses around it.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

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