

Retreat attendees workshop Penny

A workshop on the Capital Penny Sales Tax Referendum brought saw small groups of Sumter professionals together to engage in a fruitful discussion during the recent Chamber of Commerce Retreat in Clemson, S.C.

Under the banner of "Penny Perspectives: Collaborative Action Workshop," the 45-minute session began with Bob Smith and Josh Glenn giving a brief overview of the Capital Penny Sales Tax. Smith chaired two Capital Penny Sales Tax Commissions and Glenn has served as President of the Young Professionals of Sumter for the last two years.

Potential projects to be funded by the tax are vetted for their merits, community impact, and the ability to attract matching state or federal dollars, Smith said. For all three iterations of the penny tax, projects fell under one of four categories: Public safety, transportation and infrastructure, economic development and quality of life.

"One thing we learned – it really takes everybody to make this work," Smith said.

Glenn touched briefly on the importance of word-of-mouth and noted that 88 percent of consumers trust their friends and family over traditional media.

"So that's why it's so important for everyone in this room to go out and be positive," he said.

Several people served as "Penny Diplomats" to report what their group spoke about.

Darlene Sparks said her group discussed the impact of misinformation on the last effort and how to more effectively communicate to the public about the penny tax and what it entails.

Knowing that the projects would be a boon to the local



Ariel Wilkie Floyd, middle, top, leads a Feb. 2, 2024, discussion during the Chamber's Retreat in Clemson. Josh Glenn, below right, and Bob Smith began the discussion and workshop.



and regional economy, she said

"So we have to show our community -- what is the benefit for Sumter?," she said.

Tecca Wright touched on the ballot itself in terms of what it would look like as well as the referendum language.

"So you have people with a clear picture of what they're supposed to do when they get in the moment," she said.

Joint Chiefs Chairman helps dedicate Tuskegee monument



Left to right: Sumter Mayor David Merchant, Gen. Charles Brown, S.C. House Speaker Murrell Smith, County Council Chairman Jim McCain, City Councilman Anthony Gibson, and Pastor Marion Newton on stage during the Feb. 9, 2024, ceremony at Veterans Park.

Sumter's Tuskegee Airmen Monument was officially dedicated as Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. spoke movingly of honoring those who blazed a path for him and others to follow.

Situated within Veterans Park, the focal point is a replica of the P-51 Red Tail Mustang flown so valiantly by African-American pilots during World War II.

After Sumter Mayor David Merchant welcomed the crowd and offered remarks, the Rev. Dr. Marion Newton gave an invocation before the Crestwood High School AFJROTC presented the colors. John F. Kennedy sang the National Anthem and the 20th Fighter Wing gave a flyover of the ceremony.



Top: The Crestwood High School AFJROTC presented the colors.

Bottom: Speaker of the House and Sumter Rep. Murrell Smith.



Sumter County Council Chairman James T. McCain Jr. led the Pledge of Allegiance before Gen. Brown spoke.

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TUSKEGEE, from Page 2

Throughout many stops in a storied military career, Brown said Sumter was one of “his favorite assignments.”

“Being a fighter squadron commander is probably the ultimate. It’s even better than being Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” he said, to laughter.

Brown thanked all those serving our nation and for the sacrifice their families make, “for what they do to support all of us in uniform.”

The Tuskegee Airmen paved a way to change America, he said.

“These Airmen created a legacy of honor and made a lasting impact on our nation,” he said. “It’s a legacy that goes to the noble call of service – a call that resonates through the generations and continues to inspire today,” he said. “We stand here as stewards of that legacy.”



McCain gives update on County Government at Chamber Retreat

Sumter County Council Chairman James T. McCain Jr. gave a detailed update on County Government projects and initiatives during the Feb. 2-4 Chamber of Commerce Retreat in Clemson, S.C.

McCain spoke first for Team Sumter, with Mayor David Merchant also giving a thorough presentation on the many ongoing projects with the City of Sumter.

McCain began by talking about a new 18,500-square-foot apron at the Sumter County Airport that follows the refurbishments of the runway and taxiways, new lights and a new hangar. The \$4.2 million apron was 90 percent funded by the Federal Aviation Administration with 5 percent from the S.C. Aeronautics Commission and 5 percent from

cycling centers. The Cane Savannah Recycling Center, for example, sees about 15,200 vehicles per month," he said.

Rain causes puddles and potholes, he noted, and in looking at the top five busiest recycling centers, the county sees about 60,000 vehicles each month.



"We firmly believe that we serve everyone in this community and we don't want anyone with disabilities or families with differently abled children to feel left out. And that's why we're bringing a Miracle Park to Sumter."

- Jim McCain, Council Chairman

Sumter County.

"Our airport is a conduit for attracting economic development prospects as well as a hub for existing industry," he said. "Top executives crave efficiency."

McCain then spoke about funds Sumter County received through ARPA.

"We're using \$500,000 in funds we received from the American Rescue Plan Act to pave the five busiest re-

"So this is an excellent investment. All told, our 9 Recycling Centers throughout Sumter County see about 84,000 vehicles each month," he said.

Also under ARPA, County Government is using \$2.6 million and a \$10 million grant from the South Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority to upgrade the Shiloh Water System and Wedgefield/Stateburg Water System, he said.

"Two new wells will replace existing wells as we look to improve water quality while anticipating expansion," he said. "To understand the scale and scope of these systems, the Wedgefield/Stateburg Water System has 41.2 miles of water main and the Shiloh System has 43.6 miles of water main."

Along with new wells and treatment facilities, there will be water distribution system improvements, water meter upgrades and existing tank improvements as well. Tap incentives will also be offered to new residents, he said.

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PENNY, from Page 1

It might also be helpful to create a map showing the many penny projects all over Sumter County, she said.

Erika Williams said too many people had the “not for us mentality” during the failed 2022 effort as they



Brenda Chase, top, helped lead a discussion during the workshop, as Cheryl Baker, below, takes notes for her group.



**“If you believe in it,
your people will
believe in it.”
- Lefford Fate**

lacked the information and awareness of the tax. A suggestion of large pennies stationed in front of or nearby projects funded by the penny would be helpful, she said.

Community leaders need to set the tone, said Lefford Fate.

“If you believe in it, then your people believe in it,” he said. “If we only talk about this when we want something as leaders, people aren’t going to pay attention. How we lead is where other folks will follow.”

Ariel Wilkie Floyd said her group was comprised of mostly millennials, “so we thought of ways we would actually help,” such as sharing posts on social media and encouraging her peers to talk about it with others. She also raised the idea of having a “penny mascot,” and showed a sketch of “Penny,” which drew laughter.

Bob Smith said one thing his group discussed was how the 2022 penny referendum was preceded on the ballot by two state amendment questions, which caught people unawares. Using a QR Code as a link to a video that explains the penny might be helpful, he noted.

“You’ve got to talk about what people want,” said Brenda Chase.

A lot of folks took it for granted that the penny tax would pass, she said. About a third of the people who pay into the penny revenue stream are not from Sumter County, she pointed out, “so that’s a good strong point that we need to emphasize.”

PENNY, from Page 5

There are several City and County government projects that will have to get funded, whether through the penny tax or other ways, she said.

“We will have to pay for this, so let that 35 percent coming from outside the community help fund that for us,” she said.

Sumter County Administrator Gary Mixon noted how it’s interesting to hear how the conversations are taking shape. His group focused on quality of life and he found it interesting how each group picked a different category.



Sumter County Administrator Gary Mixon leads a discussion, above.

About 170 Sumterites participated in the Chamber Retreat.



“That’s our community. That’s what it’s intended to do,” he said.

There needs to be a better job of disseminating information about the penny tax to a wide-ranging audience, he said.

“The message is different depending on who you’re speaking with,” he said.

Having a robust speaker’s bureau is key, he said, and there needs to be a better job of educating business and industry.

Cheryl Baker said there was focus on what to differently going forward. Rev. Blassingame spoke of the impact the faith-based community could have, she said, such as a “Pastor’s network,” to provide outreach.

There needs to be some focus on college students, she said, as they’re 18 years old and therefore eligible to

vote, as well as efforts to reach educators in K-12.

“Name another tax where you get to see where exactly how every dollar is spent,” Josh Glenn said as the workshop came to a close. “Can you imagine if the state or federal government did that?”



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McCain then spoke about the County's new Litter Control Officers, Mike McCoy and Nick Murray.

"They both bring a law enforcement background to the job and they're writing tickets for littering, illegal dumping and more," he said.

McCoy and Murray are getting close to a 100 percent conviction rate in court, he said, and people are performing community service and paying fines.

"So watch out, litterbugs. Because we're watching you," he said.

McCain then delved into plans for Patriot Park, which sees about 350,000 people each year and will soon expand.

"We firmly believe that we serve everyone in this community and we don't want anyone with disabilities or families with differently abled children to feel left out," he said. "And that's why we're bringing a Miracle Park to Sumter. If you've seen a game take place before at a Miracle Park, you know the true meaning of inclusion."

Plans for expansion also include a new amphitheater.

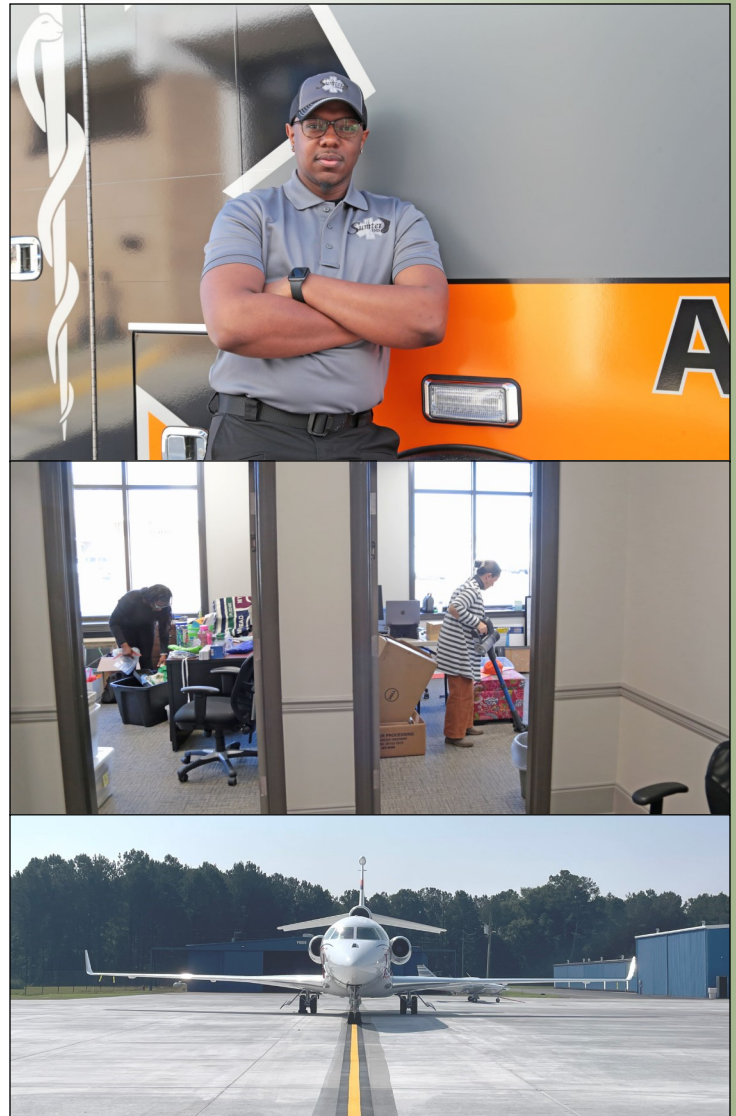
"A few years ago the County and City worked together to host a Lee Brice concert at Patriot Park and it was an incredible success. With a new amphitheater, we can host all sorts of performing arts events," he said.

Magnolia Place's transformation continues, he said, and will soon house the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Probation, Pardon & Parole Services. Clemson Extension is already moving in and in the near future, Sumter County's Office of Voter Registration & Elections will move in as well.

"Just across the street from Magnolia Place is our Emergency Medical Services building. You may have seen some media coverage recently of Chief Kent Hall and his crew," he said. "It's a new year and new look for EMS."

Chief Hall is instituting new uniforms and the County recently took delivery of a new ambulance displaying an all new color scheme.

"It's eye catching and different and meant to attract



the next generation of first responders," McCain said.

Currently in Rembert, Ross Farm Road is being prepped for paving, he said, which was part of the second Capital Penny Sales Tax Referendum. About \$12 million was dedicated to resurfacing and paving dirt roads, and all told, about 21 miles of roads all over Sumter County were greatly improved, he said.

A key factor regarding the Capital Penny Sales Tax referendums has been our ability to match state and federal dollars with local money.

"When our Legislative Delegation and Senators and members of Congress see that we have skin in the game, they're more inclined to help us fund these projects," he said. "Look at the Manning Avenue and North Main Street projects. We allocated \$5 million and got \$11.4 million in federal funds as well. That's huge!"

Litter team meets with church leaders



Stash the Trash!

Sumter County's front line in the fight against litter met with church leaders from Quadrant 4 on Feb. 15, 2024, to discuss how they can get involved in helping clean up Sumter County.

Representing Pleasant Grove Baptist Church were the Rev. Jay Melton, Marion Huggins and Austin Huggins; the Rev. Ernest Frierson of Friendship United Methodist Church; Azilee Dickey of Asbury United Methodist Church; and the Rev. Michael Sykes of Shiloh Christian Church.

"Some of you may be familiar with what we've been doing throughout Sumter County," Sumter County Administrator Gary Mixon told the group, noting how the Rev. Frierson serves as Chairman of the Sumter Litter Advisory Board.

The LAB, Mixon explained, came up with the quadrant concept of using U.S. 378 as an east-west dividing line, and using U.S. 15 as the north-south line. The idea is to focus efforts on one quadrant at a time for the purposes of clean-up efforts, educational outreach and getting the schools, churches, property owner and neighborhood associations involved in fighting litter.

"This has been a county-wide effort," Mixon said.

He introduced Litter Control Officer Lt. Mike McCoy to the group. Mixon acknowledged it's been a challenging environment.

"Litter is a problem all over Sumter County, we all



know that, and it's something only the communities – only the people – can solve," he said. "We're trying to reach every pocket to get them somehow engaged. It's going to take time to change the culture, to reach the youth, and get them to understand this is not acceptable."

The overall goal, he said, is to make our community cleaner, while pointing out the support and participation from the Sumter School District.

Public Works Director Karen Hyatt gave a brief PowerPoint presentation detailing the last few years of

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what has comprised the fight against litter. In 2021, County Council approved a 1-mill tax increase to fund the Litter Division within Public Works, she said, and soon Litter Control Officers were hired. The mission is education, enforcement, and partnerships with cleanups, she said. Once the LAB came up with the quadrant concept, the question became what can be done “to involve everyone.”

Thus far, three Stash the Trash events have been held in their respective quadrants, she said, which have involved cheering contests, poster contests, games for kids, door prizes, and free litter pickup supplies. The City’s and County’s litter equipment has also been on display.

“It’s a time to get together and showcase litter, especially for the young people,” she said. “We’ve had 100 percent participation from the schools.”

A mascot named ‘General KICS, or Keep It Clean, Sumter,’ has been in use as well, visiting schools and clubs, she said. Last year saw 117 litter pickups staffed by about 1,700 volunteers who removed 268 tons of roadside litter. The year before, a total of 253 tons were cleaned up, she said.

Public Works has been focusing a lot of energy on cleaning up the major corridors, and for the enforcement side, 125 tickets were written last year, resulting in 344 hours of community service and over \$24,000 in fines were collected. Those offenders wore ‘Don’t Be a Litterbug’ safety vests while doing so, which motivated them to never littering again, she said.

“It’s not just cleaning up – we want to enforce it,” she said. “Education is also a key component and that’s why we’re out here today.”

Hyatt encouraged them to attend the March 23rd Stash the Trash event planned for R.E. Davis College Prep. She also sought their participation in litter pickups around their churches and explained how Public



Works will be there to provide support, supplies and labor.

“We’re going to be right there with you, helping you,” she said.

Rev. Frierson pointed out how “one thing cleaner communities can do is foster economic development.”



Join Team Sumter
for the 4th Quadrant
litter prevention
kick-off event.

March 23, 2024
11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

R.E. Davis College Preparatory Academy
345 Eastern School Road
Sumter, SC 29153

**Come support our Quadrant 4 schools and churches as they
participate in various contests for Stash-the-Trash.**

**There will be interactive and educational activities for everyone.
The City and County will have their litter equipment on display.**

FREE T-SHIRTS for the First 250 Attendees

Sponsors



**For more information:
call 803-436-2241
or visit**

sumterlitteradvisoryboard.com

Rafting Creek visits county gov't



Fourth and fifth graders from Rafting Creek Elementary on Feb. 2, 2024, toured several Sumter County Government buildings to get a better understanding of their local government. Assistant Administrator Lorraine Dennis greeted the students at Summary Court before they moved on to the Sumter County Library for a tour. The students then toured Patriot Hall and the Sumter County Gallery of Art before heading over to the Sumter County Sheriff's Office for a tour and lunch.





Sumter County Sheriff Anthony Dennis, middle, on Feb. 2, 2024, offers encouraging words to students from Rafting Creek Elementary, who toured the Sheriff's Office. They learned about drones and the aerial capabilities of the SCSO, while also getting a K-9 demonstration before they enjoyed lunch with the deputies. Photos: SCSO PIO Mark Bourdeaux



Mark Bourdeaux - SCSO

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SWAN CON

MARCH 29-30, 2024

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FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 2024

University of South Carolina Sumter
Schwartz Building, Room 127

12 PM FACULTY SEMINAR SERIES

Dr. Andrew Kunka talks about his research in comics studies.

1 PM CREATOR ROUNDTABLE

Roundtable discussion about making comics with guests **Tana Ford, Asiah Fulmore, and Stephanie Williams.**

5 PM DRINK-AND-DRAW

5-8 pm
Sumter Original Brewery
2 S. Main St., Sumter, SC

Join our guest artists to chat about comics, grab a pint, and watch them sketch some impromptu designs. Feeling creative? Grab a coaster and join in the fun!

SATURDAY, MARCH 30, 2024

University of South Carolina Sumter
Nettles Building Gymnasium
10 AM - 4 PM

10 AM DOORS OPEN

Vendors and comic artists

SPECIAL GUEST CREATORS

Tana Ford (Laguardia, Silk)

Asiah Fulmore (Amethyst, Family Time)

Stephanie Williams (Nubia, Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur)

3:30 PM COSPLAY CONTEST

Dress up and win big!

FOR UPDATES ABOUT SWAN CON: SUMTER'S COMIC ARTS FESTIVAL
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FESTIVAL ON THE AVENUE

**THURSDAY
APRIL 11, 2024**

Heritage Night - Remembering the Past
Mount Zion Enrichment Center
315 W. Fulton St
7:00PM

**FRIDAY
APRIL 12, 2024**

11th Annual Golf Tournament
Crystal Lakes Golf Course
Format: 4-Man Captain's Choice
Tee Time: 7:30 AM
Shotgun: 8:00 AM

A Taste of Soul
Farmer's Market (337 Manning Ave)
6:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Featured Entertainment
Renowned Artist and Guaranteed Crowd Pleaser...
Join Us For The Reveal

**SATURDAY
APRIL 13, 2024**

Festival On The Avenue Parade
Starts Corner of South Main & Bartlette St.
10:00 AM

Food, Music & Family Fun
Manning Avenue
10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Featured Entertainment
Renowned Artist and Guaranteed Crowd Pleaser...
Join Us For The Reveal

REGISTER FOR GOLF, AS A VENDOR, SPONSOR OR PERFORMER



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