COASTAL OBSERVER

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NONPROFITS

Food pantry fills the gap with SNAP in limbo

By Madison Sharrock
COASTAL OBSERVER

Virginia Boyles gets an $84 monthly medical benefit from United Healthcare. She said she uses it to help stretch her grocery budget.

Boyles, who has diabetes, said many senior citizens like her age must choose between medication, food or paying bills. She said she prioritizes paying her bills.

She was among more than 150 people who went to the Baskervill Food Pantry's emergency food distribution last weekend. Boyles, who lives in Georgetown, said she visits the pantry at least once a month.

"Before that, I had no extra nothing," Boyles said. "This is really helping me, and with the holidays coming up, I do want to do a little something for my family."

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Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

Geniveyah Valcin, 7, came to the food pantry with her mom.

PAWLEYS ISLAND

Push for $100 permits for carts settles at $50

By Charles Swenson
COASTAL OBSERVER

The cost to operate a golf cart on Pawleys Island will double next year under a budget proposal approved this week by Town Council.

It isn't the money; it's the frustration.

The increase in the cost of a town golf cart permit from $25 to $50 was first raised in the spring, when the council learned the town had already issued 400 of the annual permits in four months. It issued 850 in 2024. Most permits go to people who don't live on the island.

The carts create law enforcement issues with underage drivers and night time operations, Council Member Guerry Green said. They also create traffic backups.

After following a golf cart down Myrtle Avenue from the North Causeway to her home on the south end, Council Member Sarah Zimmerman said she was willing to raise the price of a permit considerably more.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The town issued about 800 golf cart permits this year.

"That is the most frustrating thing about golf carts, their lack of awareness," Mayor Brian Henry said.

Zimmerman said "$100 is a reasonable amount" but that she would settle for $50, albeit reluctantly. Those were the same numbers she cited in 2023 when the permit fee increased from $10 and again this spring.

The council decided against

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CHURCHES | Belin Memorial UMC

Former leaders sue to force vote on leaving denomination

By Charles Swenson
COASTAL OBSERVER

Three former leaders at Belin Memorial United Methodist Church are seeking a court order to allow the congregation to vote on whether they should leave the national church. In the meantime, they want to enjoin the denomination from changing the ownership of the Belin property, estimated to be worth $18 million.

A suit filed last week in Circuit Court comes two years after the Belin church council voted to end a process to leave the national church, known as discernment. The suit said the vote was flawed because some council members didn't know a vote would be taken and didn't attend. It also claims two members of the church clergy voted although they were not part of the council "and their participation materially and wrongfully altered the outcome."

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Belin Memorial marked its centennial this year.

The suit was brought by the Belin Revival Group, a nonprofit created in May, Clif Smith, Derrick Temple and Frasier Wall, who previously served as church trustees and council members. It names the state conference of the United Methodist Church, its current and former bishops, Belin Memorial and four of its clergy, including senior pastor the Rev. Will Malambri, as defendants.

The United Methodist Church itself is not a party to the suit because it is not incorporated and cannot own property, according to the complaint.

"This case does not require the Court to consider, evaluate, or decide questions of disputed doctrine, internal church rules, or ecclesiastical matters," it states.

That makes the suit different from others filed in the state over the split in the United Methodist Church, according to the complaint. It can be decided based on "neutral principles of secular South Carolina law."

The schism itself is based on what the plaintiffs call "the denomination's liberal theological shift," particularly the ordination of homosexual clergy and same-sex marriage. In

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ELECTION 2025

GOP won't press claim Democrat can't serve

By Madison Sharrock
COASTAL OBSERVER

The Georgetown County Republican Party will not challenge the eligibility of a Democrat who won a seat on Georgetown City Council last week.

The GOP, which lost the mayor's race and three council seats, claimed on the eve of voting that Jessie Walker wasn't eligible because of a guilty plea to forgery in 2009.

"People made their choice. We are not pursuing," Karol Anderson, who chairs the county GOP, said after the result was certified last week.

Walker had the second highest vote tally in the election for the Georgetown city council.

"I don't have the words to describe it because I'm still in shock," Walker said.

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EDUCATION | From Chromebooks to chatbots

Early adopter of classroom tech hears familiar concerns over AI

By Madison Sharrock
COASTAL OBSERVER

Artificial intelligence won't replace teachers in the classroom, says Brian White, a history teacher at Waccamaw High.

But it will if current and incoming teachers don't learn how to use it, he said.

"It's the next big thing. I don't want it to overtake the good people that are in the building," White said. "This AI thing is not going away, and we've got to learn how to adapt to it to make it to where it's useful for us. It's another tool for us."

White was a major proponent of the Georgetown County School District adopting Google Classroom in 2016. He attended a Google Summit in Charlottesville, Va., and learned how school districts across the country were using the program.

He was eager to tell his peers about the "next best thing."

"I knew nothing. Nobody in here knew about it. They were like talking foreign language to me," he said. "When I came back, I said, 'we've got to do this. We're going to be behind.'"

White was the first teacher to test pilot the first batch of Chromebooks in the district. He raised $8,000 through businesses and the WAVE parent-teacher organization, now known as the Warrior Club, for his class.

He had a hunch 10 years ago that Google Classroom would be "revolutionary," but he never expected it to turn into what has over the last month.

"I couldn't even sleep when I finally figured out what this

Brian White navigates the AI feature on the Google software. He was an early user of Google Classroom.

Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

demic hit in spring 2020, White's curiosity paid off. He didn't have to worry about scrambling to upload online lessons when the district schools closed and remote learning began. He said he was so far ahead of online learning that he already had recorded lessons from 2016 before the pandemic.

"Those kids didn't miss a beat," he said. "We didn't fail. We tried. The problem was that nobody was prepared for that."

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