COASTAL OBSERVER

Vol. XLIV No. 35 | Pawleys Island, South Carolina ~ February 5, 2026 | $1.50

Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Winter storm drops snow along with temperatures

It wasn't the snow – estimated at 2 to 4 inches along the Waccamaw Neck – but the temperatures that fell into the teens that caused problems over the weekend. The snow that covered the ground Sunday morning was mostly melted by the afternoon. But "black ice" on the roads prompted closings of schools and government offices. Above, William Horner, Jeremy Potterfield and Daniel Grimes brave the snow at Stables Park for a round of disc golf on Sunday. At right, John Porter and Christopher Escobar repair a transformer Sunday morning on the south end of Pawleys Island, where the power was out for about three hours. The Santee Cooper crew had been on call overnight. Below, the drifting snow piles up along the beach on Pawleys Island, mimicking the crests of the breaking waves.

Environmental lawyer up for appointment to Planning Commission

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The head of the nonprofit S.C. Environmental Law Project is due to take a seat on the Georgetown County Planning Commission this month.

Amy Armstrong will fill the District 6 seat on the seven member commission, replacing Ashley Nelson, who is stepping down with one year left in her term. Nelson was named the executive director of the Bunnelle Foundation last year.

"Amy, I think, will be an outstanding planning commissioner," said Council Member Stella Mercado, who represents District 6 and plans to nominate Armstrong next week.

Armstrong joined the law project in 1999 as an intern to its founder, Jimmy Chandler. He served two terms on the Planning Commission. Armstrong became the nonprofit's executive director and chief counsel after Chandler's death in 2010.

The appointment comes as the county is merging its zoning ordinance and development regulations into a unified development ordinance, or UDO, to reflect the goals of the updated comprehensive plan

SEE "PLANNING," PAGE 3

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Amy Armstrong's nomination is due for a vote next week.

BEACHES

Officials push for decision on inlet dredging project

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Local officials plan to seek help from the state's two senators to get approval for a project that will dredge silt from over 16 miles of creeks and channels in Murrells Inlet.

Georgetown County applied to the Army Corps of Engineers in 2023 for a permit to dredge over 750,000 cubic yards of material and pump it to a nearshore disposal site off Huntington Beach State Park. The county started planning the project in 2019.

The county councils in Georgetown and Horry counties are working on a letter to Sen. Lindsay Graham and Sen. Tim Scott to "move the needle on the federal side," said Clint Elliott, who chairs the Georgetown County Council. "The permit should have been issued a year ago."

At issue is the nearshore disposal site. The Corps has pumped sand from dredging projects in the federal channel onto the beach at Garden City and the state park. Silt from a county-funded project in 2016 was pumped into geotextile tubes, dried and hauled away. That's too expensive for the project the county is now planning.

Since the permit was filed, the Corps has sought additional information about the disposal site. The county said in the permit application that the site would be designed to make sure silt and clay don't wash up on adjacent beaches.

"They keep coming back and asking for different stuff. They're basically stalling," Elliott said.

State Rep. Lee Hewitt said

SEE "DREDGE," PAGE 3

MURRELLS INLET | Remembering Oliver's Lodge

Church's purchase of historic restaurant serves up memories

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Susan Shirley Duerk of Murrells Inlet recalled a day she spent with Maxine Oliver Hawkins and Roosevelt "Rooster" Pickett as they roasted, shucked and ate oysters by the campfire in the backyard of Oliver's Lodge.

"They cooked the oysters and they lit heaters to the side that kept us warm. It's a lot of history here," she said.

Duerk reminisced about times she spent at one of the oldest restaurants in Murrells Inlet as she stood outside the chain-link fence that now surrounds the perimeter of the Oliver's Lodge property that Belin Memorial United Methodist Church's purchased for $2 million last week.

A fried shrimp basket was Duerk's go-to on the menu at Oliver's Lodge, meanwhile her late husband, Donnie, often left the restaurant with a pants pocket full of leftover hush puppies.

While everyone else went for fried seafood, Corinne Hoch, who grew up eating family meals there, went for the cheeseburgers and hush puppies but really had her young eyes set on the joggling board on the porch.

"You always felt like it was going to break any second because it went down so low, the more people you added to it," Hoch said. "The food was good. You had a good view of the inlet, and the people were always nice."

Oliver's Lodge is the "keystone" of the whole inlet according to Chip Smith, an author who lives next door to the former restaurant.

Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

A cat basks on a window sill at Oliver's Lodge, which has been exposed to the elements through years of disuse.

Oliver's Lodge was built using lumber from Richmond Hill Plantation, now part of Waccamaw Plantation, and has stood along the waterfront since 1860.

Smith writes in his book "A Pocket Wild: Notes from a Carolina Marsh" that Capt. Mack Oliver and his wife, Miss Teeny, ran the restaurant for decades.

In 1891, the Oliver family bought the home and turned it into a hunting and fishing lodge. The house became a restaurant in 1910.

Maxine Oliver Hawkins, Oliver's daughter, took over ownership until the early 1990s when she sold it to a couple who ran it for years.

The restaurant closed in 2006.

"I felt like a knife had just been jabbed into my heart because I could not believe that the doors were not open," Hoch said.

What once was a beloved restaurant in the community is now a makeshift shelter to feral cats, raccoons and squirrels.

Whether Oliver's Lodge will

SEE "LODGE," PAGE 4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Waccamaw High: JROTC provides building blocks for leadership.
SECOND FRONT

County: County considers buying historic building for offices.
PAGE 4

Arts: Music is the universal language for students in the All-County Band.
PAGE 8

Online
coastalobserver.com