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District 14, S.C. Senate 148

Peeler seeks re-election

Senator Harvey Peeler has announced his re-election bid for Senate District 14, which comprises Cherokee County and parts of Spartanburg, Union and York counties.



PEELER

The following is his statement:

“If reelected, my priority will continue to be on improving the quality of life for every family in District 14. I will build on past successes to bring jobs to our area, improve public education, and strengthen our infrastructure - roads and bridges, as well as

water and sewer services.

“I led the Senate this year in creating a major highway and road improvement initiative without raising taxes, and adopting meaningful ethics reform.

“My Read to Succeed initiative, signed by Gov. Haley in 2014, focuses on making certain that third graders are able to read at their grade level before being promoted-a critical skill they must have to succeed in school and beyond.

“I will be your strong and effective voice in state government if you continue to give me the privilege of serving as your Senator.”

¹⁴⁸ *'Motorcycle Mama'*

Loree Robinson celebrates her 103th birthday
by riding down Main Street on the back of a Harley

By ANNA BROWN

Ann Harmon knew one of the bucket list items of her 103-year-old mother, Loree Robinson, involved a motorcycle.

"When she was working she used to say, 'I am going to buy me a motorcycle and ride to Charleston,'" Harmon said with a laugh.

Mrs. Robinson, who celebrated her birthday Monday, didn't have to buy her ride and she didn't go all the way to Charleston, but her wish was partially fulfilled. Josh Lawson of Union gave Mrs. Robinson her first ride on a motorcycle. They led an entourage that rode from the Union County Courthouse to USC Union and back.

"Ya'll realize when she was born Harley-Davidson hadn't been around but 10 years," said Donald "Ducky" Lawson, Josh's father, who organized the ride.

Josh Lawson fitted Robinson with a helmet. She also was attired in a red, white and blue shirt and blue jeans for the occasion.

"How do I look?" she asked.

"You look like a Motorcycle Mama," someone in the crowd said.

"Don't let go of Josh," Mrs. Harmon told her mother. "If he falls off you go with him."

Someone asked Josh if he had ever given a 100-year-old woman a ride on a motorcycle.

"I think I must have everyone in Union beat on this one," he said.

Josh's 2008 Harley led the way, followed by some members of the Southern Legends motorcycle club and Donald Lawson on a Cushman scooter. Other riders who participated included Millard Lipsey, Dennis and Leesa Frost, Steve Bailey and Chris Haney.

Runners and walkers on Main Street turned to look as the riders went by. After the short ride they pulled onto North Pinckney Street.

"I enjoyed it very much," Mrs. Robinson said. "That was fun. I could ride it again, but I won't."

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Anna Brown photo
Loree Robinson gets ready to take off for her ride up Main Street with Josh Lawson.





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Josh Lawson fits Loree Robinson with a helmet prior to the 103 year-old woman's first motorcycle ride. With her are Christine Erskine of Ellen Sagar Nursing Center (left) and Mrs. Robinson's daughter, Ann Harmon.

Robinson

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Mrs. Robinson was given a birthday party on May 9 at Ellen Sagar and will be honored again with another party on May 21 at the Kirby's Cake Shoppe dining room. She is the oldest living member of First Baptist Church in Union. Mrs. Harmon said her mother loves her church very much and now attends services at Ellen Sagar. She received birthday greetings from President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, and from Gov. Nikki Haley and her husband, Michael.

"She is a very strong and loving lady and her family loves her very much," Mrs. Harmon said. "We are so thankful for her."

Mrs. Robinson celebrated her 102nd birthday with a plane ride. Union County

Supervisor Frank Hart was the pilot. She laughed when asked about what she might do for her 104th birthday.

She was born in Pea Ridge, one of 10 children of Wade Hampton James and Maggie Spillers James. She recalls growing up on a farm and raising cotton, cane, peanuts and other crops. The family had chickens and cows.

Mrs. Robinson is a cancer survivor. Today she enjoys good health and requires no medications, Mrs. Harmon said.

Mrs. Robinson said she isn't sure to what she can attribute her long life.

"I don't know," she said. "Hard work, I reckon."



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Special guests at the May Pilot Club program meeting were Chelsea Bullock, Miss SC Sweet Potato Festival, and Kinsley Odom, Miss SC Sweet Potato Festival Teen. Both honorees spoke to Pilot Club members about their platforms and activities as they prepare for the Miss South Carolina pageants coming up in June. Miss Bullock has as her platform raising awareness of mental health and mental illness. She expressed pleasure that Governor Haley had proclaimed May as Mental Health Awareness Month. Kinsley Odom shared her platform which is greater awareness of acceptance and inclusion of individuals with disabilities. She says her platform was inspired by her younger brother who has Down Syndrome. Both young ladies have had a busy year of community service, speaking engagements, and fundraising for the charities related to their platforms. The Pilot Club made donations to the charities chosen by the honorees, including The Children's Miracle Network.

The Darlington Pilot Club members work with Will Isgett to support the SC Sweet Potato Festival Pageant each year.

Pictured on right: Ruth Flowers, Pilot Club of Darlington, presents Will Isgett, Kinsley Odom, and Chelsea Bullock with a donation from the Club.

SUBMITTED BY MARY SCOTT, PRESIDENT, PILOT CLUB OF DARLINGTON





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Marriage rate one of S.C.'s biggest issues

Tackling big issues is tough. It's far easier for policy makers and politicians to make a speech or issue a press release with a few snappy phrases and then claim they are doing something.

And if you really want to make things difficult, add in such volatile and emotional issues as race, culture, sex and money – then it becomes a “really big tough issue.” Who wants to take this on? It's easier to talk about transgender bathrooms.

Recently, columnist Steve Bailey took on all these issues in his column “Low Marriage Rate Has High S.C. Cost.” Bailey is a South Carolinian who has returned home after a successful career in journalism at The Boston Globe and other papers, and he now writes occasionally for The Post and Courier.

Bailey cited a recent study by the American Enterprise Institute based on U.S. Census data, and this is what he found:

Our state is ranks last in the percentage of parents who are married and have children under 18 years of age.

Only 48 percent of S.C. adult males 25-59 are married – we rank 49th after “heathen New York” (Bailey's words, not mine).

We have the third-highest child poverty rate and third-lowest median family income.

Along with North Carolina, we have the nation's lowest rates of social mobility – i.e. the toughest

place for poor kids to make it into the middle class.

Bailey says, “We stand out because of our comparatively low levels of education, low median income level for men without college degrees and higher percentages of minorities. And we finish at or near the bottom on one measure after another when it comes to marriage.”

This last finding on social mobility is especially troubling. We all want to believe in the American Dream – that if we work hard and play by the rules our children will be better off than we are. This is the very foundation of our country. It's who we are.

And the study found that “South Carolina is the poster child for this (low social mobility) ... the American Dream is weakest in the country in South Carolina because so many kids are raised out of wedlock.”

We do not deserve this. And we can do better. We must build ladders of hope and success where our people (and their children) can climb the ladder out of poverty.

As with any really big tough issue, it's easier to just not talk about it – for a variety of reasons:

Sex is not something politicians should be talking about, it's not polite.

That's wrong.

Poor people are “different” and they don't really want to work or have a secure family. Wrong.

We are a God-fearing conservative state and

people believe in marriage. Wrong.

The government is handling this and besides, there's really not much that can be done. Wrong.

We can do something. It's not hopeless. We can effectively deal with these big, tough issues. Bailey cites two examples: in recent years rates of both teenage pregnancy and smoking have declined as both have become less socially acceptable.

So, what must we do?

Here are four things we as a state can do right now to have a big impact.

First, end the marriage penalty for means-tested welfare programs, which discourage low-income folks from getting married. Think about that – government policies are financially penalizing poor folk who want to get married.

Second, increase the minimum wage and expand job training opportunities for effective job training. As Bailey says, “The only anti-poverty program more effective than a good marriage is a good job.”

Third, make access to contraceptives easier for women, to avoid pregnancy in the first place. The states of Delaware and Colorado are having great success with long-acting reversible contraception such as a new generation of intrauterine devices and implants.

Fourth, Gov. Haley should create a cabinet-level secretary of families and marriage to oversee and coordinate all of the above policy changes.

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Creating this new position would send a strong signal that she is serious about doing something.

Yes, this is a really big tough issue, but we can do something about it if we look at what works in other states and focus on hard-headed cost-benefit

analysis. Just one example: for every dollar Colorado invested in long-acting birth control, it cut Medicaid cost \$5.82.

One of my favorite quotes is from John Kennedy, the man who first inspired me at age 9. He said, "Our problems are

man-made, therefore they may be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings."

The question for us in South Carolina is how big do we want to be?

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Guest column



Phil Noble is president of the S.C. New Democrats.



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Down on the Farm

Midlands Farm Tour Highlights Small Farms and the People Behind Them

BY BACH PHAM
 PHOTOS BY THOMAS HAMMOND

Driving down Calks Ferry Road, it's easy to get lost in the splendor of Lexington County's farmland. And there are so many farms on this stretch of road that it's easy to accidentally pass Sandhills Heirlooms without even realizing it. As chefs in Columbia have come to realize in the past few years, however, Sandhills Heirlooms is well worth the stop, having steadily earned a following for its dedication to heirloom tomatoes.

Derrick Gunter started Sandhills Heirlooms in 2011. His family had suggested he try to make use of his land during the summer by putting in crops. Over the past five years, he's treated the business like a big research project, planting some of the thousands of heirloom tomato varieties in the world. (Heirlooms are older, often isolated varieties maintained by gardeners and farmers — different from the hybrids and mass market varieties bred for grocery stores and industrial use.)

"First and foremost, I always grow for flavor," Gunter says. "Some people immediately attribute heirloom to being better, but not all heirlooms actually have great flavor or were meant for our palates."

As a full-time history teacher at White Knoll High School in Lexington County, Gunter has found farming to be the perfect summer work.

That's right: Like many of the farmers featured on this year's Midlands Farm Tour, Gunter has another job. It's a reflection of how hard it can be to make a living off farming alone.

That's not the only challenge of farming. This week, Gov. Nikki Haley vetoed a bill passed by the state Legislature that would give \$40 million in aid to farmers whose crops

were damaged or destroyed by last October's flood. The bill would allow farmers to apply for grants of up to \$100,000 to pay for things like seed and fertilizer if they'd suffered a crop loss of at least 40 percent.

"I will not support any bailout of any industry over any other industry that has suffered from this thousand-year flood," Haley said at the state GOP convention May 7.

Legislators likely have enough votes to override the veto — a reflection of the fact that there are farms in most every county in the state.

Agribusiness — basically agriculture combined with forestry — is South Carolina's biggest industry, in fact. A 2015 study commissioned by the S.C. Department of Agriculture and others showed it has a \$41.7 billion economic impact on the state, and supports 212,000 jobs.

But while farming is big business, it's also a dwindling industry. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that farm jobs are declining, with a projected drop of 2 percent in the next eight years.

However, the bureau sounds one positive note.

"Despite the expected continued consolidation of farmland and the projected decline in overall employment of this occupation, job prospects will be good for an increasing number of small-scale farmers who have developed successful market niches that involve personalized, direct contact with their customers," the bureau reported in 2015. "Many are finding opportunities in organic food production. Others use farmers markets that cater directly to urban and suburban consumers, allowing the farmers to capture a greater share of consumers' food dollars."

It's exactly those kinds of small, personal farms that are thriving in the Midlands — and which are part of this weekend's Midlands Farm Tour.





The tour returns this year after taking a hiatus in 2015. On May 21, eight farms along with the State Farmer's Market and the University of South Carolina's community garden will open their doors to the public, celebrating an array of farming in and around Lexington County. The tour is a self-guided, one-day

"Food tastes much better out of the ground, especially when you have grown it yourself."

- Ariel McClain, Humble Farm

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WHAT: Midlands Farm Tour
WHEN: Saturday, May 21, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.
COST: \$15. Early-bird tickets are available online for \$10. Children under 10 get in free, as do WIC, SNAP and EBT beneficiaries with proof of eligibility.
MORE: midlandsfarmtour.com



event. At each farm, visitors will be able to meet the farmers, take part in activities, and learn about the different types of food production in the region.

This year's tour is being run by the Midlands Food Alliance, a grassroots group that formed in September 2014 under the non-profit Sustainable Midlands with the purpose of advocating and educating for a sustainable, local food system. The group consists of over 100 farmers, chefs, educators, food writers, producers and more that gather to discuss the issues related to farming and eating in the Midlands.

The first farm tour began in 2013 with the help of the Carolina Stewardship Association and Whole Foods Market. The first two tours focused on celebrating farmers around the Columbia area. This year's shift to Lexington marks the first of many regions around the Midlands that the Alliance hopes to highlight in the coming years.

Katie Welborn, community organizer for the Midlands Food Alliance, also encourages farm visitors to take part in the Local Food Pledge, a campaign aimed at highlighting the importance of supporting local, sustainable farming. Pledge sign-ups sheets will be available at all of the stops on this year's tour. The pledge is a commitment to spending \$10 a week on South Carolina products to support the local food system.

"If residents spent even \$5 a week on South Carolina products, not only would it generate a great deal of revenue for the state, but it would also make all the difference for local farmers, enabling them to become sustainable businesses that can continue to provide healthy, affordable food to the community," Welborn says.

The diversity of farms on this year's tour is

tremendous. Families will find several farms on the tour for children, particularly Terra Kotta, Six Berry, and Humble Farm — small-scale farms that do a bit of everything, whether growing fruits and vegetables or pasture farming. Kids will be able to get up close and personal with goats, chickens, quail and other animals, and learn how they are raised.

Tomato lovers and heirloom enthusiasts will want to check out Sandhills Heirlooms in Pelion.

Bee Trail Farm is the first apiary to ever join the farm tour. Visitors will be able to learn how honey is produced, view an educational hive, tour apiary grounds, and of course purchase honey.

Mercer House Estate Winery brings another first to the tour. Established in 2007, the vineyard specializes in muscadine wines. The farm plans to provide tours and discuss its water management system. Visitors will be able to see the winemaking process and try samples.

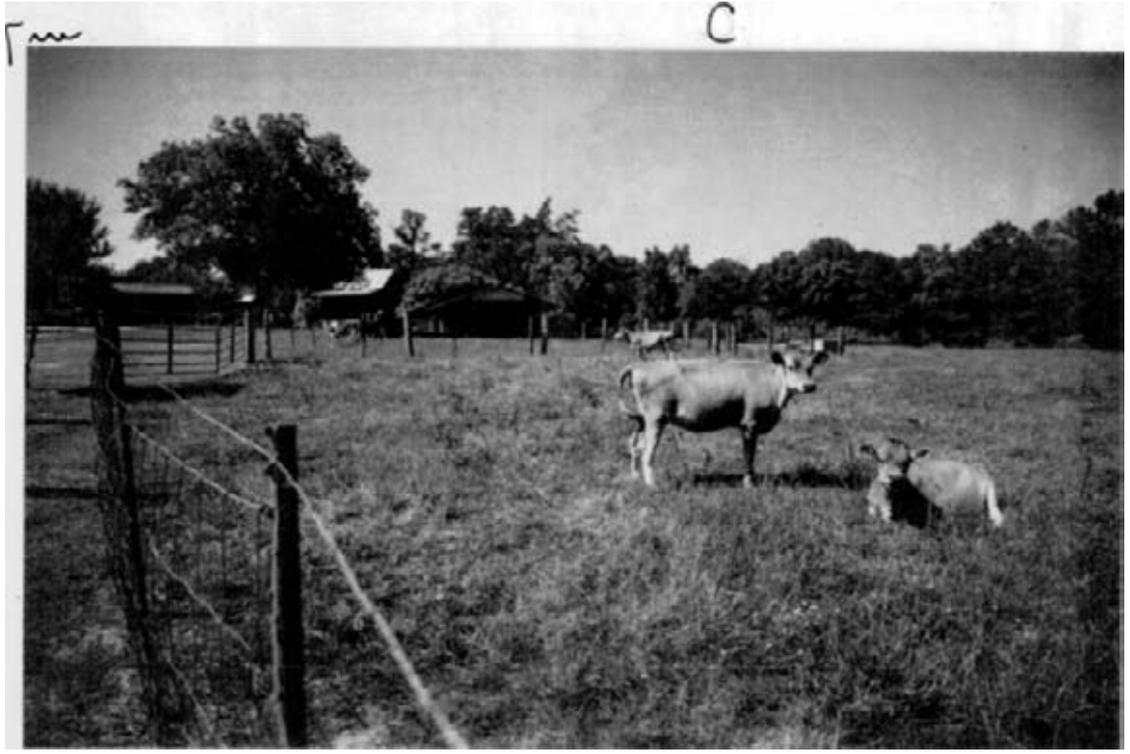
Wright and Patchwork Farms are two of the newest on the tour. Located near Swansea, Wright is a livestock-focused farm that raises purebred pigs, goats and rabbits. One of the biggest farms on the tour this year at 35 acres, the farm gives animals a large space to roam and develop. Visitors will be able to stop by the farm and participate in some family-friendly activities and try some samples. Meanwhile, Patchwork's U-pick strawberry field will be available the day of the tour. Seasonal produce and honey will also be available for sale at Patchwork, as well as drinks and barbecue.

The South Carolina State Farmers Market





Patchwork Farm



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Participating Farms

Six Berry Farm
179 Bama Road, Gilbert
sixberryfarm.blogspot.com

Bee Trail Farm
1437 Jessamine Road, Lexington
beetrailfarm.com/

Humble Farms
617 Martin Smith Rd, Gilbert
thehumblefarm.blogspot.com/

Mercer House Estate Winery
397 Walter Rawl Road, Lexington
mercershousestatewinery.com/

Patchwork Farm
110 Dairy Lane, Saluda
facebook.com/PatchworkFarm163

South Carolina State Farmers Market
208 A Wholesale Lane,
West Columbia
scstatefarmersmarket.com

Sandhills Heirloom Tomatoes
3266 Calks Ferry Road, Pelion

Terra Kotta Farms
2412 Lewie Road, Leesville
www.terrakottafarms.com

**University of South Carolina Green Quad/
Sustainable "Carolina
Community Farm & Garden"**
1216 Wheat St. Columbia
sc.edu/green/garden

Wright Farm of SC
973 St. Matthews Road, Swansea
thewrightfarmofSC.com





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Patchwork Farm



Sandhills Heirlooms





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and the University of South Carolina's Carolina Community Farm and Garden at the Green Quad round out this year's tour. The State Farmers Market is an ideal location to stop for lunch and shop from local producers. Visitors that stop at the university garden can learn about urban permaculture, sample rainwater from their rainwater harvesting system, take a look at the garden's hydroponic system and enjoy a butterfly garden.

This week, we highlight three of the farms on the tour, discussing the ups and downs of farming and what it means to be part of a community.

Growing Tomatoes with Derrick Gunter at Sandhills Heirlooms

Tomatoes were not exactly on Gunter's radar. When he first considered what to grow on the farm, he immediately thought of peanuts.

Born and raised in Lexington County, he'd grown up watching and helping his grandfather grow peanuts. His father quickly sold him off of peanuts, saying the work was too intense for a relatively small payoff. Instead, he suggested heirloom tomatoes, which were having a renaissance at the time, with chefs starting to gain interest in heirloom varieties.

Gunter immediately became attracted to the idea, and proceeded to spend the rest of the winter doing research on everything he could find out about heirloom tomato farming. By the summer of 2011, he had his first 13 plants in the ground. The crop was so successful that he scaled up in his second year, going from 13 plants to 120 in 2012. This year he plants to double that total, putting over 240 tomato plants in the ground.

While visually Sandhills Heirlooms doesn't seem like a large operation, it's still impressive that Gunter does all of the work himself, whether it is preparing the fields, planting, hand-watering each and every plant, fertilizing and weeding throughout the summer, or harvesting and selling his produce.

It's difficult work, particularly at the beginning of the season, when he spends every non-working minute to prepare fields and plant tomatoes. Gunter is constantly battling with the unpredictability of April and May's weather, examining his fields daily and replacing struggling tomato starters to ensure that he has as many healthy plants going into the summer as possible.

His favorite tomatoes include pink varieties, which are subtle and sweet, and dark varieties, which have an enormous depth of flavor.

It was a dark tomato variety that Gunter remembers changing his whole perception of tomatoes.

"Before I started growing, I was invited over to a neighbor's house who had decided to grow some Black from Tula tomatoes one

summer," Gunter says. "They were large, beautiful tomatoes that were simply incredible to eat. They completely changed my opinion of what a tomato should taste like."

Though Gunter is willing to try and grow almost any variety presented to him, his favorite varieties are much closer to home.

"I am most of all a big believer of varieties from the South," he says. "They were grown here for a reason and are always the ones that produce the best results, because this is the climate that they aren't meant to be grown in."

While Gunter tries to grow an array of tomatoes each year and expand his catalog, there are always a few varieties that he goes back to for his customers, like the German Johnson, a deep pink variety that has always been favorite of Gunter's for its sweetness, or Sungold tomatoes, a super sweet orange cherry tomato and one of the few hybrids he grows each year.

Even in the offseason, Gunter is always finding ways to improve his field, whether by using cover crops like winter peas and clover to replenish nutrients in the soil or tossing in whatever organic matter he can find to help bolster the fields organically. And he makes use of his rural surroundings, obtaining everything from straw to manure from nearby local cattle farmers. Little is put to waste at the farm. Even plants that don't quite make

it through the harsh South Carolina summer are tilled back into the ground to help provide additional nutrients.

Gunter's popularity with locals and chefs helps fuel his drive to continue improving. Chef's like Motor Supply Company's Wes Fulmer have come to greatly respect Gunter's work.

"I've never seen anyone so passionate about tomatoes. It motivates me to treat the ingredient with respect," Fulmer says.

Fulmer first met Gunter in 2014 when he first became executive chef at Motor Supply Company.

"Derrick's tomatoes were not quite ripe yet when I first met him, so I made fried green tomatoes," he says. "They were awesome. They had a special acidity to them that I had never had elsewhere. I knew then that these tomatoes were very special."

"There's something special about tomatoes that are grown in quality soil and well taken care of, and it is exciting to hear that chefs feel the same," Gunter says.

Small Farm, Big Heart – Homesteading with Ariel McClain

Humble Farm may be the most diverse farm in the region, not only for what they do, but why they do it.

Husband and wife Ariel McClain and Josh Brooks purchased the land and started Humble Farm four years ago, in May of 2012. Humble has transformed each year, evolving in scope and size, both as a farm and a business. From the business perspective, 





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Sandhills Heirlooms/Derrick Gunter



“There is a mindset that bigger is better, especially when you go to the store to pick out things like strawberries. I want to try to educate people on ugly fruit, that just because it looks odd doesn’t mean that it can’t taste great.”

– Melissa Price, Patchwork Farm





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Humble is actually not a large producer by any means. They have done everything from selling starter plants to community-supported agriculture to U-pick.

While they were successful at all of these ventures, business was never the main priority for Ariel and Josh. The original goal was always to establish a homestead: a sustainable, small-scale farm that could support their family.

"We wanted to always have access to our own food," McClain says. "We wanted to make sure our daughter would always have fresh produce."

The couple are first-generation homesteaders. Neither came from a farming background, which meant a large learning curve.

"We had no farming mentor to learn from. We are always trying new things, and learning as we go along. We learn something every day. What grows, what things are like as they mature."

A walk around Humble is an education in all things farming. The couple really do try as many new things as they can every season. In their several farm plots, you can find everything from tomatoes to peas, peppers, garlic, sunchokes, herbs and much, much more.

Peaches and blueberries were some of the first things the couple planted.

"We're addicted to planning for the future, a little at a time," says McClain — and fruit is a major representation of that for her, considering the time it takes for a berry plant or fruit tree to produce. The excitement of finally reaching that first harvest and watching the trees develop and produce is one of the things that interested McClain from the beginning.

Brooks, one of many farmers on this year's tour that lives a dual life, is a full-time carpenter who runs his own business, J. Brooks Inc. His carpentry skills are evident throughout the farm, particularly in the different coops for the quail and chickens.

Humble also raises animals for milk and eggs. The animals roam freely on the farm, including ducks, chickens and goats. McClain and Brooks also raise quail, whose eggs have been a popular commodity for local chefs.

While the upkeep of the animals is relatively easy, one of the biggest problems at the farm is predators, which have easy access to the free-range animals.

"It is a part of free-range farming that we just have to deal with," McClain says.

Despite the many things always going on at Humble, there is a delicate harmony at the farm that ties everything together. The animals provide a steady supply of manure which is used to fertilize the fields. As much of the land around Humble is kept as natural as possible to promote diversity and attract as many beneficial insects as possible. Humble also keeps bees, not for honey, but rather for pollination. The farmers also make use of companion planting — putting plants together that benefit from planted near each other — and crop rotation, the act of using growing different plants in the same location from season to season, which keeps the soil fit and prevent disease, and ensures the land stays healthy.

Only an acre of their entire land is actually dedicated to growing fruits, vegetables, and

herbs. Some of the land is left to the animals to roam, but the rest of the land remains largely unworked, which goes to show just how much food can be produced in such a small space.

McClain hopes to take the lessons she's learned to share with the community. McClain currently is attending school to become an early childhood educator. One of her long terms goals is to spread the knowledge she's obtained from her experiences homesteading and teach children about farming and the importance of growing food.

"We would like to inspire people to grow food, to show them that it can actually be a manageable thing to do and that you can get a lot out of a small plot of land," she says. "Food tastes much better out of the ground, especially when you have grown it yourself."

Putting Together the Pieces with Melissa Price at Patchwork Farm

"Do you put sugar around these strawberries? They are the sweetest thing I've ever eaten," a customer exclaimed while stopping by Patchwork Farms.

The Saluda area has always had farming, but it had been years since the region had a farm for people to pick their own strawberries.

"People in the area often want strawberries, but haven't had a place to get them in this area for a long time," says Melissa Price, who owns Patchwork Farm with her husband Chris Price. "We decided that was a need we wanted to fill for people here."

Price's most frequent customers are older, and many grew up with fresh strawberries in the area. Price notes that many are excited about coming to pick her strawberries for making preserves.

Chris and Melissa Price obtained the land for Patchwork Farm in April 2015. In the short amount of time they have owned the land, the family has quickly put it to work, clearing vegetation that had taken over the fields and planting strawberries, broccoli and cabbage in their first year. What stood as a vacant, overgrown piece of land suddenly was revitalized, unveiling a beautiful landscape that once meant a great deal to the area.

The land especially had great meaning for Melissa Price, who wasted no time obtaining the land when it became available.

"I grew up just down the road," she says. "My family had a dairy farm. We used to come to this house all the time. This land had been standing here for so long now. It used to belong to a friend of the family who passed away five years ago. He did so much for my family growing up. We knew once the land became available that we wanted to buy it and

bring it back to life."

There are two features that stand out at Patchwork. The first sits at the entrance, the remnants of an old general store stand. The store had a unique history, once being part of a bigger business on the Saluda River. The store was later detached and pulled by mules on logs to the farm, where the prior family continued business until their retirement.

The second feature at Patchwork is a beautiful historic house that the family intends to renovate into a multipurpose facility for





education, banquets, bridal luncheons, and different community events. One of the rooms will also be converted into a storefront to sell all of Patchwork's goods.

Both Melissa and Chris join a long list of farmers in the area that actually live dual lives. Chris works full time as a supervisor at Mid-Carolina Electric Cooperative while Melissa teaches English part-time. The farm, for Melissa, is exciting because it not only allows her to educate the public on farming, but also the importance of growing food and celebrating all types of it.

"There is a mindset that bigger is better, especially when you go to the store to pick out things like strawberries," she says. "I want to try to educate people on ugly fruit, that just because it looks odd doesn't mean that it can't taste great."

While the farm's public focus is produce and seasonal U-pick, Patchwork — like many farms on this year's tour — goes far beyond produce. At their private residence, the fam-

ily also raises pigs and takes care of over 35 beehives.

Patchwork was fortunate not to suffer any serious flood damage during last October's storm, but recent rainstorms in the area during strawberry season over-soaked the fields, affecting over 100 gallons of berries. It took several days of work to clear the berries that had rotted and clean the fields. The farm has since recovered, but lost several days of business in an already relatively short growing season.

Many locals came to show their support for the farm soon after, though.

"The farm definitely restored my evaluation of the goodness in people," Price says. "It is also great to see that people do want local produce, and are extremely supportive when the product is good." 

Let us know what you think: Email editor@free-times.com.

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Patchwork Farm

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growth & development

By Eva Moore

As June Deadline Looms, Group Forms to Save Christine Apartments

As rumors continue to circulate that the Christine building will be demolished, a group of historic preservationists, developers and community members has formed to try to save the iconic building.

In a May 4 cover story, *Free Times* documented what's happened to the historic apartments, where residents struggle with mold, lack of heat, leaks, cockroaches and broken fixtures, and the roof appears seriously damaged. In April, those who were behind on their rent were told to pay up and get out. Since *Free Times'* story there have been several key developments:

- Last week, the remaining residents of the building received a letter telling them to leave their apartments by June 10. However, some are struggling to find new places to live in the post-flood local housing market.

- On Tuesday, a group of residents who were told in April to pay up or get out filed suit against the Christine's owner. Attorney Mark Schnee — known locally as one of the attorneys who successfully sued Gov. Nikki Haley for kicking Occupy Columbia off the State House grounds — says he's arguing the tenants haven't violated their lease and he's asked for a jury trial. Some residents, he says, live in "conditions that would not allow a landlord to actually demand rent." Others are paid up for the next several months.

- The City of Columbia cited the Christine's owner for a slew of violations, including chipping and peeling paint, windows that don't open, a roof that needs to be repaired or replaced, broken plumbing, broken heat and electrical hazards. The owner has 30 days from May 3 to respond to the notice.

- And finally, this week, Historic Columbia Foundation staffers joined forces with Columbia city staffers, residents of the nearby Melrose Heights neighborhood, and Richard Burts, who redeveloped 701 Whaley and other structures, to try to save the Christine.

"It's a great example of post-World War II midcentury modern architecture," says Historic Columbia executive director Robin Waites of the Christine.

The building isn't historically protected in any way, Waites says — it's not a local or national historic landmark, nor is it part of any neighborhood or city zone with protections for historic structures.

A building's owner can request historic landmark status, or the City of Columbia can landmark a building itself, without the owner's consent. City-designated landmarks can't be demolished without city approval.

Landmarked buildings also are eligible for state and local historic preservation tax credits, which can help make a rehabilitation project affordable.

"These buildings are economically viable, and there are developers that will take projects on like this," Burts tells *Free Times*. "You're a caretaker of the property during that building's timeline."

However, the group hasn't had any luck yet in getting the Christine's owner to respond to calls or emails.

It's not entirely clear who owns the building. William Durham III is the property manager; his deceased father is listed in state records as the registered agent for The United Company, an LLC that owns the building and shares an office address at the Christine with Durham's company. Waites says the group plans to reach out to other people who may be part of that company.

Durham did not respond to a *Free Times* call seeking comment.

Even if the group manages to involve Durham, it'll likely be a balancing act.

Rosie Craig has been involved in saving several historic buildings in Columbia, including the Palmetto Compress warehouse. She's not part of the group working on the Christine, but spoke with *Free Times* about how the process often works.

"The important thing is not to ever think of it as two people pulling on one rope in two different directions," Craig says. "You don't want to make the owner the bad guy. You pull him into the conversation, let him save face."

It's impossible to tell now, she says, how much work the Christine needs. And despite tax credits, it can be expensive to rehabilitate a historic building.

"It is not for the faint of heart to do historic rehabilitation," Craig says.

But Waites is optimistic.

"We'd like to do this in a way that makes everyone feel like they've won at the end of the day," Waites says. ■

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148 VIEWPOINT

Babies, marriage and family in S.C.

By Phil Noble

Tackling 'big issues' is tough. It's far easier for policy makers and politicians to make a speech or issue a press release with a few snappy phrases and then claim they are 'doing something'.

And if you really want to make things difficult, add in such volatile and emotional issues as race, culture, sex and money – then it becomes a 'really big tough issue.' Who wants to take this on – it's easier to talk about transgender bathrooms or such.

Recently, columnist Steve Bailey took on all these issues in his column *Low Marriage Rate Has High S.C. Cost*. Bailey is a South Carolinian who has returned home after a highly successful career in journalism at *The Boston Globe* and other papers and he now writes occasionally for *The Post and Courier*.

Bailey cited a recent study by the American Enterprise Institute based on U.S. Census data and this is what he found:

S.C. is 50th in the percentage of parents who are married and have children under 18 years of age.

Only 48% of S.C.'s adult males 25-59 are married – we rank 49th after 'heathen New York' (Bailey's words, not mine).

We have the third highest child poverty rate and third lowest median family income.

Along with North Carolina, we have the nation's lowest rates of social mobility – i.e. the toughest place for poor kids to make it into the middle class.

Bailey says, "We stand out because of our comparatively low levels of education, low median income level for men without college degrees and higher percentages of minorities. And we finish at or near the bottom on one measure after another when it comes to marriage."

This last finding on social mobility is especially troubling. We all want to believe in the American Dream – that if we work hard and play by the rules our children will be better off than we are. This is the very foundation of our country ... it's who we are.

And the study found that "South Carolina is the poster child for this (low social mobility) ... the American Dream is weakest in the country in South Carolina because so many kids are raised out of wedlock."

Read that quote again.

We do not deserve this. And we can do better. We must build ladders of hope and success where our people (and their children) can climb the ladder out of poverty.

As with any 'really big tough issue' it's easier to just not talk about it – for a variety of reasons:

Sex is not something politicians should be talking about, it's not polite – wrong.

Poor people are 'different' and they don't really want to work or have a secure family – wrong.

We are a God-fearing conservative state and people believe in marriage – wrong.

The government is handling this and besides, there's really not much that can be done – wrong

We can do something. It's not hopeless. We can effectively deal with these big tough issues. Bailey cites two examples: in recent years rates of both teenage pregnancy and smoking have declined as both have become less socially acceptable.

So, what must we do?

Here are four things we as a state can do right now to have a big impact.

First, end the marriage penalty. We should eliminate the





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marriage penalty for means tested welfare programs that discourage low income folks from getting married. Think about that – government policies are financially penalizing poor folk who want to get married.

Second, increase the minimum wage and expand job training opportunities for effective job training. As Bailey says, "The only anti-poverty program more effective than a good marriage is a good job."

Third, make access to contraceptives easier for women to avoid pregnancy in the first place. The states of Delaware and Colorado are having great success with long acting reversible contraception such as a new generation of intrauterine devices and implants.

Fourth, Gov. Haley should create a cabinet level Secretary of Families and Marriage to oversee and coordinate all of the above policy changes. Creating this new position would send a strong signal that she is serious about doing something.

Yes, this is a 'really big tough issue' but we can do something about it if we look at what works in other states and focus on hard headed cost benefit analysis. Just one example: for every \$1 dollar Colorado invested in long acting birth control it cut Medicaid cost \$5.82.

One of my favorite quotes is from John Kennedy, the man who first inspired me at age nine. He said, "Our problems are man-made, therefore they may be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings."

The question for us in South Carolina is how big do we want to be?

Phil Noble is a businessman in Charleston and President of the SC New Democrats, an independent reform group started by former Gov. Richard Riley to bring big change and real reform. phil@philnoble.com

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End run: Coastal fans take stadium fight to governor

CONWAY — Coastal Carolina fans have called an end run, taking their fight to expand the Chanticleer's football stadium to South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley.

Local media outlets report an online petition has been launched asking Haley to intercede to get money for the expansion needed as Coastal moves to the Sun Belt Conference.

The petition went online on Wednesday and by Thursday night had 1,500 signatures.

The Commission on Higher Education has rejected money for the stadium expansion four times since February, most recently last week.

Coastal is moving to the Sun Belt in the Football Bowl Subdivision next year.



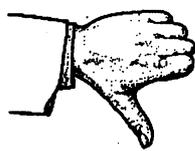
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Haley's veto of farm aid a very bad idea

Thumbs down to S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley for saying she will veto a state plan to provide financial aid to farmers. These farmers suffered \$330 million in losses because of the heavy rain and floods that hit the state hard in October. Earlier this month, the

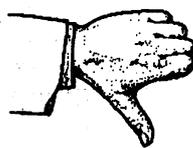


General Assembly passed a bill to give \$40 million to farmers for relief. The votes weren't close. Near the end of April, a bill passed in the Senate by a vote of 33-3. The bill sailed through the House on May 4 by a

vote of 85-2. That makes the chances of overriding a veto good, but Haley doesn't care. She said early this week that she would veto the bill because "it would be wrong to bail out the farmers when we can't bail out small businesses, when we can't bail out homeowners." But farmers aren't your ordinary businessmen. Every year they risk most of what they have against natural forces that they can't control. Sometimes they don't get enough rain. Last year, they got too much. According to the S.C. Department of Agriculture, the state's entire cotton, soybean and peanut crops were destroyed. To make matters worse, wet weather early this year made it hard if not possible to plant a full crop this spring. As The Herald of Rock Hill stated in a good editorial this week, we reward farmers for enduring the uncertainties of trying to plant and harvest a crop because agriculture is regarded as a necessity to the nation's well-being. And it also is a mainstay of South Carolina's economy. Failing to help sustain the state's agriculture industry could mean not only that many farmers could go out of business, but also that many potential young farmers will be discouraged from undertaking the risks of farming in the first place. That would be bad news for the poorer rural parts of the state, where farming remains a vital part of the local economy. Those parts of the state include the Pee Dee.

Thumbs down to people who are eligible to vote in the June primary elections but have not registered.

It isn't too late to register, but you'd better hurry. The



deadline is today. Register online at scvotes.org. Online registration requires a S.C. Driver's License or DMV ID. If you have moved, you must first update your address with the DMV.

Request a voter registration by mail application from the County Board of Voter Registration and Elections. Office or download a voter registration by mail application at scvotes.org, complete it and mail, fax or scan the application and email it as a file attachment to the County Board of Voter Registration & Elec-





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tions. Voter registration-by-mail applications must be postmarked by today. You can email the application to Florence County Board of Voter Registration & Elections Director David Alford at dalford@florenceco.org. The fax number for that office is 843-292-1613. For contact information and voter registration for your county, visit scvotes.org and click the "Voters" tab on the left-hand side of the page. We continue to be baffled by people who don't exercise their right to vote. Of all the problems that plague America, apathy is one of the biggest. So is laziness. Those who don't bother to register have a lot of nerve if they want to complain about elected officials. But it's meaningless to register if you don't vote. Worse than not voting is going to the poll without knowing anything about the candidates on the ballot. If you plan to vote, good for you, but do your duty and do your homework. We're here to help. The Morning News sent questionnaires to candidates who are involved in contests races for the primaries. To see the responses that have come in so far, visit scnow.com/news/election_2016/questionnaire_responses/.

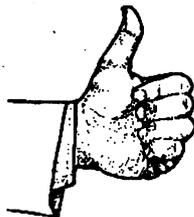
Thumbs up to eight Pee Dee students who received associate degrees before even getting their high school diplomas. Seven Darlington High School seniors and



one student from Wilson High School graduated Thursday from Florence-Darlington Technical College. They became the first students to complete the FDTC Early College Program, which was established in 2014. Those eight students are Wilson High senior Ashley Griffin and Darlington

High School seniors Thomas Gibson, Brittney Hales, Hayden Happ, Jade McPhatter, Alexis Ramirez, Russel Summerlin and Kenya White. Many of these students completed most of their high school requirements by 11th grade. While many of their high school classmates were out having fun, these go-getters were working hard to get ahead. Imagine the discipline and effort it took, but look at the time and money they will save. We congratulate them on a job well done.

Thumbs up to the high school students who are playing spring sports on teams that will compete next week for state championships. All of that practice has paid off. Some teams from the Pee Dee region have been eliminated in the lower state championship rounds. Getting this far still was a remarkable achievement. Congratulations on



great seasons.

Thumbs up, thumbs down is a regular feature of the Morning News and appears each Saturday on our Opinion page. We seek nominations for both good and bad deeds from our readers. Send nominations to us by email at letters@florencenews.com. Be sure use the word "thumb" in the subject and include a contact number. Thumbs can also be mailed to us c/o The Morning News, 310 S. Dargan St., Florence, S.C., 29506.