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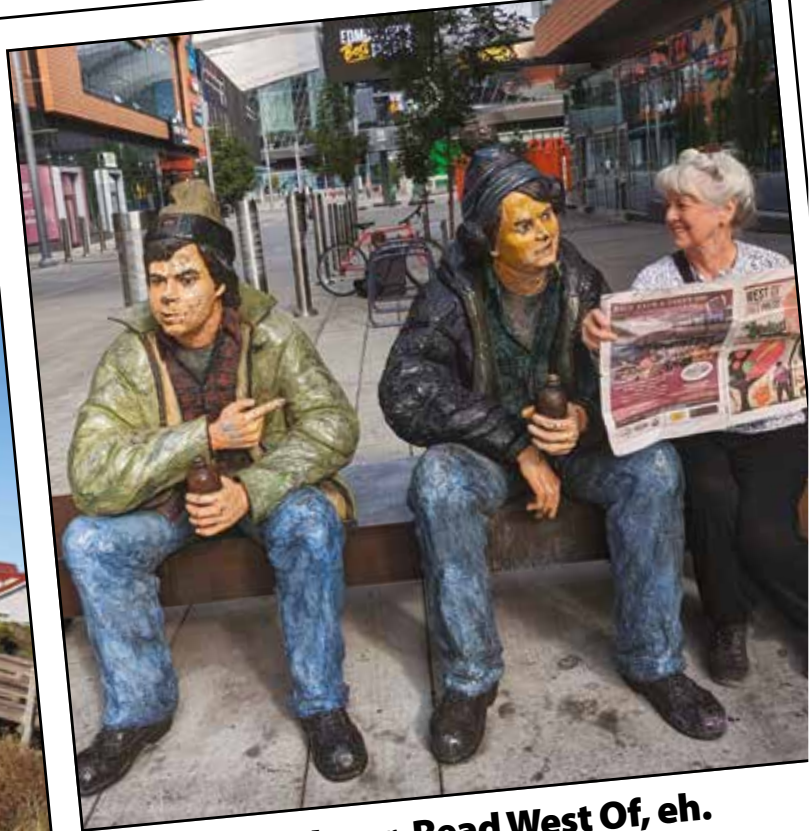


20 YEARS!

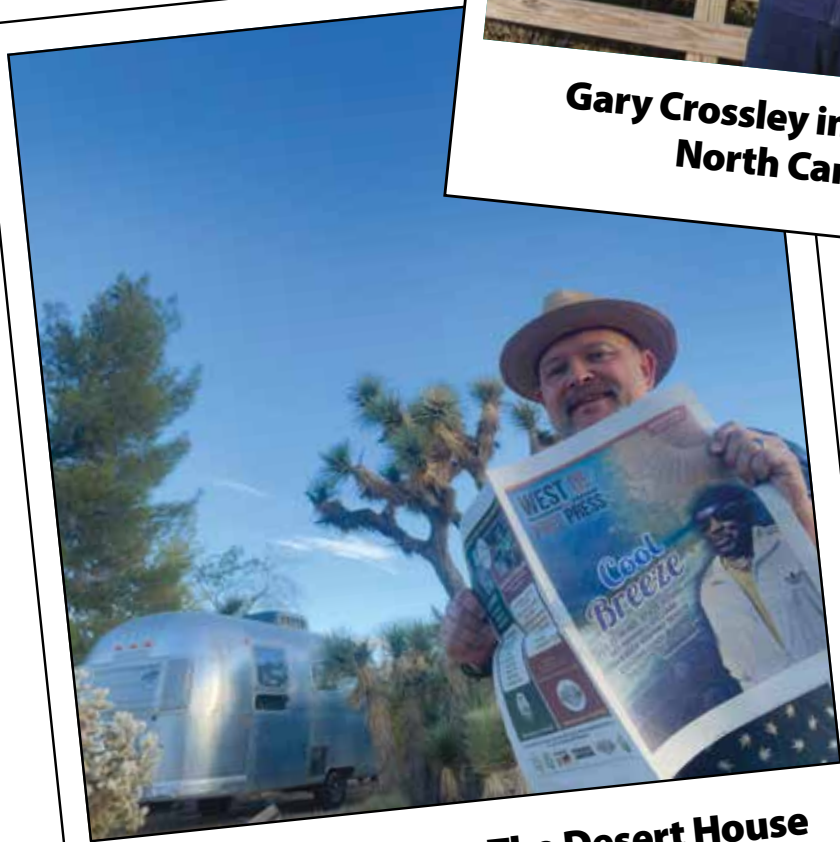




Gary Crossley in Oak Island, North Carolina



Don't be a Hoser, Read West Of, eh. Joan Perry in Edmonton, Alberta, Canana



Lorne Chambers at The Desert House Artist Residency in Yucca Valley, California



Roy & Sara White in Aspen Colorado

WHIMSY

I'm a sweet, friendly lady with a heart full of love to give. I'm quite the goofball and love to make people laugh with my silly antics. I'm also very curious and always ready to explore new things. I'll demand barks when I need something, but I'm also gentle and cuddly, always ready for a good snuggle. I'm very loyal, always by your side when you need me.



AUGUSTUS

Augustus is in the Business Ambassador program. Community businesses partner with Charleston Animal Society to showcase available animals and help them get adopted! He is currently being housed at Pounce Cat Cafu00e9 located at 283 Meeting Street in Downtown Charleston.

PETS OF THE MONTH



Charleston Animal Society
2455 Remount Road
North Charleston, SC 29406
www.charlestonanimalsociety.org

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WEST OF FREE PRESS

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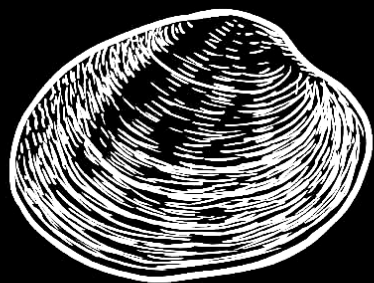
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MARCH 2

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MARCH 6

Charleston Food & Wine Festival - Shucked • 4–6:30pm

MARCH 9

Charleston Food & Wine Festival - Finale • 6:30–9pm

MARCH 15

Odyssey Bottle Shop • 5–8pm

MARCH 22

Sea Island Farmers Market • 9:30am–1:30pm

MARCH 27

The Garden by Charles Towne Fermentory • 5–8pm

MARCH 28

Odyssey Bottle Shop • 5–8pm

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NEWS

“With your help, we can ensure that this legacy continues for generations to come.”

— Joshua Singleton, St. Andrew’s Parks Legacy Foundation president

A Legacy Worth Preserving

St. Andrew’s Parks Legacy Foundation aims to keep the heart of St. Andrew’s Parks and Playground thriving

from Staff Reports

As president of the new 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Singleton is focused on raising funds to help ensure that these programs will remain in place for generations.

Although the foundation is brand new, Singleton has high hopes. He hopes the foundation can raise \$5 million in its first five years. He says the main goal of the Legacy Foundation is to expand recreational programs for all ages, provide scholarships so every child has access to play and invest in future projects that strengthen our community.

Singleton says the non-profit now allows people to donate to St. Andrew’s Parks, and the money can be used for different things as they come up throughout the year, as well as creating a fund for future projects.

“With your help, we can ensure that this legacy continues for generations to come. The St. Andrew’s Parks Legacy Foundation was created to support and enhance the programs and facilities that make our community special,” says Singleton.



Founded in 1945, St. Andrew’s Parks & Playground (SAPP) has been more than just a place to play here in West Ashley. For nearly a century, it’s been where friendships are made, families come together, and lifelong memories are created. As South Carolina’s oldest active parks district, it has touched countless lives and provided safe spaces for kids to grow, adults to stay active, and neighbors to connect.

Former SAPP athletic director Joshua Singleton has a new role. He’s heading up the St. Andrew’s Parks Legacy Foundation to help ensure SAPP remains a vital part of the West Ashley community.

Ryan’s Steakhouse Bites the Dust ... Finally

A public-private partnership marks commitment to improving West Ashley

from Staff Reports

The City of Charleston reaffirms its commitment to revitalizing West Ashley, now with the demolition of the long-abandoned Ryan’s Steakhouse on St. Andrews Blvd. The demolition is the result of a public-private partnership between the city and Gramling Brothers, a Charleston-based developer.

The project marks a key step in the city’s broader strategy to rejuvenate West Ashley and build safer, more vibrant communities. Much like the successful partnership for the redevelopment of Sumar Street, this demolition will pave the way for new amenities in the area.

“This is an important milestone in our ongoing efforts to revitalize West Ashley,” said Mayor William Cogswell. “West Ashley residents can look forward to a brighter future with more opportunities and safer neighborhoods as we continue our investment in this part of Charleston.”

The restaurant has stood vacant for years, becoming an eyesore and a hub for criminal activity, including trespassing, drug use and assault. Through collaboration with Gramling Brothers, the city is taking a crucial step in eliminating blight and improving safety in the area.

“The demolition of the Ryan’s

Steakhouse property is a significant victory for West Ashley,” said William Tinkler, District 9 City Councilmember. “Working together with Gramling Brothers, we are removing eyesores and creating new opportunities for our community to thrive. This is just the beginning, and we are excited for what comes next.”

Demolition began on Monday, February 24, with plans to clear the site quickly. The city and Gramling Brothers are committed to working together to create a space that benefits the local community and attracts new investment to the area.





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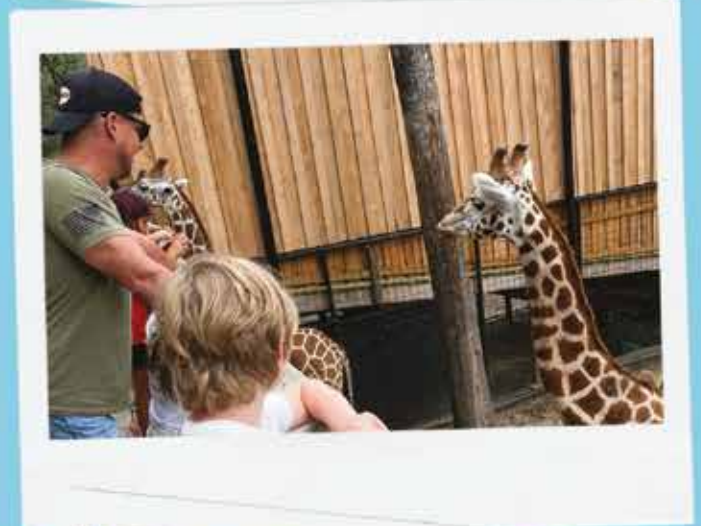
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The following were taken from actual incident reports filed last month by the City of Charleston Police Department.

These are not convictions and the names of businesses, complainants, and suspects have been left out to protect the innocent. All suspects are innocent until proven guilty ... of course.

JANUARY 23

FORGERY/COUNTERFEIT

A woman reported that she wrote a charitable check for \$250 to a cancer foundation and believes someone intercepted the check, "washed it" and reissued it to another person for \$7,000. The woman was alerted by her bank that the \$7,000 check had cleared and began to investigate. The bank was able to provide a scanned copy of the forged check.

JANUARY 24

CREDIT CARD/ATM FRAUD

A woman reported that someone had used her deceased mother's department store credit card/account at a West Ashley department store and purchased \$1,081 worth of merchandise. The woman said the card was last seen in her mother's purse following her death and she did not know if any other cards had been stolen. The department store was alerted and cancelled the woman's account.

JANUARY 24

RECOVERED STOLEN PROPERTY

Thanks to a GPS tracker, an expensive piece of construction equipment that had been reported as stolen from a large home improvement retailer in Georgia was recovered in the Lowcountry. The home retailer said the equipment was rented, but

the borrower never returned it. Officers were able to make contact with the person who was in possession of the equipment in Charleston and confirmed the matching serial number. The man, an owner of a landscaping company, said his brother, the co-owner of the business, purchased the equipment from a private seller in Georgia and they did not know it was stolen. The home improvement retailer did not wish to press charges against the landscapers and the equipment was towed away by a tow truck.

JANUARY 25

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Officers responded to reports of a stalled vehicle on a busy freeway and found a vehicle on the shoulder facing the wrong direction with the driver asleep with the driver's seat all the way reclined and the engine running. A citizen who reported the incident said the driver had been erratic. Officers eventually arrested the 32-year old man who had to be asked multiple times to provide his registration and insurance. The man said he had been drinking "a little." Following sobriety tests, he was arrested for suspicion of DUI.

JANUARY 25

USING VEHICLE WITHOUT CONSENT

A woman reported that she allowed her friend to use her SUV to go to the store, but the friend never returned. The woman said she called the friend several times about where her vehicle was and was given "misleading information several times." The woman described the vehicle as having temporary tags, tape on the passenger side back window, sticks in the front driver and front passenger windows to hold them up and a spare tire wire hanging midway down at the rear of the vehicle.

JANUARY 27

BURGLARY/BREAKING & ENTERING

A man reported that his storage unit had been broken into and more than \$3,000 worth of tools were stolen. Rather than the storage unit door being broken into, the man said someone had made a hole from the adjoining storage unit into his

unit to gain access. Officers noted the missing drywall between the units. The man said he had not visited the storage unit for approximately one month and it was unclear when the theft occurred.

JANUARY 27

GENERAL INFORMATION

An employee of a local school reported that a man had been harassing her five times on her walk home from work, stopping in his vehicle to compliment her on her appearance, telling her he wanted to "spoil" her and handed her his business card asking her to call him. The woman said she accepted a ride one day on her way to work believing that it would make him stop following her and pressuring her. The woman said while in the vehicle, the man propositioned her for a sexual act and offered to pay her money. The woman refused and was able to get out of the vehicle at her workplace and called police. Officers called the man via the cell phone number on his business card and he denied the allegation that he solicited the woman for sex. Officers made it clear that the woman does not want any further contact and wishes to be left alone. The man said he would comply.

JANUARY 29

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Officers were conducting traffic enforcement on Savannah Highway and noticed a vehicle drift to the left side of the roadway onto the shoulder and that a passenger had his legs hanging out of the passenger side window. Officers conducted a traffic stop and eventually arrested a 24-year-old man for suspected DUI. He had a blood alcohol content of .10, which is higher than the legal limit to drive.

JANUARY 30

ASSIST FIRE

Officers responded to a house fire in which an espresso machine was in flames which caused the kitchen to be fully engulfed in flames and smoke was seen coming out from the roof.

FEBRUARY 3

VANDALISM

A woman reported that her daughter

had gotten into a verbal disagreement with three other juveniles and that one of the juveniles had poured water into her gas tank as retaliation. The woman said multiple neighbors witnessed the vandalism and believe it was a female who was known in the neighborhood. The woman said she found an empty, flattened water bottle hanging off of her fuel tank.

FEBRUARY 3

FORGERY/COUNTERFEIT

Officers arrived at a local gas station for a forgery in progress after an employee said someone was attempting to cash a check for \$752 that appeared sketchy. The check had an incorrect spelling of the South Carolina city related to the business name and when the employee contacted the "business" that issued the check, the person on the other end said "the check was real" and instructed the employee to cash the check and give the man in the store \$300 cash, but then hung up when pressed for more information. Officers approached the male who was attempting to cash the check, who said that he had been receiving checks from this unknown business and decided to cash this one. He said he threw away the envelope the check arrived in and had no other information. The check was submitted into evidence.

FEBRUARY 4

BURGLARY/BREAKING & ENTERING

Officers responded to a local church after a man entered the building around 5 p.m. and stole \$100 from a money box at the concession stand. The incident was captured on surveillance footage and was submitted into evidence.

FEBRUARY 4

BURGLARY/BREAKING & ENTERING

The owner of a gas station reported that he came into work to discover the bottom half of the front glass doors had been smashed overnight and that 12 cartons of cigarettes had been stolen, worth \$90 each.

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A&E

“This event is similar to a happy hour, so more of a casual meet-and-greet social with live music.”

— Lauren Dantes, CCRPC Festival & Events Coordinator

Birds of a Feather Flies Back Into Caw Caw

Music, food, and birds come together in second installment of popular CCPR event on Thursday, March 17

by Matt Poust | Contributing Writer

West Ashley nature enthusiasts will have the opportunity to spread their socialite wings within the natural surroundings of the Caw Caw Interpretive Center on Thursday, March 27, as the Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission (CCPRC) hosts the second installment of Birds of a Feather.

As one of CCPRC’s premiere spring kick-off events, Birds of a Feather will blend a night of live music, food, and beverage with the opportunity for attendees to learn more about the 654-acre nature-filled center at which the event is held.

“This event is similar to a happy hour, so more of a casual meet-and-greet social with live music,” said CCRPC Festival & Events Coordinator Lauren Dantes. “Guests will enjoy drinks and live music with the added bonus of being able to learn more about the park and wildlife there. We hope to bring people to Caw Caw who have never had the opportunity to see the site before.”

With 160 people in attendance at the first Birds of a Feather event this past September, CCRPC is expecting a turnout of 150-200 attendees at this next one.

While main event proceedings will be

hosted in a small open area near the Caw Caw visitor center parking lot, attendees will have full access to more than seven miles worth of trails and elevated boardwalks that snake throughout the interpretive center, which plays host to wildlife habitats ripe with waterfowl, songbirds, otters, American alligators, bald eagles and more.

Paired with trailside exhibits, historic rice fields and remnants of a former tea farm that can be found throughout the center’s grounds, naturalists from CCRPC will have an educational table at the event site to offer curious guests a more in-depth knowledge of their surroundings.

Charleston-based performer and music producer Michael Duff will be providing an acoustic set for the night’s live entertainment, while Foxes Fried will have a food truck offering their signature wet-battered fried chicken, dumplings and more. On top of the beer and wine that will be for sale, attendees are permitted to bring their own food and non-alcoholic refreshments and are encouraged to bring their own chairs.

Tickets for the event can be purchased for \$20 in advance by visiting CharlestonCountyParks.com or by calling



843-795-4386 and will be offered for \$25 the day of, with all revenue going back to CCRPC for the opportunity to hold more events like this one and to support the parks system as a whole.

Those unable to attend Birds of a Feather aren’t completely out of luck, as CCRPC will be offering a slate full of events throughout March including: Under the Oaks,

on March 6, Palmetto Park Jam on March 8 and Dancing on the Cooper on March 21.

Anyone looking to further traverse the Caw Caw Interpretive Center can do so at the park’s early morning bird walks held bi-weekly every Wednesday and Saturday from 8:30-10:30 a.m. For more information, visit ccprc.com/3756/Birds-of-a-Feather

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ALL DAY
- THURSDAY:** BOGO All Apps 4-7pm
- FRIDAY:** Buy One Hibachi Dinner,
Get One 1/2 Price 4-7pm
- SATURDAY:** Buy One Signature Sushi Roll,
Get One 1/2 Price 4-10pm

WEEKLY EVENTS

- MONDAYS:** Matt Jordan 5:30-8:30pm
- TUESDAYS:** Live Trivia 7-9pm
Comedy Show 9-11pm
- WEDNESDAYS:** Music Bingo with Aaron 8-11pm
- THURSDAYS:** Team Trivia 7-9pm
- FRIDAY:** Live Music 9:30-12:30pm
- SATURDAY:** Karaoke with DJ Israel
- SUNDAY:** Open Mic with Chris Tidestrom
7:30-10:30pm

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COMMUNITY

“My favorite cultivar is *Camelia japonica* ‘Francis B. Muckenfuss’. I love the name, and I’ve been told there are Muckenfuss that still live here in Charleston.”

— Mike Blewer, Plants Collections Manager at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens

Waxing Nostalgia and Flowers

How to preserve camellia’s brilliant but short-lived blooms all year

by Joan Perry | Contributing Writer



The premise of the *West Ashley Wanderer* column is that I wander my neighborhood so much that I tend to naturally happen upon cool things to share. I was exploring the Camellia Garden at Magnolia Plantation Gardens with my friend Susan Quinn Sand, when a volunteer waved to us saying, “the Camellia Waxing demonstration is ready to start!” and this month’s column topic landed in my lap.

I’d been fascinated by waxed camellias at the Hobcaw Barony booth at SouthEastern Wildlife Exhibition displays and had it on my list of things to look into, so the timing was perfect.

Our host was Mike Blewer, Plants Collections Manager, who joined Magnolia nine months ago. He had previously been the Horticulture Business Manager, Cacti & Succulent Gardener, at the Naples Botanical Garden in Florida, teaching classes in orchid care. Mike learned the camellia waxing process from Jim Martin, Horticulture & Landscape Supervisor at Magnolia, and enjoys sharing the vintage technique that not many people know about.

We are spoiled by the glorious show of colorful camellias in Charleston, but often disappointed at their short life span after being cut. Waxing preserves the delicate beauty of the flowers, making them last longer while maintaining a fresh porcelain like appearance. Hostesses in days gone by, used to wax their best blossoms before a dinner party, floating

them in water as a centerpiece.

Mike Brewer had a variety of perfect camellias laid out for the session, along with paraffin wax, mineral oil, a double bowl set up for an ice bath and what looked like the old eclectic skillet I used to make upside down pineapple cakes years ago. He collected the blossoms early to let the dew dry off and made sure they were clear of debris or ants. *Camellia Japonicas* blooming in January and February are most successful.

Pinks and whites with full blossoms are best. Avoid blossoms that are very full or so compacted that the wax won’t surround individual petals. Wax the flowers, not the leaves.

Susan answered the call to participate, and after the “watch one, do one,” demonstration she successfully waxed a perfect camellia to take home.

Process:

The temperature of the wax/oil mix seemed key, with 138 F being the sweet spot. The leaves were trimmed or held back with the stem, and the blossom was dipped into the melted wax in a smooth, side sweeping motion for a 1, 2 count. It was lifted, given a gentle shake to drip off excess wax, turned upright to let wax reach the interior petals for a 1, 2, 3 count. Then the flower was gently dipped into the ice cold water bath to set the wax. It was submerged for 30 seconds, while moving it slowly in the water to avoid air bubbles, and ensure an even wax coat. It was then laid, stem down on a protected surface to dry.

Mike explained that it wasn’t an exact science, and not to be surprised if you are tempted to experiment with other flowers. Irises, gardenias, and any flower without a complex petal structure. The wax, cleared of any debris can be kept for reuse. Helpful Youtube tutorials are available to see the process.

I asked Mike the tough Lowcountry question, “What is your favorite camellia?”

“That is a difficult question. My favorite

cultivar is *Camelia japonica* ‘Francis B. Muckenfuss’. I love the name, and I’ve been told there are Muckenfuss that still live here in Charleston. My favorite cultivar flower is *Camellia japonica* ‘Captain Martin’s Favorite’, it’s a cultivar that originated right at Magnolia and has a wonderful story about how it got its name.”

Supplies Needed:

- 4 lbs of paraffin wax. Available in Art Supply stores
- 2 cups mineral oil (for a 4/2 ratio)
- Electric frying pan with dial temp control to heat the wax
- Thermometer
- Bowl of cold water & ice for setting the wax
- Strainer to remove debris from the wax.
- Newspaper to protect surfaces.
- Spoon to stir wax.

Stay healthy my friends and wave at me as I wander. Send ideas for upcoming columns to: westashleywanderer@gmail.com.



Mike Blewer, Plants Collections Manager at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens



An example of a Waxed Camellia

Long Live the Victory Gardens

West Ashley is fertile ground for cultivating veggies and stories



Gardens have been a part of our community's history since the first settlers' arrived on the west bank of the Ashley River. The early "experimental farm" established by Joseph West, the acting governor for the Lords Proprietors, on land that would later become the Town of Maryville was designed to be used to determine what was agriculturally feasible for the new colony.

Over time the formal gardens of Middleton and Magnolia, later the courtyard or backyard gardens in the developing suburbs, then ultimately garden clubs integrated into the life of St. Andrew's Parish. The impact of World War I and II added another garden type and these were called war gardens or victory gardens. European food production was dramatically impacted and thus the nation suffered from food shortages during both wars. The institution of victory gardens was designed to overcome this shortage.

There were more backyards established in St. Andrew's Parish during World War II. Residents were encouraged to plant victory gardens.

"20,000,000 Victory Gardens Needed in '44" was the title of an ad in the *News & Courier* encouraging residents to dig in and grow vegetables. There was advice on

types of vegetables to plant, where to buy seeds, and acquire supplies. In addition, there were tracts of farmland that were still undeveloped that could potentially serve as large community victory gardens.

In 1943 the Agricultural Society of South Carolina donated five "choice" acres of the 150-acre Cherokee tract to civilian defense. This 150-acre tract located near the U.S. and S.C. experimental stations had been recently purchased by the Society.

Collards, turnips, kale, beans, and sweet potatoes were some of the crops that were cultivated at this site. More than 4,000 bushels of produce valued at \$ 10,000 and some 5,000 quarts of canned goods were inventoried by the civilian defense office as proof of success of the effort in this agricultural experiment during its first year.

"The victory gardens across the Ashley River can be compared to an outdoor agricultural school," according to W. McLeod Frampton, head of the Society. In addition, the gardeners had the expertise of the staff from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Clemson College's experimental stations. By May of 1944, interest in gardening had waned a bit and only 85 percent of the plots were planted.

In January of 1945, L Harry Mixson, the South Carolina representative of the National Victory Garden committee was encouraging patriotism via gardening as food rationing was getting tight. President Truman even made a national plea for more victory gardens to be planted.

Today, community gardens, verge gardens, and vegetable planters are making a comeback. What pleasure in enjoying your own grown vegetable. It once was a symbol of patriotism.

Stories from St. Andrew's Parish? Contact Donna at westashleybook@gmail.com.



J.B. Weathers was a mechanic for Associated Petroleum Carriers when he was offered a job as Maintenance Foreman for SCE&G's bus service in Charleston. He and his wife Carrie purchased their home at 119 (later renumbered to 651) Savannah Highway in 1945. They were encouraged to purchase the house next door as an investment but J.B. was not known for being a risk taker. J.B. enjoyed several hobbies, one being gardening. The back lawn soon succumbed to the vegetable garden and J.B. proudly poses with the "fruit" or rather "vegetable" of his labor in this photograph dated 1948. (Courtesy of William H. Barron, Jr.)


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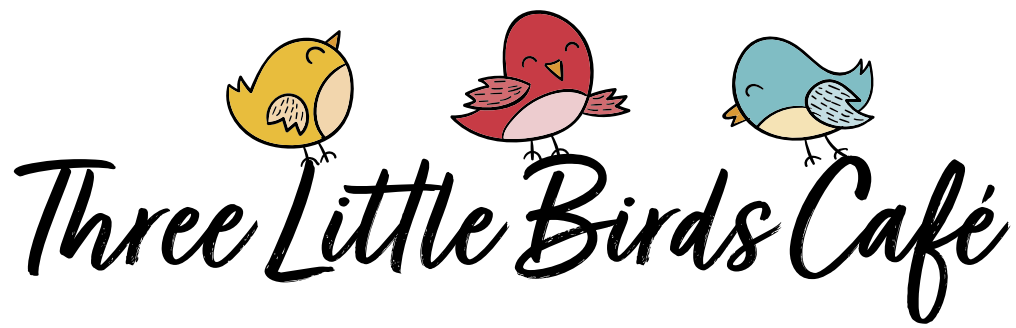
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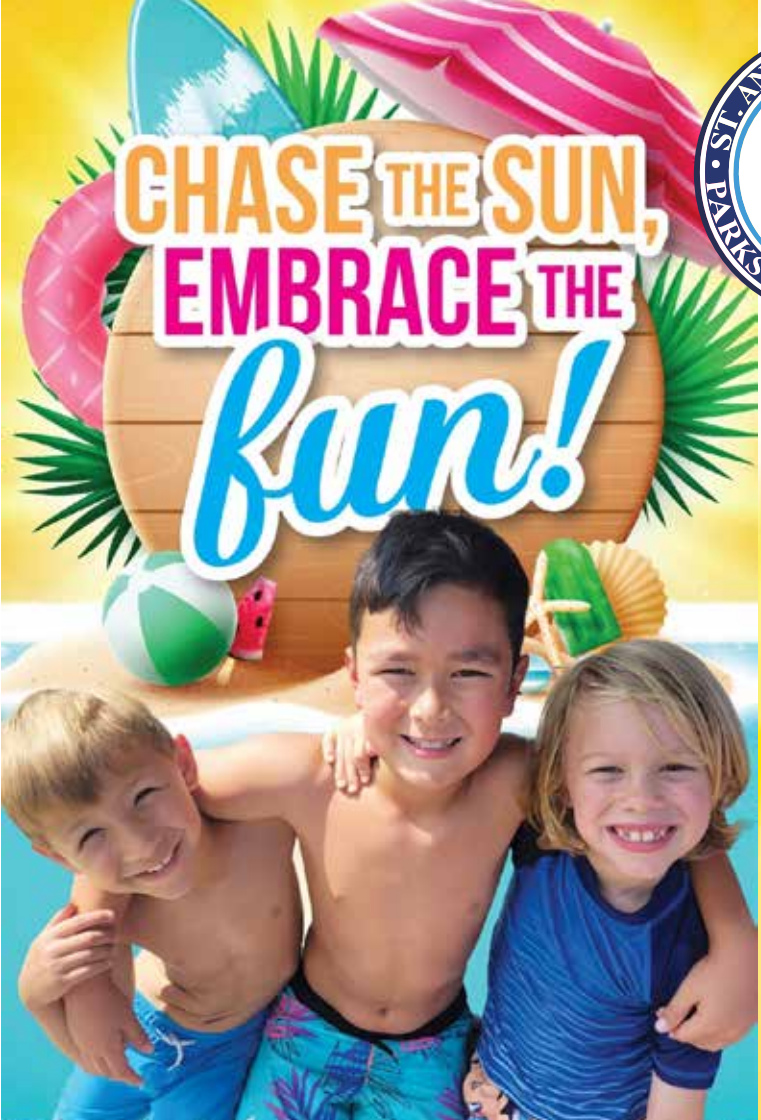
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“We love it here [West Ashley]. This is where all of our businesses have been, where we built friendships and life-long relationships. It’s home.”

— Kelly Chu, co-owner of *The Cellar Wine & Spirits*

A Tailor-Made Take on Wine & Spirits

Former Red Orchids owners Tony & Kelly Chu open The Cellar in Avondale

by Matt Poust | Contributing Writer

Whether it’s finding the spirit that suits a celebration, the wine that pairs perfectly with a homemade dish, or really any alcoholic beverage that might alleviate the burdens of a bad day, those who choose The Cellar Wine & Spirits in West Ashley can expect to find themselves in a convivial and communal storefront while searching for their next drink of choice.

That’s the sort of gregarious impression that was left by owners Kelly and Tony Chu on Feb. 20, as they talked past and present business ventures within their neighborhood wine and liquor shop located at the convergence of Tall Oak Avenue and Hickory Street in the Avondale Point Business District.

“People don’t want to go to a shop where workers read from a format and don’t really hear you, they want to go to a shop that knows your name and what you’re looking for,” Tony said, speaking on the wine and spirit buying experience that he and Kelly are trying to bring to customers.

While The Cellar is still in relative infancy at seven months in business, the shop follows a 22-year-long award-winning, community-loved reputation that the Chus have earned in West Ashley while owning two popular businesses within the local food and beverage industry.

Starting their entrepreneurial journey after falling in love at The University of Maryland, Tony followed Kelly back to her West Ashley neighborhood, where they opened Red Orchids China Bistro off Sam Rittenberg Boulevard in 2002.

Serving elevated Chinese/American dishes and using recipes from Kelly’s mother’s former West Ashley Chinese takeout restaurant “Joy Luck,” the couple not only caught the taste buds of local community members but earned the title of Charleston City Paper readers ‘Best Chinese food in Charleston’ during their first year of business.

As fondness for the Chus’ restaurant grew, so did their cuisine endeavors, as Kelly established her homemade, wholesale ice cream and gelato brand Cirsea in 2008. Originally started as a way to add quality dessert to the Red Orchids menu, it wasn’t long before customers started asking to take home pints of the sweet treat with flavors ranging from chocolate cayenne to vanilla black pepper.

To-go orders of Cirsea turned into partnerships with Charleston markets and chefs and before long, Kelly’s side passion project grew locally-acclaimed legs of its own, leading to her opening a separate space for its making, also based out of West Ashley.

Success and local admiration remained on an upward trajectory for the Chus’ businesses for two decades until 2023 when increased rent prices on the Cirsea shop and forced relocation of Red Orchids within its West Ashley shopping center pushed Tony and Kelly to step away from both.

At the end of its business span, Red Orchids had maintained an unblemished 19-year hold on its ‘Best Of Charleston’ title, while Cirsea soared to even greater heights, representing North America during the 2017 World Gelato Tour in Rimini, Italy with Kelly’s “Bacche de Marsala” flavor creation.

Despite the local and global recognition that their businesses gained, Kelly Chu noted that she’s most proud of the impression she and Tony left on the local community.

“At the end of the day, a lot of people can cite you on this website, award you on that website, but I think the most rewarding part for us is even though we are no longer in business, we constantly run into someone who remembers us from it; that shares stories, that misses it,” Kelly said. “I think that is the biggest reward for us.”

With bittersweet feelings left for the ending of Red Orchids and Cirsea, the roots of the Chus’ next business grew from Tony’s

passion and knowledge of wine and spirits.

Intrigued initially by the makings of wine that he tasted for his menu at Red Orchids, Tony wanted to create a shop that strayed more from explanations on wine’s technical elements and instead focused on what type of occasion a customer wanted to use that wine for.

Taking a more personalized approach to wine and spirit shopping, Tony and Kelly Chu began curating a more communal-based, dynamic boutique collection that would allow customers from all walks of life something to enjoy.

“It’s about how we can bring warmth to this experience, to say, ‘This is what you would like, this is what you want, and this is how we bring it,’” Tony said. “That level of trust you get in a community is what we were looking for in the shop.”

Opening The Cellar Wine & Spirits in July of last year, Kelly Chu said keeping their business in West Ashley wasn’t even a thought. “We love it here. This is where all of our businesses have been, where we built friendships and life-long relationships. It’s home.”

With hours of operation running from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday, intermittent wine and spirit tastings hosted, and social media postings that offer a glimpse at The Cellar’s latest happenings, Tony and Kelly Chu are using this newfound business to fill further the aspirations of the same community that has shown them love for more than two decades.



Kelly and Tony Chu, owners of The Cellar Wine & Spirits

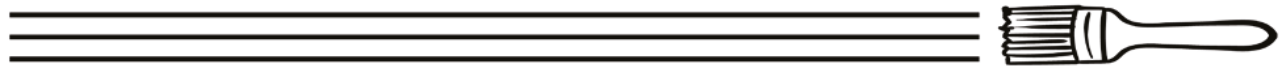
While it’s a new start in an unfamiliar industry, the two are striving for the same connections they’ve made throughout their entire career, looking forward to the road ahead.

“Wine and spirits is a completely new board game for us, we’re still learning,” Tony said. “That’s the fun part about having an American dream — to start with the inception of an “aha” moment, a napkin idea, and then hear the feedback on the journey of growing.”

The Cellar Wine and Spirits is located at 95 Tall Oak Ave unit 102. For more information, call (843) 261-8480 or visit www.thecellarws.com.



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A Labor of Love

West Of's founder looks back on two decades of publishing West Ashley's newspaper

by Lorne Chambers | Editor



I bought my first house right here in West Ashley when I was 25 years old. It was a small two-bedroom, one-bath cinderblock ranch off Wappoo Road that sat on a concrete slab bordering an empty, marshy lot that was prone to flooding. It was what realtors might have called the “quintessential starter home.” This was back in 2000, when banks would give almost anyone a mortgage. It cost \$68,000 with zero down on a three-year ARM (adjustable rate mortgage). These were the sorts of loans that helped bring on the 2008 financial crisis and would have probably crushed me had I not sold the place before that note matured.

I used the money I made on that house to buy another house less than a mile away, along the West Ashley Greenway. It was also a 2-bedroom, 1-bath house that would have also been considered a starter home. It was even smaller than the first one, but it was nicer and thus almost 50 percent more expensive. The Charleston real estate marketing was just starting to explode.

It was while living at this house along the West Ashley Greenway that it occurred to me that, unlike just about every other part of town, West Ashley did not have its own newspaper. There was *The Moultrie News* in Mt. Pleasant, the *North Charleston News*, *The Summerville-Journal Scene*, and even the *James Island Journal*. Within the next year or two after I started *West Of*, Sullivan's Island/IOP would have *The Island Eye News*, Johns Island/Kiawah would have *the Island Connection*, and Daniel Island and Folly Beach would each have their own community newspapers. But West Ashley, where I lived, did not.

West Ashley was, and still is, the largest population hub in the region. Yet it was often overlooked. In some ways, it was still the Wild West of Charleston. Zoning and code enforcement didn't care much about what happened on this side of the river. City Hall often ignored West Ashley when it came to improvement projects and special events. This was partly because West Ashley was and remains hard to define. You won't find it on a map. It isn't an island. Heck, it isn't even a town like many other places in the area. Some parts of West Ashley are in the city, some unincorporated. It encompasses two zip codes, and its population is more diverse than most other area, not only racially but financially, politically, and culturally. Providing a newspaper that served everyone in this area would be a challenge.

But I did have some experience in the business, even if I had back-doored into a journalism career with a sociology degree from the College of Charleston and a minor in Creative Writing. I had briefly done some work with CofC's newspaper, and after graduation, I took a job as a reporter for a



Owners Lorne & Lindsey Chambers celebrate 20 years of publishing the *West Of Free Press*

community weekly in Sarasota, Florida. They would actually pay me to write, and living along the Gulf Coast seemed fun. I got \$350 a week before taxes were taken out. It was enough to cover rent with a roommate or two, and there were even a few bucks left over for a couple of cheap beers. The rest of the beers were put onto a credit card. I was surrounded by snowbirds and retirees in gated communities. I felt like I was at the starting line of my life, while everyone around me seemed to be coasting toward the finish line. I found myself desperately missing Charleston. So less than two years into my Florida stint, I found myself moving back to the Lowcountry of South Carolina. I began working at the Charleston City Paper, an edgy alternative weekly that I'm happy to see is still fighting the good fight. *The City Paper* gig was a dream. I was in my 20s and getting paid to see bands and write about them, interview artists and musicians I loved, and had access to all the cool stuff in town. The City Paper office was fun, lively, and never boring. Like everyone who worked there, the owners were young and scrappy. Newspapers, especially alternatives to the dailies, were still cool and vibrant.

As much as I loved my *City Paper* job, I really wanted to do my own thing. I was approaching 30 and knew that at some point, I wouldn't have the drive or blind ignorance that would allow me to take such a huge risk.

I started to pay attention to every aspect of the publishing business, from the editorial layout to ad sales to distribution. I picked up other newspapers when I traveled. What made this one better than that one?

Over the course of a year, I began planning a community newspaper for West Ashley. I put together a business plan and talked with buddies who I thought could be future employees. I decided to call the paper *West Of*, which I thought was pretty clever at the time. In retrospect, it wasn't the greatest name. But I didn't think about Google searches or Search Engine Optimization. I just thought it sounded cool. West of what? People asked. I told them it was west of downtown Charleston, west of the mainstream. Starting a print newspaper in the 21st century was west of anything that a financial adviser or business mentor would recommend.

I got some help from a good friend and former coworker named Amy Pastre, who was quickly skyrocketing to rock-star status in the Charleston design world. But she was generous with her time and expertise. She created a logo and a layout template for the paper, which made it all feel very real. It was real. The only problem was that I still had no money and running and printing a newspaper is expensive! Plus, after five years, I had just quit my job at *City Paper* after five years. Banks weren't too keen on giving loans to upstart newspaper publisher

and there really aren't government or SBA loans available for media outlets. So, I pulled all of the equity out of my little brick house along the West Ashley Greenway. I put it all on red and spun that big roulette wheel of entrepreneurship.

I took out a lease on a small office along St. Andrew's Boulevard that my father helped me fix it up and to make functional. I hired a couple of friends: Warren Cobb to be the paper's Community Editor, a title we made up, and Brian Whittaker, who was our sole sales rep in the beginning. While Warren and I had worked together at the paper in Florida, Brian was new to the newspaper biz. But he was a quick study and was able to scrounge up a few ads. I'm proud to say, that several of those advertisers are still with the paper today. The first issue of *West Of* came out on Feb. 1, 2005.

That was also the day I met Lindsey Smith, who would later become Lindsey Chambers. She was a student at the College of Charleston and walked into the office to interview for an internship just as that first issue was being delivered. She has literally been there from day one. When her internship ended at the end of that semester, she kept hanging around, helping wherever she could. The next year, when she graduated, she officially began working at the paper. A couple of years later, we started dating. Several years after that, we were married.

There are so many people who played key roles in helping make my dream of creating a West Ashley newspaper a reality. I'm proud that they have moved on to greater things, to have families and create businesses of their own. But Lindsey has been there for it all, eventually becoming my business partner and life partner.

The last two decades haven't always been smooth sailing for the newspaper. We've weathered a recession and a pandemic and were forced to adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, going from a tabloid-sized weekly to a larger, monthly news magazine. But through it all, we've stayed true to our mission—to be the community newspaper for West Ashley. Not only did we survive, but we thrived. 2024 was our best year yet. We have advertisers who have been with us for 10, 15, even 20 years.

After all this time, I still love publishing an actual hold-in-your-hands, ink-on-your-fingers newspaper. There's still an excitement to seeing the latest issue in print. It's so much more real to me than any blog or social media post will ever be. Print media is far from dead. It's just evolving. The *West Of Free Press* will be right here evolving, too.

Maybe starting a newspaper in the 21st century was a crazy idea. But hey, I have another crazy idea ... let's do it for 20 more!



Finding Community

Advertising Director reflects on 20 Years at West Of

by Lindsey Chambers | Advertising Director



Being a salesperson at a community newspaper is so much more than just closing a deal or pocketing a commission. For me, it's about creating lasting connections between the readers and the businesses that advertise within these pages. In 2005, I never could have imagined that walking into the *West Of* office would give me a sense of community that would change my life forever. It led to lasting friendships, meaningful business connections, and meeting my future husband, Lorne Chambers.

Before officially joining the *West Of* sales team, I was studying Media Communications at the College of Charleston. When my professor, Chris Lamb, told us a former CofC student was starting a newspaper for West Ashley and looking for interns, I was eager to learn more about the world of newspaper publishing. I jumped at the opportunity and a few days later, walked into the *West Of* office for an interview just as the first issue of the paper was being delivered.

I remember Lorne's excitement. I was drawn to his passion and vision for the community. He wasn't just starting a newspaper; he was giving an often-overlooked part of Charleston a voice. Without any outside investors, family wealth, or business partners, Lorne built *West Of* from the ground up. It was inspiring. The whole *West Of* team was inspiring. They were only a few years older than me and were forging ahead bravely into the abyss and doing it their way. From the start, I knew I wanted to be a part of it. They immediately accepted me as a member of the team. We had a lot of fun in those days. We worked hard and played hard.

A Newspaper with Real Heart

When I graduated, Lorne offered me a full-time job selling ads for the paper. Honestly, I wasn't overly thrilled about the prospect, but it was a real job, one where I would get an actual paycheck. I remember telling him, "But I'm not a sales-y person." He reassured me that this role was different—

it wasn't just about getting signatures, collecting money, and walking away. It was about building lasting relationships and helping businesses grow within our community. He said there's a kind of mutually-assured success that comes with advertising in a local newspaper.

I took the job. And not long after I officially began working here, I walked into the *West Of* office carrying a scrawny, flea-ridden Jack Russell terrier mix I had found running in the street. I wanted to clean him up and find a home for him. But as it turned out, he was severely heartworm-positive and would not survive without several high-cost treatments. With tight finances just out of college, I just didn't see how I could make it happen.

That's when Lorne organized a fundraiser with our coworkers and friends at Voodoo Tiki Bar & Lounge, across the street from our office. He pledged to

match any funds raised and thanks to the generosity of the my friends and the *West Of* team, I was able to get the pup the treatment he needed.

I named him "Westie" in honor of the paper that had saved his life. And I did end up finding him a good home. It was with me!



About a year or so later, Lorne and I had our first official date at the now-closed Al Di La in Avondale (R.I.P.). We dated for more than five years before getting married in 2013. We've now had four dogs together, including Westie, who recovered

fully from his heartworms and went on to have a long, happy life before passing away a couple of years ago. Lorne had local artist Lisa Shimko immortalize him with a painting that hangs in our home. Now, we just have the one dog, Margot, our 13-year-old bulldog/boxer mix, who rules the office with an iron paw.

Changing Times, Turning Pages

When I first started working at *West Of*, the media landscape was very different. There was fierce competition from radio, TV, and other print outlets. Newsstands were filled with publications, and the future of print media seemed secure. But then social media marketing exploded, offering cheap advertising with seemingly endless views.

It was a little scary. Then it became clear that getting a thumbs up or heart on a post might boost the ego for a moment, but it can't compete with the true community engagement you get with a neighborhood newspaper like *West Of*.

I love walking into Gene's Haufbrau and seeing old newspaper clippings on the wall from past *West Of* articles featuring friends decked out in lederhosen and dirndl for Oktoberfest. Even though those papers have yellowed with time, they've outlasted millions of social media posts that are gone in a swipe of a finger.

That's not to say the changes in the media world didn't impact our business. In 2018, we knew we needed to adapt if we were going to keep *West Of* going. We decided to reduce our frequency and become a monthly, rebranding ourselves as the *West Of Free Press*. Of course, everyone still knows us as *West Of* (and that's what we still call it, too!). But as a monthly, we knew we could do a better job

continued on page 23 ...

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and offer more in-depth coverage of the issues facing West Ashley instead of trying to “break news,” which was never our role anyway. But we needed our advertisers to be on board if we were going to make the switch to a monthly.

I remember Lorne and I going to Charles Towne Landing near our home in West Ashley to talk about the future of our business. We made a list of our clients; some were weekly, some were bi-weekly, and some were once a month. We estimated that we could probably count on about 60 percent of them to continue advertising once we made the change. To our amazement, 100 percent stayed onboard. It was a testament to the bond between *West Of* and the community and the importance of building long-lasting business relationships.

For *West Of*, as we look ahead to our next 20 years, I’m confident we will continue to adapt as long as West Ashley continues to support the newspaper. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you to all of those who have supported us for the last two decades.

A Heartfelt Thank you

Flipping through our latest issue, I take pride in the fact that quite a few of our longtime advertisers are also celebrating milestone anniversaries this year: Ledford’s Termite & Pest Control just hit their golden anniversary of 50 years; Barks N Bubbles is now old enough to vote and buy cigarettes, A&A Insurance has 25 years under their belt, Consign Charleston celebrates their sweet 16, Swig and Swine hit 10 years last year,



advertiser since 2005
 “*West Of* has been an important marketing tool for St. Andrew’s Parks & Playground’s programs and events for years. They sponsor our Scholarship Golf Tournament every year and help us whenever they can. They are not only a local newspaper but a fabulous community partner for us and many local businesses. Congratulations on your 20th Anniversary!”

— Joddi Collins-Gray, Recreation Superintendent at SAPP



advertiser since 2015
 “Why have I been a part of the *West Of* newspaper for 10 years or more? For me, it’s important to be associated with something that’s heavily involved in its own community. *West Of* is deeply woven into West Ashley’s daily life, demonstrating a strong community commitment. It’s easy for me to contribute to that and be a part of a brand that wants to be a part of everyone’s success.”

— Michael Bessinger, co-owner of Bessinger’s BBQ



advertiser since 2012
 “West Ashley is home, and being part of *West Of* through the years has been about more than just advertising—it’s about connection. Ms. Rose’s has always been a gathering place for our neighbors, and supporting a community-driven paper like *West Of* that keeps us all informed, engaged, and connected is something we truly value. We love being part of the story of West Ashley. Congratulations on 20 amazing years!”

— Amanee Neirouz, manager at Ms. Rose’s Fine Foods



advertiser since 2007
 “I always tell people that it is the community that supports our business. We have always put our advertising dollars back into the community to as many local businesses and nonprofits as we possibly can so that the advertising dollars benefit us as well as our community.”

— Susan Ledford, co-owner of Ledford’s Pest Control



advertiser since 2011
 “Local businesses supporting locals. What Charleston is built on.”

— Doug Allison, owner of D Fresh Hospitality



advertiser since 2005
 “Growing up and owning the family dental practice in West Ashley, I have loved supporting our local West Ashley paper and always make it part of my marketing budget.”

— Dr. Martin Toporek, owner of West Ashley Dental Associates



advertiser since 2014
 “I was just a cook with a dream to own my own restaurant someday, which is why I support Lorne and Lindsey at the *West Of*. To see their dream unfold each month and get to be part of the family means the world to me”.

— Owner & Pitmaster at Swig & Swine



advertiser since 2014
 “I was born, raised, and have lived in West Ashley my entire life. Our office is West Ashley as well, so the importance of advertising hyperlocally is super important to us!”

— Bradley Adams, co-owner of A&A Insurance



advertiser since 2009
 “At Paisanos, we have always tried to be part of our local communities. The ones we live in, work in, and raise our kids in. We try to interact and give back to the people who call our great city home as much as we can. There is no better way to do that than through our local newspaper, which is written and published by people who also live in our community. *West Of* and Paisanos have had a great relationship for over 10 years. Thank you so much, guys.”

— Mark Slater, co-owner of Paisano’s Pizza Grill



advertiser since 2005
 “*West Of* has been a perfect fit for my advertising needs all these years. It has brought me a lot of local business and they have always been so supportive. Best decision I ever made. Plus, I look forward to every issue. It keeps me up to date on all the local news.”

— Clelia Reardon, owner of Clelia’s Guitar Studio



advertiser since 2009
 “Kudos to Lindsey and Lorne for knowing exactly what West Ashley needed; a magazine that is just as hip, mindful and funky fresh as the community it serves!!!”

— Seana Flynn, owner of Consign Charleston



advertiser since 2008
 Having a consistent presence in the *West Of* gets our business ads in the faces (or in front of) the customers we are supported by and focused on.

— Chris Orlando, owner & chef at Mondo’s Italian Restaurant



advertiser since 2006
 “If your target market consists of consumers living and working in West Ashley, *West Of* is the perfect publication for advertising. We have had a great response by consistently placing ads with them ... and we will continue to do so!”

— Holly Clayson, marketing manager for Triangle Char & Bar



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Where Are They Now?

Catching up with past employees who helped West Of make it 20 years ... and counting

by Lorne Chambers | Editor

Looking back at two decades of publishing West Of, there are so many stories that stand out to me. Of course, there are the literal stories that we covered for the paper, some more memorable than others. Then, there are stories from things that happened at the office or outside the office with staff, some more regrettable than others. Many I can't print. But above all, when I look back at the last 20 years, I think about all the people who made it happen or at least made it fun.

West Ashley's community newspaper keeps rolling on, and, hopefully, keeps improving, much like West Ashley itself. For that, I have our current West Of crew to thank, like designer extraordinaire Shanna Thompson, who has been our chief ad builder since last year. Her talent and professionalism make our clients happy and make Lindsey and my jobs so much easier. My friend and former grad school classmate Elise Lusk is doing a great job covering the West Ashley arts scene, with an eye always locked on the local literature scene. Recently added to the West Of team is seasoned journalist Matt Proust, who began covering West Ashley news and happenings for the paper this month. See two of his stories in this edition.

There are also regular contributors like Donna Jacobs, who has written her fan-favorite West Ashley Flashback column for most of the duration of our 20-year run. There's Joan Perry, whose West Ashley Wanderer column and photographs have become popular among readers in recent years. It should be noted that Joan is also a master crafter and created the amazing Coburg Cow newspaper cake on the paper's cover this month.

Columnists from the past also played a role in the story of West Of. Whether it was Andy Brack's political column Brack Talk or Katie Well's entertaining Life Unscripted musings. Andy is now the co-owner and editor of The Charleston City Paper and Katie is the Vice President of Learning and Development at ASM Global

and whose daughter is the coolest kid on the planet.

There's also my dear friend Dr. Jeffrey Gredlein, who introduced me and many of our readers to good beer long before it was even cool. His longtime beer column, The Beer Snob, ran in the paper for over 15 years. Dr. G is a psychology professor at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and lives in Greensboro, NC, with his lovely wife and two dogs.

For this special 20th Anniversary issue, I was able to catch up with nearly all the key employees from the last 20 years. These were the folks who were more than just periodic contributors or spent more than a few fleeting moments in West Of's employ. These are the ones who carried the heavy loads, often during tough times and helped make us reach the 20-year mark.

There are two glaring omissions here. The first is former staff writer Charlie Morrison, who now works at Tennessee State University and lives in Nashville with his professional cellist wife. The other is former Art Director Brian Smith, who helped guide West Of through its transition from a weekly tabloid to a monthly news magazine, redesigning the entire paper and rebranding the company's logo and marketing collateral. In addition to being one helluva designer and a great dog-sitter, Smith remains an elusive man of mystery. The last reports were that he was living somewhere along the Gulf of Mexico, raising turtles and tortoises.

While I regret these two omissions, it was not for lack of trying. Thankfully, the rest of the West Of family joined me on my jaunt down memory lane. Here is an update on what they're doing now and some reminiscences about their time at West Of.

I feel extraordinarily lucky to have worked with so many talented and fun people over the years. I'm even more lucky to still be friends with all of them and get together regularly with many of them. I've been to their weddings, helped them get other jobs, helped them move, and watched their career and children grow.



on local politics, schools, and development issues that impacted West Ashley.

"One of the things I miss the most about working at West Of is knowing what is going on in the part of town where I live," Bill says. "When you know what is actually going on, you see where West Ashley fits into the region's future."

After nearly 30 years as a journalist, Bill now works at the Social Security Administration, where he describes his role as a "down-market Oprah Winfrey," helping the disabled, elderly, homeless, and poor apply for monthly governmental subsidies. If you know Bill personally, then you also know he's also a well-established stand-up comedian in town, often hosting comedy nights at local clubs or performing around the Southeast.

So, why the move into the public sector after three decades of reporting? Ironically, the money, he says. "Apparently, being a writer in a state where so few can read, is a terrible business model," Bill adds. "Good luck, West Of, on the next 20 years!"

Jenny Peterson

Staff Writer, 2023-2025



Jenny Peterson and I first met when she was still a student at the College of Charleston and had an internship at the Charleston City Paper, where I had just started working after getting fired from my crummy public relations job.

Now, Jenny has been a working journalist for 20 years, spending more than half that time in community newspapers. She started her career in 2004 at *The Moultrie News*, covering Daniel Island—a brand new community at the time—her first job/beat when she graduated from the CofC with a degree in media communication.

Jenny moved on to work for more hyperlocal community newspapers throughout Charleston communities, including serving as editor of both *The James Island Journal* and *The Summerville Journal Scene*. She moved back to her hometown of New Orleans in 2009 and served as editor of the *St. Bernard News*, a community newspaper in a suburb of the city.

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Warren Cobb Managing Editor, 2005-2012



When I began planning a community newspaper for West Ashley back in 2004, Warren Cobb was the first person I reached out to. Not only were we childhood friends, but we had worked together at a similar newspaper along the Gulf Coast of Florida after graduating from the College of Charleston.

As West Of's first employee, Warren helped make West Of a go-to source for all things West Ashley. He served as the paper's managing editor for seven years. After leaving West Of in 2012, Warren moved briefly into the world of marketing before enrolling in grad school at the University of South Carolina. He received his Master's

degree in Library and Information Science in 2020 and worked as an archivist in Washington DC for a year before moving back to the Lowcountry and taking a position as a Reference Librarian at the Beaufort County Library at Hilton Head. Last year, Warren became a Research and Instruction Librarian at USC-Beaufort, running the library at the school's historic coastal campus.

"West Of remains one of my proudest accomplishments. My time at the publication was a living example of the idea that if you love what you do, you will never work a day in your life. What fun we had!" says Warren. "We were making it up as we went, so there were very few rules about what a newspaper (or newspaper office) had to be or look like. And while we didn't take ourselves too seriously, we took the work very seriously. We were fun but also idealistic."

According to Warren, community newspapers like West Of are important because they hold local officials accountable and give readers actionable information about the goings-on in the community.

"We set out to try to elevate the West Ashley community into its own thing, highlighting its own traditions, values, and ideals, and to introduce readers to 'the people in your neighborhood.' I think we did

that," says Warren. "And I think West Of has continued to crystalize the community for the past two decades."

Bill Davis News Editor, 2012-2023



Award-winning journalist Bill Davis and I first met in the early 2000s when we worked together and shared a small office at the Charleston City Paper. I covered the music scene, and Bill was on the news desk.

In early 2005, I struck out on his own, opening West Of, and Bil went on to cover the state legislature for 11 years for the S.C. State House Report. When there was an opening in the West Of newsroom, I reached out to my old friend and coworker. Bill was our paper's news editor for the next decade, focusing



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Jenny knows firsthand the importance of community newspapers in informing and engaging with the local community, holding elected officials accountable, and following a news story from its inception in the public setting through a committee and to a final vote. She says she loves interviewing people to understand why an issue is important and always aims to write clearly and understandably.

"From the garden club to city council, everything is important," she says.

Moving back to Charleston in 2009, Jenny worked for local TV station ABC News 4 as an evening content manager, helping make sure the 11 p.m. news had the latest breaking news for residents. Peterson then moved into magazine journalism as the editor of *Charleston Living*, telling stories of the people and places that make the Charleston area such a great place to live.

Jenny joined the *West Of* team as a staff writer in 2023 and enjoyed informing West Ashley residents about important topics, from development plans to the forthcoming planetarium. As of last month, she's now a business reporter at the *Post & Courier* with a focus on retail. She continues to fulfill her high school newspaper class dreams as a full-time journalist and continues to subscribe to the mantra that everything is important.

Joe Felder
Staff Photographer, 2010-2013



In early 2010, *West Of*, like a lot of small businesses at the time, was still reeling from the Great Recession and trying to find its footing again. Enter Charleston native "Photo" Joe Felder, a young, friendly freelance photographer who strode into the *West Of* office one day and said that he wanted to shoot some photos for the paper. Even better, he was willing to do it for little-to-no pay.

Joe's upbeat personality and infectious laugh were a much-needed shot in the arm for the *West Of* team. Suddenly, the little-newspaper-that-could had a real photographer on its staff. The photos that were printed in the paper during those years

were well above the quality that community rag should have. But alas, like all good things, the Photo Joe era came to an end when he married his long-time sweetheart Amy and, along with their dog Stark, headed west ... much further west than West Ashley.

After leaving Charleston in 2013, Joe landed in San Francisco for a stint, freelancing for news and editorial outlets around the Bay Area. Eventually, the Felders moved to Colorado and Joe went back to college, receiving a degree in Mechanical Engineering from Colorado State.

"I now reside in Northern Colorado, where every winter, I find myself questioning my life choices," Joe says, who's now a research and development mechanical engineer at Advanced Energy. But he still takes his trusty camera everywhere he goes. He also looks back fondly on his days with *West Of*.

"Someone told me once, it might have been Warren, that the best thing about being in the news is we got to go to stuff for free and do things that other people don't get to do," he recalls. "And *West Of* was always involved in the best stuff, from running around town for days dressed as pirates for The Almanac or the Cookbook issues, which were always my favorite. Fortunately for me, those came twice a year. We were always in the mix of what was happening in West Ashley. Man, I think it might have been the best job I ever had."

Kristin Hackler
Staff Writer, 2012-2014



Kristin Hackler, former journalist and editor, did not wander far from her writing roots. After leaving *West Of* in 2014, she spent some time ghostwriting for several national organizations as well as a civil plaintiffs attorney firm before landing at Advantage Media in downtown Charleston. At the time, Advantage was a small local book publisher focusing on nonfiction business books, but it soon grew to include the imprints of Forbes Books, Entrepreneur Books, and South By Southwest (SXSW) Books.

Kristin started with Advantage as their first in-house ghostwriter, then developed the role of Ghostwriting Manager before landing where she is today: Director of Book Architecture, where she works with a team guiding new authors in developing the creative direction of their book plan. It's a role that constantly keeps her on her toes, and while it may get hectic, it is never boring.

"I definitely miss my days working with the *West Of* team," said Kristin with a wistful smile. "I mean, you can't beat a job where your day could include going to fun events, visiting new businesses, and meeting all kinds of amazing people, and then writing about the experience. I am so proud and grateful to have been a part of such a great team and an iconic West Ashley publication!"

Erick Pineda
Art Director, 2013-2016



Erick Pineda is uniquely skilled at juggling a lot of projects at once. This is a requirement for independent newspaper designers. But during his time as art director for *West Of*, Erick was also busy running his own bustling design firm, Pineda Design + Photography,

"As a firm believer in seeing locals succeed, I find personal satisfaction in helping Charleston businesses creatively and watching them flourish," says Erick. "I'm proud to have been a small part of *West Of's* evolution, contributing to their brand refresh. *West Of* is such an integral part of our local scene, keeping the community in touch with relevant topics and fostering meaningful connections."

Today, Pineda Design + Photography is crushing it with Erick at the helm, bringing a unique vision and innovative approach to local and national clients. Outside of his professional life, Erick enjoys working on cars, including restoring his 1988 Suzuki Samurai.

"I'm also passionate about golf, exploring new destinations with my family, and expanding my culinary skills," he says. "One of my dreams is to open my own restaurant, blending my love for food and creativity. Above all, I consider my two children, Nico and Isa, to be my most successful designs, and cherish every moment spent with them."

Brian Whittaker
Advertising Sales, 2005-2007



Before becoming *West Of's* first-ever advertising rep, Brian Whittaker and I had met through mutual friends and forged a friendship of our own. At the time, Brian was working his way through college waiting tables at Mondo's Italian Restaurant on James Island and delivering papers for the *Charleston City Paper*, where I had worked until early 2005 when I left to start *West Of*. Brian was one of the first people I reached out to when I did.

"I was about to graduate from CofC in 2005, with a degree in Communications, when Lorne offered me a position in ad sales for his new endeavor, *West Of*," recalls Brian. "I saw his deep commitment to local journalism and his inspiration to serve the

West Ashley community." During his time with the paper, Brian recalls driving up and down Savannah Highway and Ashley River Road, visiting many local businesses and amazing people. In 2007, he married Whitney, and together, they left Charleston to start a new chapter in Richmond, VA.

They renovated an early 1900s house and then moved to the suburbs, where they live with their three sons: Huxley (15), Olsen (13), and Bauer (11). Whitney works as the Finance Director for a former Congresswoman running for Governor of Virginia

"*West Of* helped launch my passion and a career in marketing that ultimately led to my current role as Senior Vice President at TPN, a global agency under Omnicom," Brian says. "I am so proud to have been there at the start of *West Of*."

Will Shelton
Advertising Sales, 2006-2011



Will Shelton joined the *West Of* team sometime around Memorial Day of 2006. For three years before that, he had lived in rural Vermont with his then-girlfriend and future wife, Kim, while she attended law school. During that time, Will began his career in sales, working at Eagle Publications out of Claremont, NH, which had five weekly newspapers and the company's flagship daily paper.

As Kim's graduation approached, their "What Next" plan started to take shape. After three Vermont winters spent taking photos of used cars in frigid temperatures, Will says their decision was easy.

"We traded snow for sand and moved to Charleston, where Kim and I had family and friends from her time at the College of Charleston," he says. One of those friends happened to be yours truly. I had just started *West Of* the previous year and was excited about the prospect of adding an experienced sales rep to the team. So, I connected Will and offered him a similar sales position as the one he was currently doing in Vermont.

"Navigating change can be tough. The *West Of* team – Lorne, Lindsey, Akai, Warren, Brian, and Elizabeth—welcomed me warmly and quickly became my surrogate family, my micro-community," recalls Will. "The job also offered me a great chance to learn more about my new city and meet the small business owners that served as the heart of West Ashley."

Will worked at the paper for just under five years. "During that time, my wife and I celebrated many firsts: our first house, our first dog, our engagement, our wedding (with many of my *West Of* colleagues in attendance), and our first pregnancy," says Will.

Like many soon-to-be parents, Will and Kim reviewed their finances and made the tough decision for him to leave *West Of* in

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March 2011, three months before his son was born.

Since then, he's been at Blackbaud, moving up from an entry-level lead generation role to his current position, where he partners with some of the largest non-profits in the country, helping solve their business problems. Will and Kim welcomed a daughter in 2014 and moved to James Island a few years later, where you can likely find him roaming the sidelines of a soccer field six days a week.

"I still pick up *West Of* and love reading the fantastic hyperlocal content and seeing many of the advertisers I had the pleasure of working with who are still running ads. I think about my time there and can't help but smile. The friends, the clients, the happy hours at Voodoo, the anxious wait for the published papers to be delivered, the smell of fresh newsprint and seeing it on my fingertips, and the old-school Westofus Festivus office parties," says Will, who is still curious as to what exactly a certain attendee had done during one such party that caused him to sneak back in to undo it the following morning out of embarrassment.

"*West Of* was like a surrogate family — a bridge to building my own family. That's why I am extremely excited to celebrate it reaching this incredible milestone of 20 years in business! It is a testament to Lorne and Lindsey's and many other contributors' hard work, dedication, and commitment," says Will. "Over the past two decades, they have not only built a successful business but also made a significant impact on the West Ashley community. Cheers to 20 more!"

Nicole Tomer

Advertising Sales, 2012-2016



When Nicole Tomer, then Nicole Lubold, applied to a Now Hiring post for a sales position at *West Of*, she worked at Mellow Mushroom across the street from our office. She didn't have any experience in advertising sales, per se, but she was great at talking to people. After chatting with her for a few minutes, you can't help but feel like you've known her forever.

Lindsey and I immediately liked Nicole and hired her on the spot. She immediately became an important part of the *West Of* family and for the next four years, she sold ads for us, helping West Ashley businesses reach customers right here in their own community. And even though she has since moved on to greener pastures, she and her husband Courtney remain great friends of ours, and it has been exciting watching their own business take off.

Nicole, a Massachusetts native, and Courtney, a Connecticut native, are the creative folks behind Co Hog, who can often

be found at the West Ashley House of Brews or The Garden by Charles Towne Fermentory, serving New England-style seafood, like clam fritters, lobster rolls, and their namesake stuffed quahogs, aka stuffies.

Courtney is a Johnson & Wales-trained chef with years of experience in some of Charleston's top kitchens, such as FIG, Glass Onion, Edmund's Oast, Home Team BBQ, and Lowland. While he creates CoHog's delicious food, including inventive specials like Mahi Reubens, whole belly clams, meatball grinders, or his recent riff on a classic North Shore Beef sandwich, Nicole still uses that ad rep charm to sell southerners on traditional New England clam shack fare. When she's not slinging stuffies from the back of Co Hog's big red trailer, she works full-time as a project manager at MUSC.

"I will always remember my time working at *West Of* fondly. Not just for the people I met and the work I did, but for the lifelong friends that I met," says Nicole, reflecting on her years at the newspaper. "I'm so proud of Lindsey and Lorne for reaching this landmark and we're happy to support what they do by having an ad for Co Hog every month in the paper. They have always supported us, even helping us design our logo and marketing materials in exchange for a couple quarts of chowder. And that's what small businesses are all about, supporting each other where they can."

Carlton Swift

Art Director, 2005-2006



It doesn't matter how great the stories are or how many ads are sold if there is no way to get all of them on the page. In those early days of *West Of*, the paper was full of ambition and dreams but lacked certain skills in one department in particular. So, I reached out to talented local graphic artist Carlton Swift, whom I had worked with for several years at the *City Paper*. Like me, Carlton had recently left *City Paper* and agreed to step in and help with the ad building and the publication's layout and design for a little while.

What was supposed to only be a couple of weeks turned into a couple of years. Beyond creating all of the ads and making the editorial content look good, Carlton was invaluable in helping install organizational systems that are still in place at the paper today.

If you ask him what he's been up to since then, Carlton will reluctantly tell you about his career as a freelance graphic designer. If you ask about his community work, he'll excitedly tell you about his passion for designing a better West Ashley. And if you ask his wife, she'll tell you he's in the backyard next to his grill trying to design a better plate of barbecue.

"Working at *West Of* helped me

discover the near-infinite number of opportunities to improve our community," says Carlton. "I'm grateful to have met, and to continue to meet, so many residents with a passion to guide West Ashley into the future. And *West Of* has been a huge part of that."

Akai Antia-obong

Art Director, 2006-2013



We always knew we had Carlton on loan, so when he finally did move on, we set out to hire a new designer, ideally one who would be with us for the long haul. So, we had candidates come into the office for a design "test." This involved building an ad from scratch and maybe a couple of other fairly basic design tasks, which should have been pretty easy for anyone with a lick of experience in graphic design. Surprisingly, it was not so simple for some of the applicants.

After several less-than-stellar candidates strolled through the office, Akai Antia-obong rolled in to the office with confidence and swagger. He knocked out a dynamite test ad in a matter of minutes and easily cruised through the other parts of the test. He was clearly head and shoulders above anyone else who we had interviewed for the position.

Since we usually carved out about an hour for the "test" and Akai did it in about a quarter of that time, I told him there was a second part to the test he didn't know about. The entire staff walked across the street to Voodoo Tiki Bar & Lounge. This was not actually part of the test, but he rolled with it, and we had several drinks and got to know each other better. It was clear to everyone that Akai was going fit in perfect with the *West Of* crew.

Akai would go on to be our Art Director for the better part of a decade. He and I spent countless late nights at the old *West Of* office putting the issues to bed. I'm so grateful for his time with the paper and even more grateful that we've remained close after all these years.

"When I joined *West Of* in my mid-20s, I didn't know that it would become my extended family," says Akai. "We were all so young with strong opinions, big dreams, boundless energy, and tons of interests. Amazingly, we shared it all, and while we collaborated weekly to put out issue after issue, we also forged bonds that will last a lifetime. We have struggled together, celebrated together, and also said goodbye to loved ones together. I will always treasure our time together."

Akai now uses his creative energies in completely different ways. A skilled chef who, when not chasing his two sons around, stays busy doing private cooking events and can usually be found behind the bar at The Post House in Mt. Pleasant, where



he is regarded as one of the most talented mixologists in the Charleston area.

Andrew Sprague

Art Director, 2022-2024



Lindsey and I first met Andrew Sprague at the Oak Barrel Tavern, which was located just a few doors down from our office in the Avondale Business District. At the time, we were all regulars at the little beer bar (now All My Exes). So when the paper suddenly found itself without a designer, Andrew stepped up to save the day.

A creative force in Charleston, Andrew combines his passions for design, storytelling, and photography into a career that's left a mark on the region's media scene. With years of experience in graphic design and production, he's worked on everything from business journals to branding projects for local craft breweries.

Since 2020, Andrew has run ABSprague Graphic Design, helping small businesses bring their visual identities to life while also lending his expertise to media archiving and management. During this time, Andrew also worked as the ad designer for *West Of Free Press*. Before that, he spent nearly a decade as a graphic designer at SC Biz News, GateHouse Media, and Gannett, crafting print and digital media that ranged from magazines to animations. His knack for clean, impactful design has earned him multiple first-place awards from the South Carolina Press Association.

Andrew studied at Ball State University in Muncie, IN, before making the Lowcountry of South Carolina his home. When he's not deep in design projects, you'll find him enjoying Charleston and taking in the city's energy and events. Living in North Charleston, Andrew continues to bring fresh ideas and creative solutions to the media world, all while keeping things fun and visually striking.

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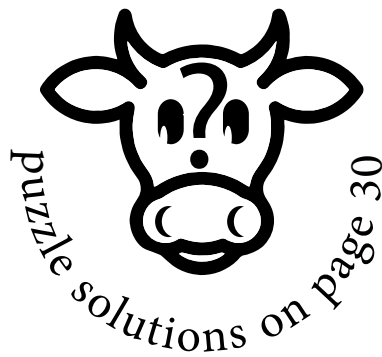
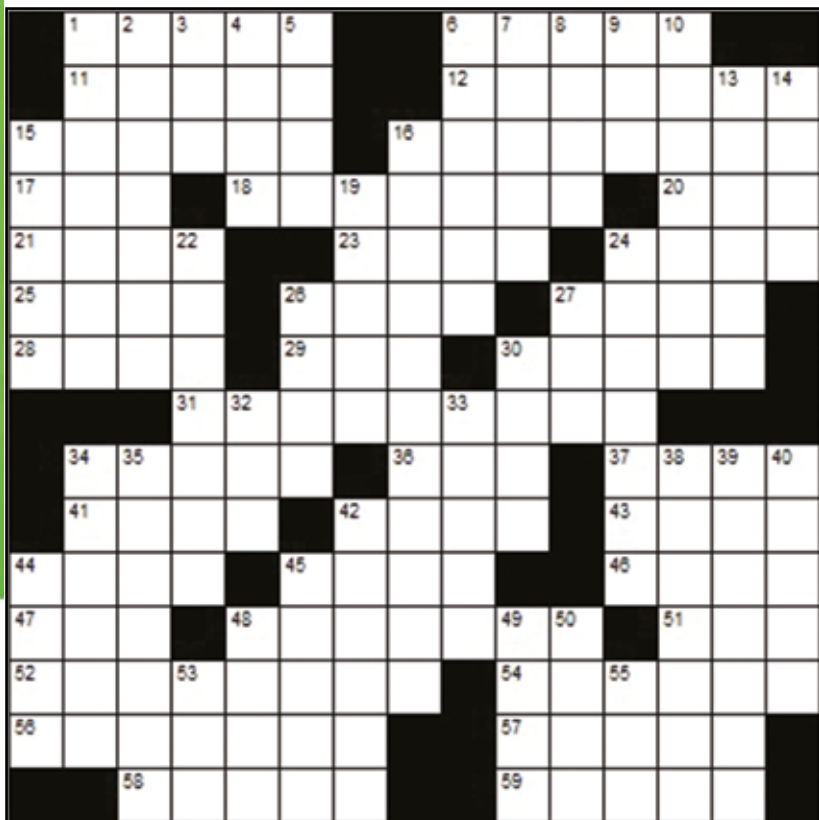
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7	4		6	9				2
	2		1					7
8	5		4					
	9			2				
3	6	4				2	8	9
	8				4		5	3
9				1	7			
2					9			7
			8	6	9	2		

TRIVIA

1. NEWS & MEDIA

After a decade, who announced last month that they are stepping down as the host of NBC Nightly News?

2. FOREIGN FILMS

Nominated for Best Picture, what movie just became the first Brazilian film since 2002's City of God to surpass \$4 million at the U.S. box office?

3. MUSIC

What Grammy-winning musician recently released an album and is now touring under the name Johnny Blue Skies?

4. GEOGRAPHY

Paddington Bear travels to what South American country in the latest theatrical installment of the live-action franchise?

5. REST IN PEACE

Best known for her hit song 'Killing Me Softly,' what R&B legend died last month at age 88?

6. STAR WARS

Diego Luna is set to return as the title character in season 2 of what critically acclaimed Star Wars prequel series?

7. MOVIES

In a controversial move, Amazon MGM became the new owner of what long-running and beloved action franchise?

8. SPORTS

Former MLB pitcher Patrick Mahomes Sr. was scheduled to fight what other former MLB pitcher before the event was cancelled last month?

ACROSS

1. Hurray
6. Floral leaf
11. Rose dye
12. Procedure
15. Stylish
16. Water pill
17. Escape
18. Sample passage
20. Darjeeling or oolong
21. Footnote note
23. Leave out
24. Annoyance
25. Not stereo
26. Scheme
27. Classify
28. Therefore
29. Be bedridden
30. Light wood
31. Decay
34. Wails
36. Boozier
37. Clothes
41. Egg-shaped
42. Not that
43. Curved molding
44. Quarry
45. Not fat

DOWN

46. Trawling equipment
47. Arrange (abbrev.)
48. Doctor's signboard
51. Falsehood
52. Hunting illegally
54. Flip over
56. Bickering
57. Come up
58. Sea eagles
59. Sound of any kind

DOWN

1. Dwell on
2. Wandering
3. Donkey
4. Workshop gripper
5. Black stone
6. Ghost
7. Blow up
8. Harbor
9. Air hero
10. Written correspondence
13. Catnap
14. "Go away!"
15. Poetic region
16. Tearing down
19. Infant's illness
22. Threshold

24. Two-dimensional figure
26. Shallow containers
27. Seated oneself
30. Morsels
32. Ever last one
33. Accomplishing
34. Strong aversion
35. Extra
38. Undying
39. Pensioner
40. Assail
42. Objects
44. Daddy
45. Biblical possessive
48. Tibia
49. Amount lent
50. River in Spain
53. Mongrel
55. Seven in Roman numerals



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Mahjong Game

Weekly Mahjong game with a \$5 PIE. Tuesdays at 6:30pm. Meets at the Pavilion in Shadowmoss (meets in the Clubhouse if it's raining). Meet new people and have some fun! All skill levels welcome.

The Sampler Guild of Charleston

All skill levels welcome. Meets on the 4th Monday of every month at 10am. Old St. Andrews Parish Church in Fellowship Hall, 2604 Ashley River Rd. For more information, contact nancythechief@gmail.com

Soap and Candle Making Workshops

Call for details. Pluff Mud Mercantile, 2408 Ashley River Rd. (843) 872-6022.

St. Andrew's High School 50th Reunion

The class of 1975 on Saturday, April 5 from 4-8pm. Pay early for discounts! \$75 per person if paid by Feb. 15th, \$90 per person if paid by Mar. 25th, \$100 per person after March 25th or at the door. Cash bar, DJ, buffet dinner, casual cocktail. Still missing information for many of the classmates. Join the Facebook group: St. Andrews Parish High School- Class of '75 Reunion or visit the website at sties.google.com/view/standrewsreunionclassof1975. Email davidseithel@hotmail.com or text David at (843) 822-3540.

West Ashley Quilting & Sewing

Meets the second Tuesday of each month at 460 Arlington Dr. from 10am-noon and the 4th Tuesday of the month at Five Eighth Seams, 1888 Raoul Wallenberg Blvd. from 10am-2pm for open sew. Find on Facebook or contact cgb7507@gmail.com.

West Ashley Writer's Group

Established in 1999, this is the longest running writer's group in the Charleston area. Writers of all types and genres are welcome. Free. The group meets on Zoom on the 4th Wednesday of the month from 7-9pm. Message the group here to receive the Zoom link: <https://www.facebook.com/westashley-writersgroup>

PARKS AND REC

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- Cards & Coffee. Fridays, 1pm-4pm. Free.
- MahJongg. Tuesdays, 1pm-3pm. Free.
- Bridge. Wednesday, 10am-12pm. Free.
- Acoustic Music Group. Thursdays, 2pm-4pm. Free.

Bees Ferry Library

3035 Sanders Rd., (843) 805-6892, www.ccpl.org. This library offers a variety of events and activities for children, teens, adults, and seniors including children's story-time, computer classes, crafting events and more.

Charleston County Parks

The Charleston County Parks system offers a variety of activities, classes, and even summer camps. Check their website for more information: www.ccprc.com.

Hurd/ St. Andrews Library:

1735 N. Woodmere Dr., (843) 766-2546, www.ccpl.org This library offers a variety of events and activities for children and teens, including crafts and month-long challenges.

- Homesteading Expo: Saturday, Mar. 15 from 10am-12pm at Hurd Library.. Crafts for adults and kids, demonstrations, popcorn, kids games, learn about homesteading in the city.

St. Andrew's Family Fitness Plus:

1642 Sam Rittenberg Blvd., (843) 763-3850, www.standrewsparks.info. Offers a variety of activities for adults and children.

St. Andrew's Parks & Playground:

1095 Playground Rd., (843) 763-4360, www.standrewsparks.com.
 • Afterschool Program – Only \$85 per week.
 • 2025 Summer Camps Registration starts March 3. Register online at www.standrewsparks.com or in person at 1095 Playground Road or 1642 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. For more information, call or (843) 763-4360 or email jrossignol@standrewsparks.com
 • Pickleball – Tuesdays & Thursdays 10am-12pm, \$2 per person. Bring your own equipment or borrow. All skill levels welcome. St. Andrews Parks Gymnasium, 1095 Playground Rd.

West Aquatic Center

www.ccprc.com
 5156 Highway 165 Hollywood, SC 29449. (843) 762-6160.

SENIORS

Waring Senior Center:

2001 Henry Tecklenberg Dr. (843) 606-7877, www.low-countryseniorcenter.com
 The West Ashley Senior Center offers a variety of fitness classes including yoga, Tai Chi, synergy, dancing, and strength training, for all levels, and art classes. Available for both members and non-members.

OUTDOOR

Caw Caw Interpretive Center:

5200 Savannah Hwy. (843) 795-4386. Register online at www.ccprc.com. Caw Caw offers a variety of children's walks through the forrest and along the waterways, where they learn about animals and their habitats.

- Birds of a Feather: Guests will enjoy wine, beer, and live music from Michael Duff. Fee: \$20 in advance, \$25 day of, ages 20 and up. Saturday, Mar. 29 from 5-7pm.
- Understanding Rice Culture: To talk about land is to talk about rice, who grew it, where it came from, and how the cultivation changed the landscape in ways that are still evident today. Fee: \$10, ages 16 & up. Saturday, Mar. 15 from 11am-12:30pm.

Charleston Parks Conservancy

www.charlestonparksconservancy.org
 • Early Morning Bird Walk – Mulberry Park and Food Forest: Mar. 15 from 7:30-

9:30am.
 • Walk in the Park – Weekly Walking Group: a 10-week Monday morning walking series on the West Ashley Greenway. From Mar. 17-May 19. Meets at John's Island end, park off of McLeod Mill Rd.
 • Spring Community Potluck and Seed Swap: Magnolia Park and Community Garden, 720 Magnolia Rd.

Charles Towne Landing

southcarolinaparks.com
 1500 Old Towne Plantation Rd., Charleston, SC 29407. (843) 852-4200.

Toddler Time at the Animal Forest: Mar. 4 & 18 from 11-11:30am.
 Close Encounters of the Bird Kind : Thursdays, Mar. 6, 13, 20, & 27 from 2-2:20pm.
 From the Collection – Special Artifact Highlight: Mar. 8 from 1-2pm.
 A Defensive Posture (Musket Demonstrations): Mar. 15 at 3pm.
 Stono River County Park 3580 McLeod Mill Rd., www.ccprc.com.

West Ashley Farmers Market:

Wednesdays, beginning April 23 from 3-7pm. Expect familiar faces, fresh produce, F&B options, food trucks, art, live music, free parking, and more. Ackerman Park, 55 Sycamore Ave.

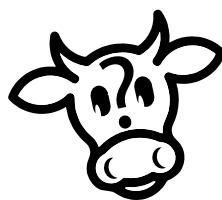
West Aquatic Center

West Aquatic Center/ Hollywood Town Hall is located at 5156 SC-165, in Hollywood. www.ccprc.com for more info.

The West Of Free Press Community Billboard is free listing for events taking place in West Ashley. Please submit all happenings to: publisher@westof.net.

CROSSWORD SOLUTION

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SUDOKU SOLUTION

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1	8	2	9	6	4	7	5	3
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2	1	6	5	4	9	3	7	8
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TRIVIA ANSWERS

1. Lester Holt
2. I'm Still Here
3. Sturgill Simpson
4. Peru
5. Roberta Flack
6. Andor
7. James Bond
8. John Rocker



The Spring Bite is Upon Us

Don't wait, grab your gear and start fishing now

by Captain Geoff Bennett
Charleston Charter Fishing

As colder months end, temperatures have been working their way higher over the last few weeks. Warmer water makes for happier fish and the spring bite will soon be well underway. The usual suspects, redfish and trout, will be the primary targets, and both will become increasingly active. Don't wait a couple of months; grab your rods and start fishing now!

Over the last few months, redfish have been doing their best to avoid hungry dolphins. Now, they will switch modes from just surviving and instead become predators. Redfish remain in huge schools and the most productive fishing will be at low tide when they are concentrated. These fish will be quite spooky so you'll want to be quiet on your approach. Sometimes, the best option is to post up and wait for the school to swim within range of you.

If they are being wary, these big schools of redfish will often turn their noses up at artificial lures. Instead of casting at them to no avail, we'll fish bait on the bottom. Toss out chunks of blue crab or cut mullet on size 3/0 circle hooks. Place your rod in the rod holder and leave the rod be when you see the line begin to tighten. The circle hook does all the work for you, and when your drag starts to sing, you're in business!

The trout bite has just begun. Artificial lures will be your best bet, with little natural bait currently in the water. Fish these lures slowly and try to let them dive to the bottom. These trout are sluggish as well, and it pays to get the lure right in front of their nose. Plastic lures that imitate small minnows are a good choice and the Zman 3.75" Streakz in smokey shad is our go-to choice. Matched with a 1/8oz. or a 1/4oz. jighead, this combination will work well throughout the year.

See you on the water!



For sixteen years, Capt. Geoff Bennett has operated Charleston Charter Fishing providing light tackle charters. Clients choose from a full menu of artificial and live bait fishing options with charters tailored to their desires. USCG licensed and insured, Capt. Bennett is committed to providing a safe and enjoyable charter to anglers of all skill levels and ages. For more information, call Capt. Bennett at 843-324-3332, visit his website at www.charlestoncharterfishing.com or email him at captain@charlestoncharterfishing.com.

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(SELECT) BOTTLES OF WINE

TUESDAY 4-10PM

WEEKEND LIVE

MUSIC

6-9PM

17

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