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148 Governor visits county after flood

BY MICHAEL DUKE
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Governor Nikki Haley paid Williamsburg County a visit recently. Haley's visit was part of a "Team South Carolina" initiative aimed at providing resources to families and businesses impacted by the historic flooding. "Team South Carolina is out to help everybody, and we're not going to stop until we come out of this stronger than when we started," Haley said. "We're going to keep coming back to these areas until they feel like they're back on their feet again."

Haley helped box over 200 supply packages before speaking to local citizens as well as the many volunteers that were staged at the Williamsburg

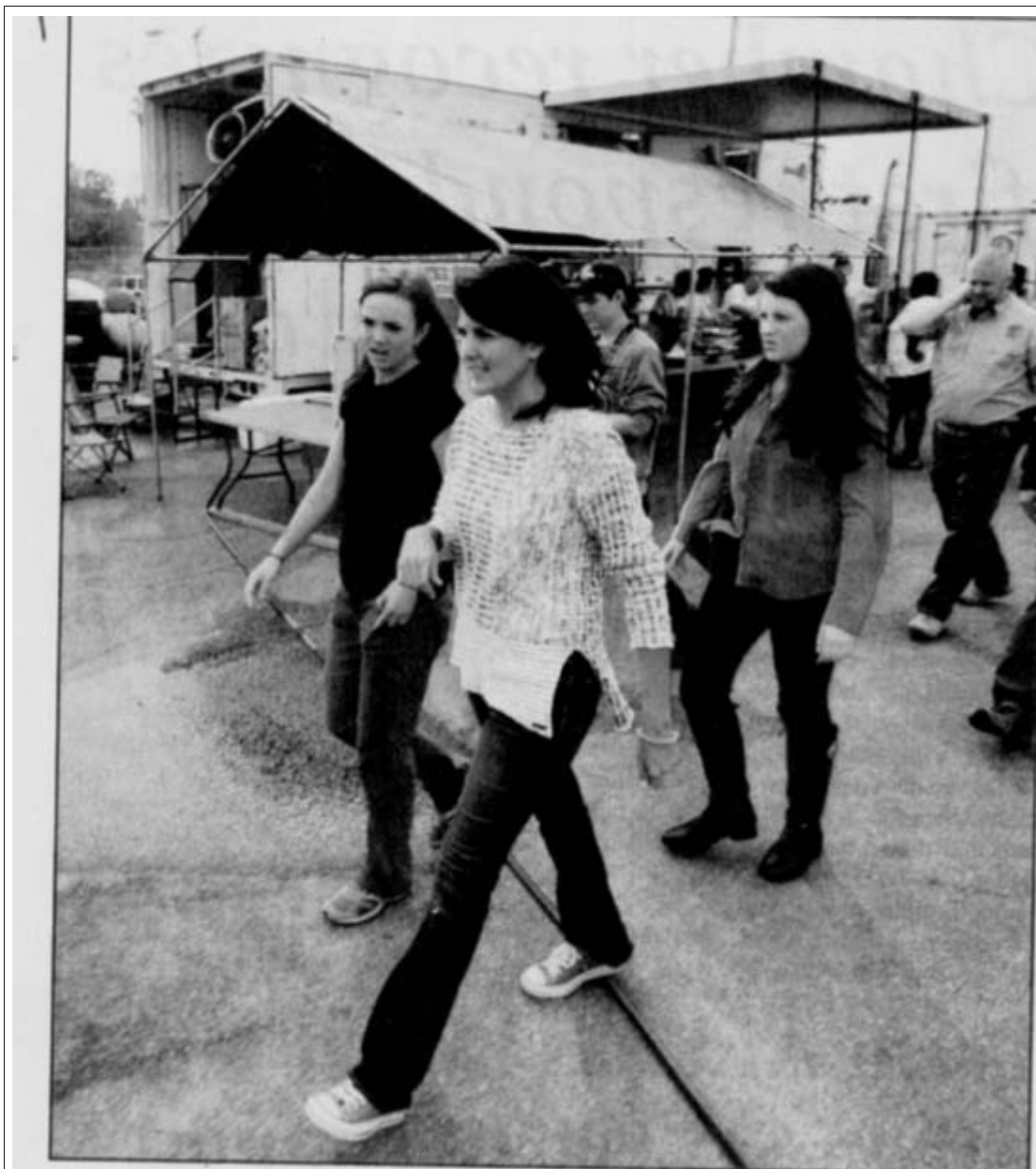
Recreation Complex. The agencies included the American Red Cross, the U.S. Small Business Administration, Social Services, DHEC and FEMA. "We had something that we never expected," said Haley. "We pre-positioned but it was rain - and then it was 24 inches in 24 hours - and then it was more rain - and it sat. So in some cases we can do assessments now. And in some cases we can't get into the counties to do the assessments yet, but we will."

Haley addressed the current situation and what is next. "We're going to continue to do this (relief efforts), but at some point FEMA is going to stop, and at some point the state

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GOVERNOR NIKKI HALEY visited Williamsburg County as part of "Team South Carolina," an initiative to provide resources to families and businesses impacted by the flood.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL DUKE

Our job is to re-build

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will only be able to do so much and that's why we're pushing our non-profits to get out there and help these people because our job is to re-build and every person deserves a chance to re-build" she said.

"In January, we'll see where

we are and decide where we'll go from there, but for right now our focus is on the people of South Carolina and those in need."

She said she's been in touch with Williamsburg County Supervisor Stanley Pasley. "Speaking with the county

administrator - this is whatever you need, whenever you need it," she said. "So we're going to keep coming to these areas till they feel like they're back on their feet again. And this is happening faster than we had hoped. But it's not fast enough for me."



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148 State employees get \$800 bonus

By **VANESSA
BREWER-TYSON**

Pageland Progressive reporter

No, that wasn't a mistake that state employees noticed in their checks this month.

Exactly 175 South Carolina state employees in Chesterfield County were among those receiving an \$800 bonus in their Oct. 16 paychecks.

According to Brian J. Gaines, Policy and Public Affairs director for the state, this number only includes state agency employees.

Gaines said the bonus funds were included in the Supplemental Appropriations Act, which was effec-

tive July 1 of this year, and were earmarked for State-wide Employee Benefits for Bonus Pay.

The S.C. Department of Administration allocated \$23,500,000 to state agencies to provide the one-time lump sum bonus, said

Chaney Adams, press secretary for Governor Nikki Haley's office.

Each permanent state employee, in a full-time equivalent position for at least six months prior to July 1, 2015, and who earns less than \$100,000 a year, was qualified to receive the bonus.

Any state employee retiring before July 1, however, was not eligible.

The purpose of the bonus

was to offset the years during the recession when state employees did not receive any additional compensation.

Asked if school employees qualified for the bonus checks, Gaines said that school employees were not considered to be state employees. He said school employees were employees of their respective school districts.

Gaines explained that different government agencies pay into the S.C. Retirement System, even

though their workers may not be considered state employees.

For details, e-mail information@admin.sc.gov.

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Janet Snipe of Goose Creek, right, talks to a FEMA agent about the damage to her home.

Lindsay Street/Gazette

Weathering the flood

State, federal agencies gather to help Berkeley Co. residents after historical rainstorm damages properties

BY LINDSAY STREET

The Gazette

The rains came through the roof and then the musty smell began. Janet Snipes of Goose Creek said her insurance asked for a \$2,500 deductible to fix the problem.

"Who has that kind of money?" Snipe asked. "So I'm trying to get assistance from FEMA."

Snipe is one of nearly 3,400 registrants so far with the Federal Emergency Management Agency in Berkeley County, applying for federal

money to mitigate losses and damages from the historic storm that battered and flooded the state in early October. Deadline to apply for funds is Dec. 4.

On Wednesday, Oct. 28, Snipe went to the Goose Creek Recreation Center to work out. She left with more information on the effects of the flood on her house as Team SC held an event

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Lindsay Street/Gazette

Gov. Nikki Haley arrived at the Goose Creek event Oct. 28 to aid those affected by the flooding.





Help

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featuring multiple state agencies, FEMA, and Gov. Nikki Haley.

For the last week, her husband has been sick and unable to go to work, and a musty smell has taken over her home. A FEMA representative — at the center for a recently opened flood relief center — told her she likely has mold in the house.

Snipe has her registration number and is now waiting to see what kind of federal assistance she will get. “We’ll see what happens. Pray to God and let it go from there,” she said.

At the flood relief event, multiple agencies were represented: Small Business Administration, Department of Insurance, Department of Health and Environmental Control, and more. Anyone stopping by only needed to ask if any agency could help him or her.

“(People) are coming for the events because we are coming to them. They might not have internet or they might be intimidated by the system,” Haley said.

The Goose Creek event was one of “a bunch” held around the state over the last few weeks, Haley said.

Down the road at the Magistrate’s Court, a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center has opened to assist flood victims with registering for federal funds to make their dwellings safe again. Up to \$33,000 is available for homeowners making repairs.

Dorothy Chiasson of Ladson is a bus driver with Dorchester School District Two with her husband Ralph Beach. Chias-

son and Beach showed up at the Team SC event to seek help.

The couple missed six days of work due to the flood. The front and back door of the mobile home where she lives was affected by flooding — and to make matters worse, her insurance had lapsed. She stopped by Wednesday to see if FEMA can help take care of the doors and her leaky roof.

Chiasson and Beach will have to look to the state for their missed workdays. Berkeley County is one of 24 counties with Disaster Unemployment Assistance available. To be eligible, workers or business owners must meet one or more the following criteria:

Individuals who are unemployed due to the disaster, and do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance benefits.

- Self-employed individuals and small business owners who lost income due to the disaster.

- Individuals who were prevented from working due to an injury caused by the disaster.

- Individuals who have become the major supplier of household income due to the disaster-related death or injury of the previous major supplier of household income.

- Individuals who are unable to reach their job or self-employment location because they must travel through the affected area and are prevented from doing so by the disaster.

- Individuals who were to commence employment or self-employment but were prevented by the disaster. Applicants can file immediately by going to www.mybenefits.dew.sc.gov. Applicants have 30 days from the time a county has been de-

clared a disaster to file a claim under this program. The Small Business Administration was also on hand at Wednesday’s event. According to public affairs specialist Richard Daigle, nearly \$19 million has been approved in loans statewide since the flood. Daigle said the loans are low-interest (some as low as 1.87 percent) and can cover homeowners, relocation, renters, and businesses.

“We fill in the gap. We want to get federal dollars into people’s hands but we have to make sure they apply for the loan,” Daigle said. “There are federal dollars out there but we need people to apply ... Many people will say they don’t want a loan, but we encourage them to apply and decide later.”

FEMA assistance is designed to take care of immediate needs and get people safe, but that may not be enough to rebuild, according to Daigle.

Wednesday’s event didn’t draw a huge crowd, but that might have been due to limited damage in the city. Goose Creek Mayor Michael Heitzler attributes his municipality’s good fortune to proper preparation. He said only 10 homes in the city were affected by the epic rainfall and flooding.

“We’ve been preparing for this for decades,” Heitzler said. He added that after 1989’s Hurricane Hugo, the city pinpointed flooding areas and fixed them with community development grants.

Registration with FEMA and SBA is still ongoing. You can register at the Magistrate’s Court in Goose Creek or online at www.disasterassistance.gov.

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Lindsay Street/Gazette
Red Cross workers load a car with water and cleaning supplies at the Goose Creek Recreation Center Oct. 28.

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148 **Alternatives to Violence program celebrates 20 years**

BY DEBORAH SWEARINGEN
Morning News
dswearingen@florencenews.com

FLORENCE — To celebrate the 20th anniversary of its Alternatives to Violence program, the Pee Dee Coalition hosted a luncheon Thursday at the Francis Marion University Performing Arts Center.

Community members congregated, ate and listened to keynote speaker Glenn Smith, the watchdog and public service editor at the Post and Courier in Charleston.

Smith worked on "Till Death Do Us Part," the paper's Pulitzer Prize-winning package on domestic violence in South Carolina, and explained how the idea originated and the work that went into creating it.

He said he was shocked to see the public's immediate reception of the package, most of which was positive. He also said the paper was honored and humbled to win the Pulitzer.

"It was just such a surreal moment," Smith said. "I mean, it just feels unreal, because you look at the company you're in

— The New York Times, The Washington Post, Woodward and Bernstein — and then you're like, 'Wow, how were we possibly in that same mix?'"

Pee Dee Coalition Executive Director Ellen Hamilton said she was initially reluctant to begin the Alternatives to Violence program, since it focused on the offenders.

"We're about victims," she said.

But it was the requests from domestic violence victims in 1995 that spurred the Alternative to Violence program's inception.

Looking back, Hamilton now said she's thankful for the offender intervention program, which aims to reduce relationship violence through a variety of services, including assessments, 26-week group sessions, criminal and legal coordination and case tracking.

"Well, I think this is one of the most important programs that we have, but it gets the least attention," she said.

Thursday's luncheon also included a report from Sheriff Kenney Boone, a member of Gov. Nikki Haley's domestic violence

task force.

Boone said the committee just completed Phase 2 of the process, which included identifying problems and proposing solutions to address the culture of domestic violence in South Carolina. There were more than 50 recommendations, he said.

"Glenn is exactly right," Boone said. "We should have identified these problems years and years ago."

The domestic violence culture is engrained in our state, he said, but South Carolina is now moving in the right direction.

For the Alternative to Violence program, changes also might come.

"We need some creative solutions," Hamilton said. "And we've got to engage men. This is not just a women's issue."

She said hopefully the coalition can use the program and the luncheon as a springboard to begin looking into potential solutions, such as a business roundtable, and to continue addressing what needs to happen from the offender's standpoint.



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...accepted the challenge ...
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SCDEW Cuts 2016 Unemployment Tax Rate

For the second consecutive year, the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW) is cutting the Unemployment Insurance (UI) tax rate, saving South Carolina businesses more than \$151 million over that period.

The 2016 tax rate represents an average reduction of 17.1% over last year's rate, saving businesses more than \$69 million.

Rate reductions are a direct result of the state's economy improving, businesses employing more than 2 million South Carolinians, DEW dramatically lowering benefit payouts, and legislative and DEW policy changes to restrict benefits to individuals who lost their job through no fault of their own.

"When we save businesses money, we give them cash flow, and they can expand, put-

ting more of our people to work - that's why this announcement is so important," said Gov. Nikki Haley. "South Carolina is on the move: we've seen record lows in unemployment and more people working than ever before, and, as we continue to invest in education and workforce development, we'll continue to celebrate."

In June, DEW announced that it had paid off a nearly \$1 billion federal loan used to pay state unemployment insurance benefits during the Great Recession. Early and voluntary payments on the loan by DEW between 2011 and 2015 led to returning the Trust Fund to solvency, saving businesses more than \$12 million in interest payments.

"The economy is improving and more South Carolinians are working than any time in our

state's history. This, coupled with paying off the federal loan, has allowed us to reduce the tax burden on businesses while rebuilding the Trust Fund to a level that will sustain a recession," said Cheryl Stanton, DEW's executive director. "Our gratitude goes out to the business community and workforce development training partners who have worked hard to create jobs and provide the skilled workers to fill them."

This is also the third consecutive year that businesses will receive their individual tax rate notices during the first week of November, six months before the first tax payment is due. Wage and Contribution reports are due by April 30, 2016, and these tax rates apply to the first \$14,000 earned by each employee.



Some people I know and love are just exceptional, a cut above the rest

About a week ago, I called Ms. Evelyn Edmunds, an Angus cattle producer friend of mine, to see if I could come by and just sit and chat with her about being honored with the S.C. Order of the Palmetto Award. Governor Nikki Haley recently awarded Ms. Evelyn the Order of the Palmetto, the highest civilian honor in S.C.

Just so you know, the Order of the Palmetto is given for extraordinary lifetime service and achievements of national or

state-wide significance. Of course she said I could, and so off I went, excited

to get the chance to interview my friend, someone I cared ever so deeply for, someone who I thought oh so much of, someone who had, in the beginning of my cattle career, given me a lot of great advice and help and been my friend in return. I was going to see someone who had been given one of the highest awards in the state of S.C., woo-hoo!

I pulled up at her beautiful Circle E Farms

in Clover and immediately she and the dogs greeted me with open arms, hugs and licks. We went and sat on the back porch and looked out across her vast, beautiful farm and just talked and laughed and discussed everything from cattle to politics to people to religion and God, to her life and mine and how we had so many things in common. We

talked about her receiving the S.C. Order of the Palmetto Award and what that meant to her and how it made her feel, and then we talked just about her!

I must tell you, I have always thought so much of Ms. Evelyn. She is a strong woman, a tough woman – a man, really, to tell you the truth. Most people don't want to hear that, but you have to be that in the cattle business, for respect especially. If you're not, folks will just walk all over you. Not only is she strong and tough, but she's earned a reputation for having unbelievable work ethics and raised all six of her children with those same beliefs. She is a pioneer in so many things, but she doesn't want any of the limelight or any of the glory for it. Her comment to me was just this, "I didn't do any of it for recognition, I didn't do any of it because I thought I might get an award, I did

it 'cause I liked it. We did it because we had too. I did it for the children, and then other children wanted to be a part of what we were doing. We all enjoyed it."

You see, she and her husband started farming and raising turkeys back in 1950, then as the years went on, they had six children. Back then they had one big brooder house for turkeys and fenced off pastures.

"Back then," as she tells it, "they were kinda free range. Once you moved 'em out of the brooder house, you moved them onto pastures 'til time to go to market."

As far as farming and the family, everything was just moving along when in 1970 her husband had a massive heart attack and left her with the six children, three still at home, and 4,500 turkey hens on the pasture ready to go to market.

November cold was coming in quickly, but she did manage with the help of friends to get the hens up and to market and from that point forward, she took over the farm and the business and it has grown ever since.

Then she added, "Sharon, I didn't have time to grieve. I didn't have time to think about anything. I had work that had to be done."

I wanted to cry for her,



What'd She Say?

Sharon Furr





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not because she was sad but because she was such an extraordinary woman, so unbelievable, so matter of fact, so in total control!

She's come a long way since 1970 – sheer grit, hard work, sweat and tears, but she's made it. She's served as commissioner for the York County Soil and Water Conservation for 19 years and she's worked countless years and hours with juniors in 4-H, Scouts and American Angus. She's taught kindergarten and she's started and led the way for juniors all over the state of S.C. to begin showing and fitting cattle all over the country with the SCJNA. She's taught horse riding lessons, she's

worked with the SCCA and the S.C. Farm Bureau and she's been an enormous inspiration for women in agriculture all over, especially me!

At 86 years old, she reminded me real quick that she really wasn't 87 years old and that her birthday wasn't for another couple weeks. She's still running Circle E and the cattle side of the operation. She loves her Angus cattle, and her son Wesley runs the turkey operation side of the business, J.W. Edmunds and Sons, an operation that once started out at 4,500 turkeys and one brooder house. It now has grown to 84,000 turkeys growing out every eight weeks and six more

brooders houses.

She told me at the end of our time together, "Now Sharon, don't draw this all out and make it real long. If you must write about it make it short, 'cause you know I'm not a front page kinda girl, I'm a back page kinda girl!"

Ms. Evelyn, you're one of a kind. You're truly a gem, and yes you are a front page kinda girl! I love you Ms. Evelyn, thank you so much – CONGRATULATIONS!

Sharon Furr is a Charlotte native but has been living and farming in Chester County since 2000.



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148 Curtis elected as 2nd female mayor of Simpsonville

**Wants economic
development focus**

SCOTT KEELER
DSKEELER@GREENVILLENEWS.COM

As the local executive director of the Miss South Carolina Scholarship Organization, Janice Curtis spent many years trying



Janice Curtis

to help young women capture their dream of wearing the crown of Miss South Carolina.

On Tuesday, one of Curtis' dreams came true. While there's no crown involved in this competition, Curtis will gladly take the title of Simpsonville's new mayor.

According to unofficial totals posted on the Greenville County website Tuesday night, Curtis tallied 1,013 votes to defeat Sylvia Lockaby, who had 556 votes. Curtis becomes the city's second female mayor in history. Pam King, who was elected in 1992, was Simpsonville's first female mayor.

"I'm very humbled and honored that the people of Simpsonville have really stepped up and want to bring the embarrassment and nonsense to an end," Curtis said. "I extend a hand to

all of those that want to do the same."

Current Mayor Pro Tem Geneva Lawrence has fulfilled mayoral duties since Mayor Perry Eichor was suspended from office by Governor Nikki Haley in May of 2014.

The result means that Lockaby will keep her City Council seat in Ward 6, which expires in 2017.

"I wish Mrs. Curtis well and I hope the city moves forward from here," Lockaby said.

Economic development ranks high on Curtis' list of priorities when she takes office.

"The No. 1 goal for me is to take a look at our plan for downtown," Curtis said. "I want us to look into obtaining an economic development director for the city or perhaps, looking at avenues to engage someone for economic development. Maybe not a direct employee of the city, but maybe a contract person."

» In Simpsonville's City Council races, incumbent Matthew Gooch was re-elected to his Ward 1 seat while Jenn Hulehan and Ken Cummings were elected in Wards 3 and 5, respectively.

Gooch had 879 votes to

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Curtis

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earn a second term as he defeated James Ashe (386) and Kevin Glenn (291).

"It's a great honor and a tremendous privilege to be able to go back for another term and serve the city of Simpsonville," Gooch said.

In his second term, Gooch said he wants to see economic development through private and public partnerships that foster growth for the city. Fiscal responsibility to prevent tax increases, infrastructure development and treating everyone fair are other primary goals for Gooch.

» Hulehan collected 1,026 votes to 522 for Mark Rodeffer. She will replace Lawrence in Ward 3, who did not seek reelection after serving two separate four-year terms on City Council.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to serve my city," Hulehan said.

Hulehan said Simpsonville needs to make economic development a top priority. Other specific goals she has in mind for when her term begins is helping the city make a stronger commitment to community and cultural programs and services, as well as uniting the city for continuous improvement.

"We need to work together to

"The No. 1 goal for me is to take a look at our plan for downtown."

JANICE CURTIS

MAYOR

strengthen all of the great facets of life in Simpsonville, and work together to ensure we continue to grow," Hulehan said.

» In Ward 5, Cummings posted 1,086 votes to 268 for James Donnelly. Vic Smith, who pulled out of the race but was still listed on the ballot, received 171 votes. Cummings will be replacing Curtis' husband, George, who did not seek reelection after eight years on City Council.

"It's an honor. I'm overjoyed and very humbled that the residents of the city spoke their mind and did their civic duty of voting," Cummings said. "I'm just glad that it worked out in my favor."

As chairman of the Simpsonville Area Chamber of Commerce, Cummings looks forward to bringing a business development mindset to City Council.

Cummings said he's dedicated to "bringing folks of different backgrounds and ideas together for a common goal."

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Hill Appointed to Commission for Technical and Community Education

A Spartanburg County community leader - Mrs. Tracey G. Hill - has been appointed to serve a four-year term Spartanburg County Commission for Technical & Community Education, the governing body of Spartanburg Community College, by SC Governor Nikki R. Haley.

Seven commissioners reside in and represent each of the seven school districts in Spartanburg County, one commissioner represents Cherokee County, one represents Union County and two commissioners are at-large residents of Spartanburg County. Additionally, two commissioners serve in an ex-officio capacity: a representative school superintendent from Spartanburg and the chairman of the Spartanburg County Planning Commission.

"Tracey Hill brings a wealth of experience to the SCC Commission," says Gregory Tate, Commission chair. "Her professional expertise and dedication to the mission of Spartanburg Community College will benefit the entire SCC community as we strive to offer all of our citizens affordable educational opportunities that lead to high paying jobs. In addition, her unique tie to the Commission through her grandfather, Mr. Tracey J. Gaines, who served as our first chair during the College's founding, brings a special legacy connection to our body. I'm sure Mr. Gaines would be

delighted on his granddaughter's appointment."

A resident of Inman, Tracey Hill represents Spartanburg County School District 1 on the SCC Commission. She is an automotive textile designer with Sage Automotive Interiors and has over 20 years' experience meeting the innovation needs of customers like Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, Ford and General Motors. Hill received a bachelor's of science degree, cum laude, from the University of South Carolina, and upon graduation started her career in automotive design with Milliken and Company. She is a life-long resident of Spartanburg County and is the granddaughter of Mr. Tracy J. Gaines who was the first Chairman of the Spartanburg County Commission for Technical Training serving from 1961 to 1969. Her desire is to serve Spartanburg Community College with the same integrity, passion and dedication as her grandfather.

Tracey has served as vice-president of the Inman Woman's Club and is an active member of Inman First Baptist, where she serves in various ministries. She is married to Larry Hill and has two children, Ansley and Gaines Hill. She enjoys being a part of the many sporting activities in which her family is involved including golf, soccer, basketball and tennis.



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¹⁴⁸ RAI will spend another \$5.5 million on new facility

Reinicke Athens, Inc. (RAI), a Georgia-based leading industrial contractor, is planning to invest an additional \$5.5 million in its new Laurens County facility, which it broke ground on in August 2015. This adds to RAI's initial \$4.5 million investment in the project.

Founded in 1996 in Athens, Ga., RAI specializes in fast-track installations, plant shutdowns, relocation of industrial manufacturing equipment and full-service, turnkey construction. With a client list that includes many Fortune 500 companies, Reinicke thrives on competitive bidding as well as negotiations with both small and large projects alike.

Located in the Owings Industrial Park on Old Laurens Road, RAI's facility is currently under construction. Once completed, the company will be able to further strengthen its existing customer base in South Carolina.

Last year, the company announced that this facility would generate 30 new jobs. Hiring for

those positions is currently underway. Those interested in applying may visit the company's careers page online. For more information on Reinicke Athens, Inc., please visit www.rai-usa.com.

"RAI has been blessed to have the opportunity to grow. We are excited to announce that we are expanding our original Gray Court project to accommodate the growth and opportunities we are experiencing. Laurens County and the State of South Carolina have been instrumental in helping us make the decision to expand, and we look forward to a long and mutually beneficial relationship with all of those involved," said RAI President Mark Christopherson.

"It's another fine day for Laurens County and its people. It is good to welcome an addition to a project that just got off the ground. RAI will be good for the county and its customers. Again, welcome to our county," Laurens County Council Chairman Joe Woods said.

Ted Nash, District One member on county council said, "We are excited that RAI is expanding. They are going to be a big asset for my district and for the county."

Last year, the company announced that this facility would generate 30 new jobs. Hiring for those positions is currently underway. Those interested in applying may visit the company's careers page online. For more information on Reinicke Athens, Inc., visit www.rai-usa.com

"We were excited last year when RAI announced its decision to build this facility in Laurens, and we're even more excited today to celebrate this additional investment. We've worked extremely hard to create a business environment in South Carolina where companies can grow and succeed, and RAI's decision to invest further in Laurens County is proof that we have done exactly that," said Gov. Nikki Haley.



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148 The State, Columbia, on arrest of Spring Valley high school student

South Carolina is once again in the national spotlight. Video of a school resource officer throwing a Spring Valley High School student to the floor and arresting her is, as Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott put it, disturbing. The video and the arrest have rightfully captured the attention of our state and nation.

As federal, state and local authorities investigate the incident and the deputy's actions, the rest of us must react as we did after the Charleston shootings in April and June and the statewide floods in October. It is essential that we again show amazing peace, calm and togetherness.

We inspired ourselves and the nation before. We must do it again.

Understandably, parents, students, administrators and the public have questions about what happened in that Spring Valley classroom. All have the right to seek answers, offer opinions and express concerns. A public discussion is healthy.

We had similar discussions in April after a white North Charleston police officer shot an unarmed black man; in June after a young white man massacred nine parishioners at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston; and just a few weeks ago after widespread flooding damaged thousands of homes and left at least 19 dead statewide.

After the North Charleston shooting, fears about violence surfaced because of the unrest we had seen in Ferguson, Missouri, Baltimore and New York following the deaths of black men in police encounters.

"People mention Baltimore. People mention Ferguson. People mention New York," North Charleston City Attorney Brady Hair told The Associated Press earlier this month. "What's different here is there were no acts of violence. There were no buildings burned.

"None of us did anything to escalate this into an uncontrolled environment. It is a different template from what you have seen around the country."

The Mother Emanuel shootings sparked outrage among South Carolinians of all races and religious beliefs. Immediately, the people and churches of Charleston reached out to the congregation, providing food and other support. A Toronto Star reporter tweeted video of a mostly white crowd marching through Charleston chanting "black lives matter."

A few days after the shootings, a crowd estimated at more than 10,000 gathered at Charleston's Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge to honor the victims and to show those who would divide us that South Carolina really is different.

Next, our Legislature voted overwhelmingly to move the Confederate flag from the State House grounds.

When hundreds of our neighbors lost their homes last month, an army of volunteers showed up to help, uninvited and unannounced.

Our responses this year have been praised by national media and by politicians across the political spectrum, from Gov. Nikki Haley to President Obama.

Thankfully, the Spring Valley High School encounter did not end in the loss of life. But it is disturbing, as Sheriff Lott said. South Carolinians should ask questions. If any laws were broken, we should expect justice.

But in our response, we should continue being who we are: a community that will not be divided.