

COLLETON COUNTY'S

Local Leaders



2018

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SHOULD FEATURE AS A LOCAL LEADER?

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THEY'RE DESERVING TO BE A

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Contact: Kami Merritt at 843-549-2586
Email: kmerritt@lowcountry.com



Publisher
Barry Moore

Managing Editor
Katrena McCall

Contributors
Katrena McCall
George Salsberry
Cindy Crosby
Julie Smith

Office Manager
Rhonda Sauls

Production
Ashli Burris
Amanda Mosely

Advertising
Kami Merritt
Jessica Maynard

Classifieds
Amanda Moseley

**Editorial and
Advertising Offices**
The Press and Standard
1025 Bells Highway
Walterboro, S.C. 29488
843-549-2586
FAX 843-549-2446

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GUNTHER RENCKEN, MD

Gunther Rencken is in a profession in a small town that calls for a special devotion and willingness to serve and care for others — he is a doctor.

Dr. Rencken is a family medicine physician and partner at Walterboro Family Practice, where he has served the health needs of the community over the last 15 years.

Growing up in small town in South Africa, Dr. Rencken says he fell in love with Walterboro because it felt similar and was like home.

“For me, it was like coming home to a small community where folks know each other and help each other out,” he said. “When someone is in need, they get help, and then they help others when they are able. Walterboro, as a community, is very caring and welcoming.

“I love taking care of people of all ages,” said Dr. Rencken. “I take care of their emotional and physical needs. Being a family physician allows me to take care of whole families, often extended families. This allows me to

get a sense of not only the individual, but the whole group, and even the community.”

Dr. Rencken believes in giving back to the community and his chosen cause is to take care of victims of crime.

“I try to help out folks when they are vulnerable, hurt and often unable to afford medical help,” said Dr. Rencken. “I coordinate this with the local law enforcement crime victim’s advocates. Denise Pinckney got me involved many years ago and we continue to coordinate our efforts to take care of crime victims. This enables us to give them emotional, physical and medical help very quickly without them having to worry about financial constraints. My wife, Kim, is also involved and helps provide care to crime victims.”

On his wish list for the community: more activities for people of all ages to be active and involved with.

“I would like to see Walterboro and Colleton County continue

to work on improving activities for people of all ages,” said Dr. Rencken. “The recreation center and swamp sanctuary walking trails are wonderful places for folks to relax and do activities as a community. I think we need more facilities such as these.”

Dr. Rencken, 46, calls living in the Lowcountry paradise. He shares that love of the Lowcountry with his wife Kim and the two beautiful daughters they have raised — Lee (20) and Lauren (18).

“

For me a sense of community is taking care of each other.

Making sure that your neighbors, friends and family are safe and well taken care of.”

DR. GUNTHER RENCKEN
Walterboro Family Practice



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MATT MARDELL



Mardell, 35, was named director of the Colleton Museum, Farmers Market and Commercial Kitchen last year. He moved into the new post after spending time as Colleton Commercial Kitchen manager.

He loves that the position gives him a platform to make a difference. "There are multiple things, but mainly they all center around the fact that I help people. Whether I give a talk at a school about the value of supporting the grow local, buy local, eat local movement, coming up with new ideas for exhibits in the museum to entice more visitors, or helping a food business start-up get permitted and running," he said.

"On the larger scale, I love throwing around ideas for improving downtown and the wider Colleton County with other staff members whether in my department or another county department or over in the city offices," he said.

Mardell envisions changes in Walterboro and Colleton County are on the horizon.

All the work going on right now — the Capital Projects Sales Tax projects and the development of the city's Discovery Center — Mardell said "are great. We are going to reap so many benefits from these as a community."

But, he adds, there is still work to be done. "I want to see some of these vacant buildings downtown get a new lease on life. Assistant City

Manager Hank Amundson and I talk about these things all the time. We have a great downtown — we just need to add a couple of points of interest in the form of public spaces that have a multitude of uses for a variety of our citizens."

Because of his job at the commercial kitchen and farmers market, Mardell said, "I'd like to see more young farmers in Colleton. We have a great market and commercial kitchen that farmers can capitalize on for value-added production. This is the foundation of a lot of things and as we see more and more of these farmers retire, now we are seeing gaps appear in our farmers market that we worked so hard to establish here.

Hardworking and congenial are the two adjectives his wife Holly uses to describe him. He concurs. "I think more often than not, if something can be done, I will figure out the way to do it. I think that's how I've had a lot of success in my current role — just by helping people out and always remaining approachable. How can you not want to work hard and be happy when living in a place like Colleton?"

Mardell, while looking to improve the community, doesn't seek to change the personality of the city he became part of nine years ago.

"Living in the Lowcountry is about being able to slow down and actually take in the world around you. The pace, people, cultures, landscapes, food and drink, life, diversity ... It's

all right here on our front porch. The people in Colleton are a treasure and a joy to talk to. We always have time for each other, even if it is just a quick hello — I have traveled a lot in the world and can tell you there are not many places that can beat Walterboro in that sense. It's one big family of people who share more in common than we know. That's what it's all about."

It builds, Mardell said, a sense of community. "A sense of community is simply about pride. With pride in where you live, you have a community and as a result, you then begin to contribute more to that community. Mardell is involved in a lot of state organizations and works and plays with a number of local groups.

One of his favorites is Friends of Colleton County Animal Shelter. "We always ask for donations to the animal shelter in lieu of gifts for my son's birthday every year. The stray animal situation here is awful for us and the animals. FOCCAS and its volunteers, as well as Colleton County Animal and Environmental Control and the local vets, are doing incredible work."

Matt and Holly's four-year old son Towns sees his dad joining the ranks of fathers volunteering their time and energy. His stepdaughter, Maddie Lucas, 22, rounds out the Mardell family.

Mardell previously coached rugby in Charleston and soccer with Colleton County High School and Walterboro Soccer Club. "I know I'm about to

invest some years into these programs as Towns is now old enough to play."

"Soccer is one of my favorite sports," the English-born transplant said. "It's great for teaching kids communication, keeping them active and fit, and all these skills translate into life lessons."

"We have so many causes here to work for — why not donate your time to one and make the sense of community even greater?"

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DENISE PINCKNEY

Denise Pinckney is a superhero. She is the one you want on your side if the unthinkable happens.

As the Walterboro Police Department's Crime Victims Advocate Program coordinator for the past 11 years, Pinckney admittedly loves her job. During a 19-year career with the department, she has undoubtedly seen a lot.

"I love my job because it allows God to use me as his vessel to give others hope in their time of sorrow and be the light in darkness," said Pinckney. "My job is not about me, but what God is doing through me for his purpose.

"I love this community because the people here have a genuine love for one another," she said. "When someone in the community is down on their luck, there is always someone who wants to rally up some help to assist the person in need. It is that sense of community and commitment to each other that I love — meaning we will all do our part to take care of each other and not allow our neighbors to be left behind. We are our brother's keeper."

A cause near and dear to her heart is a newly formed sexual assault support group. "It is one of my biggest accomplishments," said Pinckney. "This support group will help sexual assault crime victims with the aftermath of

the crime, which is the healing process. This allows them to breathe and release. This also allows them to tell their story to other victims of the same crime who can relate to what they may be feeling or going through.

"In all my years of assisting sexual assault crime victims, it wasn't until recently, when I struggled to reach the victim in one case," said Pinckney. "No matter how hard I tried, I felt like I wasn't doing all that I could. I was determined to find a way to help her with her healing process. I prayed about it and then came a vision to organize the sexual assault support group. It was an answer to my prayer."

Pinckney's wish for Colleton County it is a humble, selfless one. "The one project and dream that I have for Colleton County is to have a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)," she said. "For many years now, I have been transporting sexual assault crime victims to MUSC to get a sexual assault examination completed. It takes courage and strength for these crime victims to come forth and report a detrimental crime such as this sexual assault. They are humiliated and ashamed. They must first speak with the responding officer at the crime scene, then be transported to our local hospital to be examined to ensure they are

stable and then released to be transported to MUSC. Upon arrival, we then wait another hour or two for the on-call SANE nurse to arrive. By this time, the victim has had to recount what happened to the responding officer, myself as the advocate, the local nurse and doctor, and finally tell the intake nurse and SANE nurse at MUSC. Then, adding insult to injury, by this time the victim has been transported from the crime scene in the soiled crime scene clothing she had on during the rape to the local hospital then to MUSC. This is a continuation of re-victimizing the crime victim and it is unacceptable and humiliating.

"It is my goal to have this long-time problem rectified in the future," said Pinckney. "I am my victim's keeper. I am the voice for the voiceless. It is my duty to ensure that my crime victims are less re-victimized as possible."

The 43-year-old Pinckney was born, raised and lived here her entire life. For her, living in the Lowcountry means no one ever meets a stranger. She is married to the love of her life, Dolphus Pinckney, and is blessed with three beautiful children: Amberlynn Pinckney (23), Justin Allan Pinckney (19) and Hunter Ashton Pinckney (17).



“

As the Walterboro Police Department's Crime Victims Advocate Program coordinator for the past 11 years, Denise Pinckney loves her job and will battle for victims of violent crime."

CINDY CROSBY

PAT GRANT

Colleton County's Clerk of Court is not only experienced and recognized as an esteemed professional at a job that she has held for 18 years, but Grant is also a wife, mother, grandmother and community advocate and volunteer.

"I love my job because it allows me to provide service to the citizens of Colleton County," said Grant. "This community is one I love because it is a friendly place where leaders and citizens work together to improve our quality of life."

Retirement is still a few years away for Grant and she jokingly says she'll retire at the same age as the judges, 72.

Having lived in Walterboro for 66 years, Grant finds many things to love in the Lowcountry. "I enjoy the relaxed environment with lots of green space, minimum traffic compared to large cities, strong family support and a strong community."

Grant firmly believes that being connected to those that live in the community is key to being responsible and a positive influence. Because of her dedication to the community, she has served on the Colleton Medical

Hospital Board, Colleton Alcohol and Drug Commission Board and is presently active with the Colleton Training School/Colleton High School Alumni Association Inc.

"The Colleton Training School/Colleton High School Alumni Association is very important to me," said Grant. "We endeavor to give scholarships to high school graduates and work to preserve a 'Legacy of a Rich Tradition of School and Community for Posterity.'"

One of her wishes for Colleton County is to see an Olympic swimming pool built either at the high school or recreation center.

Grant is married to Glenn (71) and they have two sons, Clashawn (45) and Patrick (40), and four grandchildren, Autumn (19), Kavius (18), Payton (10) and Collin (9).

“

This community is one I love because it is a friendly place where leaders and citizens work together to improve our quality of life."

PAT GRANT

Colleton County Clerk of Court



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DAQUAN WASHINGTON

Daquan Maurice Washington is an administrative assistant for the Colleton County School District's Alternative School. Thirty-one-year-old Washington has been employed with the district since 2007. What is not written on his job description is mentor — but he definitely fills the roll and wears the big shoes for the students who come through the doors. In doing so, he is making a difference, one student at a time.

"I love my job because it gives me the opportunity to help the students of Colleton County strive for greatness," said Washington. "A familiar scripture I like to quote to my students, whether it be a past or present student, is Philippians 4:13: 'I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.'"

"I share this scripture with them because it often reminds them that no matter what the obstacle may be, God is right by your side," said Washington. "It also gives them a level of encouragement to push harder and that there is someone depending on them."

At Colleton County's graduation, Washington

has earned an honored spot: standing with the guidance counselors. "Although, I am not employed at Colleton County High School, I work closely with the guidance department to ensure that the students are college- and career-ready. I am thankful that God has placed me where I am for this purpose. If I can just help one along the way, then I know my living is not in vain."

Washington, who has lived in Colleton County almost his entire life, believes the youth are our future and therefore invests in them easily and without gain. "A sense of community means the strength to be able to positively influence the lives of people, the quality of life and encourage a sense of belonging in conjunction with your colleagues and neighbors," said Washington. "Mentoring young people is near and dear to my heart, as I see the need in the community and work as diligently as possible to be a positive influence in the lives of those I mentor."

"I love where I live because no matter how hard I am on these students, wherever I'm spotted, whether it's at the stop light, out eating

or simply in the city, they give me the utmost respect," he added. "It is my hope that there will be more opportunities for growth in terms of recreational activities for students who are limited in means, but otherwise talented."

Washington is the son of Mary Washington of Hendersonville and Warren Delaney of Yemassee.

“

Mentoring young people is near and dear to my heart, as I see the need in the community and work as diligently as possible to be a positive influence in the lives of those I mentor.”

DAQUAN WASHINGTON
COLLETON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT'S
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL



MICHELLE STRICKLAND

Michelle Strickland is one of the few who went off to college, then came back to devote her life to the hometown that she loves.

"While Walterboro may be the quintessential small Southern town, the direction and vision of local leadership is so forward thinking and innovative. We are ready for growth — and carefully planning for it. It is exciting to be a part of this movement," she said.

A 2004 graduate of Clemson University with a bachelor of arts in media communications, her first job was as a reporter for The Press and Standard, then as a photographer, graphic designer, magazine editor and tourism director for the City of Walterboro.

Her present position as marketing director coordinator with Palmetto Rural Telephone Cooperative offers her the chance to assist in the implementation of the marketing strategy for all of its services: internet, video, voice, wireless IT, security and Strickland also handles programming and commercial production for Channel 57. She also assists with community sponsorship: PRTC supports non-profit organizations and community events, as well as PRTC's youth tour of Washington, D.C. and its scholarship program for local students.

"PRTC provides Lowcountry residents with a number of valuable services including a cutting-edge fiber optic network, which not only improves access and quality of life in our rural area, but

puts us in a better position to recruit industry and aid in economic development," Strickland said. "PRTC plays such a vital role in shaping the future of our region. I am proud to be part of an organization on such an upward trajectory."

Strickland served as the vice president of the Lowcountry Resort Island Tourism Commission from 2015-2018; on the South Carolina Travel Tourism Coalition and the South Carolina Travel Oriented Directional Signage Committee from 2015-2018; and is a 2016 graduate of Leadership Colleton.

As chairperson for the Walterboro Criterium, Strickland successfully recruited two other cycling events to Walterboro, which bring an economic boost for the region. FestiVELO (which came to Walterboro in 2016) has now made Walterboro its home. The Carolina Cycling Association Regional Criterium Championship came to Walterboro in 2017 and will return in 2018.

As tourism director, she launched the Brag About Walterboro campaign, "a grassroots marketing effort that focuses on reminding local residents about what they love about Walterboro, an effort that continues today," she said. She also helped organize the first annual Rock In the Holidays Festival, which "brought five organizations together to collaboratively market their events into one holiday weekend."

As a member of the Friends of the Great Swamp

Sanctuary Committee, Strickland acquired \$250,000 in grant funding for the Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary's Discovery Center, a project which recently broke ground and is scheduled for completion next year. "One of my favorite projects was overseeing the installation of a giant red rocking chair at the Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary in partnership with Thunderbolt Career and Technology Center, Leadership Colleton, the Walterboro Colleton Chamber of Commerce and the City of Walterboro," she said.

Strickland recently spearheaded a new concept, a Relocation Marketing Campaign, which is set to launch this July, forming a public/private partnership between the city, the county and several local businesses, including PRTC, in an effort to market Walterboro as not only a great place to visit, but also a great place to live.

"Life in the Lowcountry is so natural, not just because of our natural resources, but because our way of life is like a state of mind," she said. "Walterboro is a place where you can be a part of something larger than yourself, make an impact and really have a voice."

"With all of the improvements currently underway, we need to establish a better culture among our citizens so they recognize the importance of maintaining those improvements — our roadways and gateways into the city, as well as their own property — in order to attract the right kind of growth moving forward. Litter



continues to be a problem. It is difficult because it requires a change in mindset, and that can take some time. That's the goal of the Brag Campaign, to get folks engaged in loving where they live and reinforcing that we should always strive to be better," she said.

Strickland lives in Walterboro with husband Kyle and their two-year-old daughter Anna and attends St. Anthony's Catholic Church. She enjoys spending time with her family, playing tennis and graphic design.



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SHARON WITKIN

Sharon Witkin doesn't seek the spotlight for everything she does to make Forest Hills Elementary a great school. She just wants to help the students and teachers

Witkin, a Walterboro native who graduated from Walterboro High School and Clemson University, is co-chair — along with Liza Catterton — of the Parent Teacher Organization at Forest Hills Elementary School.

She and her husband, Spencer, returned to Walterboro six years ago when he took over her father's dental practice. Today their sons Michael, "almost 10," and Sam, 7, attend FHE, the largest elementary school in Colleton County.

The school's PTO spearheads fundraisers and projects, generating money used to improve the schools. Volunteers work with teachers to determine the greatest needs in the classroom, and support solutions with a series of events and projects.

"I started helping with the PTO during Michael's first-grade year," Witkin said. She began volunteering because "I wanted to be involved, to be helpful, and

to do what's best not only for my kids but also their classmates.

"We try to take good care of our teachers and make sure they feel some love and attention, too," Witkin added. "We also utilize their input on which projects to pursue for the school."

A major, two-year project was raising funds for the creation of a new playground, to the tune of \$20,000. The new playground offers swings, slides and a kid-propelled merry-go-round.

Playground equipment is expensive: After the \$20,000 was spent, the project still required some additional upgrades, such as the installation of handicap-accessible swings.

In addition to an annual Fall Festival, with carnival games, vendors, a trunk-or-treat and displays by local public safety departments, the PTO also sells Yankee Candles and Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

Another project involves setting aside funds by grade to meet state-required science standards. To date, \$6,000 has been raised towards the effort.

"We ask the teachers what they need and identify what it is they're trying to accomplish throughout the year. Working together, we determine how the project dollars can help students achieve those goals," she said.

Witkin, who also substitute teaches at FHE, relaxes by "hanging out with my kids and my husband. That's my favorite thing."

“

I started helping with the PTO during Michael's first-grade year. I began volunteering to be helpful, and to do what's best not only for my kids but also their classmates.”

SHARON WITKIN



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LIZA CATTERTON



County where elementary students were given the opportunity to learn to swim — what a potentially lifesaving lesson.”

“

I love how Walterboro always pulls together when anyone is in need.”

LIZA CATTERTON

Catterton considers her most important role to be motherhood. “I love being able to be home with my boys,” she said. “We don’t have to be as scheduled as some families, and I appreciate that. Like any other mom, I am trying to teach manners, respect and how to be polite young men. I feel lucky I am in a situation where I can work part time and balance my family. I love being able to attend local events with them and knowing no matter where we go in town, we will see friends we know.”

When Catterton isn’t being a “sort of” stay-at-home mom, she can be found helping her husband out at Louie’s Liquor, where she gets the title of administrative assistant and delivery girl, or volunteering as the PTO co-chairman at Forest Hills Elementary.

“I enjoy the few hours each week I am able to work at the store,” she said. “Socialization is what I miss most from not working full time outside of the home. Although I am often in the back office, I really enjoy working the register and helping customers.”

Catterton is highly regarded by the teachers and staff at Forest Hills Elementary, where she is often found lending her support.

“I help with fundraising efforts, staff appreciation activities and help determine the best projects for the PTO to fund that would benefit the largest number of students and staff,” said Catterton. “I most recently helped pull together several science-based projects that would both beautify the school grounds and function as outdoor classroom space for students in first through fifth grade. Our PTO funded a butterfly garden, a large rock and flower bed and two outdoor seating areas with plants.”

As for the future, Catterton is excited about the growth projected for the local community. “I am very excited about the amphitheater that is being built at the new discovery center,” said Catterton. “I also understand the Colleton County Recreation Center will have a splash pad in the near future.”

On her wish list for the community — a swimming pool where children could learn to swim. “I would love to see a facility where swimming lessons could be offered, as far too many children drown in this world,” said Catterton. “We are in the Lowcountry where we have many rivers, lakes and beaches. I recently spoke with an educator in Beaufort

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CHRIS MYERS

Not only does Colleton County have the ACE Basin Sports Complex but they also have an “ace up their sleeve” in Chris Myers, director of parks and recreation.

Over the past seven years, Myers has led the recreation department to becoming a top destination in South Carolina for travel ball and collegiate showcases. In doing so, the economic impact has been felt across the community.

Last year, the ACE Basin Sports Complex hosted 28 weekend tournaments, drawing visitors to stay, dine and shop in our community.

Recently, Colleton County began the renovation and expansion of the 54-year-old Colleton County Parks and Recreation Complex. The \$3,220,000 project is part of the Colleton County Capital Projects Penny Sales Tax and is slated to add approximately 12,949 square feet of new construction including a splashpad, a new fitness facility, basketball court/gym and office space, along with 16,802 square feet of renovation to the current gym, restrooms, administrative office space and assembly rooms.

So, how does Chris Myers manage to keep so many irons in the fire?

“I have always been super competitive in everything — from sports to jobs,” said Myers. “The last two jobs I had, I was told by some people not to accept them because no one could be successful at them. I took that as a challenge.

“The most important project I have wanted to see happen over the last few years is finally happening at the recreation center right now,” said Myers. “The expansion is something we have wanted for a long time. Being able to be a part of the entire new ballfield complex from the ground-breaking to the ribbon-cutting and now being able to witness the same thing with our expansion has been an amazing experience.”

Myers, a Citadel graduate, was immediately attracted to the area because it felt like home. “When I first came to Colleton County to teach and coach, I realized even though it does have a lot of the amenities that a large town or city might have, it still has that small-town feel. The Lowcountry is a special place because

it’s one of the few places within driving distance to the beach, river, lake or even the mountains, which makes outdoor activities like boating, hunting or fishing available almost year-round.”

Myers, at age 33, is helping Colleton County grow and develop. His family has also been growing as he, his wife Courtney and daughter Kinleigh (2) recently welcomed Kaelyn (1).

“

I firmly believe we need to take pride in what we have — and that doesn’t necessarily just mean the places we have, but also taking pride in the people who live and work in our community.”

CHRIS MYERS
Director of Parks and Recreation



STEPHANIE DRAWDY

Stephanie Drawdy can bring down the house — in more ways than one.

Not only does the 35-year veteran Walterboro High School and Colleton County High School choral director know how to put on a show, but she can flat out SING. And, at 57, she is finding her best self — owning it and loving every minute of it.

Over the 35 years Drawdy has lived in Colleton County, she has made a tremendous impact on the arts by introducing full theatrical musicals, not only to her students, but also the community. Honored as Teacher of the Year in 2009-2010, Drawdy has proven music education and the arts have a place in our history and our future.

Drawdy began her career here in Colleton County in 1983 at Forest Hills and Black Street Elementary as the music teacher between the two schools. The following year, she split her time between Forest Hills and Hampton Street. Then in 1985, Drawdy found her home at Walterboro High School when she took over the reins from the much-loved Dorothy Mae Buckner.

Across her career, she has provided travel-based learning opportunities for her students, from singing in a choir across England and France and performing at Carnegie Hall to trips

to destinations like New York and Nashville. In fact, Drawdy’s impact on her students has led many of them to find careers or contribute in some way within the arts.

When it comes to community, Drawdy said living in Colleton County means belonging. “Living here gives me a sense of pride and belonging,” she said. “People here care for one another and want to see each other — and this community — succeed”

The talented educator is hopeful about the future of education. “As an educator, I would like to continue to promote the importance of education in the lives of our Colleton County students, as well as the importance of accountability for their actions,” said Drawdy. “However, as a music educator, I would like to continue to promote quality music education and performances. It concerns me when performances in our community, whether sacred or secular, have been ‘dumbed down.’ Learning the correct structure of music and technique in singing and performance can open doors for our young people that desire a life in performance.

“I would love to see more opportunities for parents to become involved in our schools and community,” said Drawdy. “So many of

our parents, and often students, are working diligently to provide for their families, so there simply is no time left. Many often work more than one job, and sadly, that is not always enough to sustain them.”

Passionate about her family, Drawdy enjoys spending time outdoors at their farm and boating along the waterways of the ACE Basin with her husband William (Billy) Drawdy, her son (Graham) and her daughter (Meredith) and son-in-law (Clark Odum) and her grandchildren Tradd and Parker.

Across the years, Drawdy has established herself as an institution. But that doesn’t mean she is done or that she is ready to retire. In fact, she isn’t fond of answering questions about retirement. And, she is right. After all, she is young, her best self and clearly owning it.

“

People here care for one another and want to see each other and this community succeed.”

STEPHANIE DRAWDY
Colleton County High School Choral Director



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Katrena McCall
George Salsberry
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Office Manager
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Production
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**Editorial and
Advertising Offices**
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GUNTHER RENCKEN, MD

Gunther Rencken is in a profession in a small town that calls for a special devotion and willingness to serve and care for others — he is a doctor.

Dr. Rencken is a family medicine physician and partner at Walterboro Family Practice, where he has served the health needs of the community over the last 15 years.

Growing up in small town in South Africa, Dr. Rencken says he fell in love with Walterboro because it felt similar and was like home.

“For me, it was like coming home to a small community where folks know each other and help each other out,” he said. “When someone is in need, they get help, and then they help others when they are able. Walterboro, as a community, is very caring and welcoming.

“I love taking care of people of all ages,” said Dr. Rencken. “I take care of their emotional and physical needs. Being a family physician allows me to take care of whole families, often extended families. This allows me to

get a sense of not only the individual, but the whole group, and even the community.”

Dr. Rencken believes in giving back to the community and his chosen cause is to take care of victims of crime.

“I try to help out folks when they are vulnerable, hurt and often unable to afford medical help,” said Dr. Rencken. “I coordinate this with the local law enforcement crime victim’s advocates. Denise Pinckney got me involved many years ago and we continue to coordinate our efforts to take care of crime victims. This enables us to give them emotional, physical and medical help very quickly without them having to worry about financial constraints. My wife, Kim, is also involved and helps provide care to crime victims.”

On his wish list for the community: more activities for people of all ages to be active and involved with.

“I would like to see Walterboro and Colleton County continue

to work on improving activities for people of all ages,” said Dr. Rencken. “The recreation center and swamp sanctuary walking trails are wonderful places for folks to relax and do activities as a community. I think we need more facilities such as these.”

Dr. Rencken, 46, calls living in the Lowcountry paradise. He shares that love of the Lowcountry with his wife Kim and the two beautiful daughters they have raised — Lee (20) and Lauren (18).

“

For me a sense of community is taking care of each other.

Making sure that your neighbors, friends and family are safe and well taken care of.”

DR. GUNTHER RENCKEN
Walterboro Family Practice



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MATT MARDELL



Mardell, 35, was named director of the Colleton Museum, Farmers Market and Commercial Kitchen last year. He moved into the new post after spending time as Colleton Commercial Kitchen manager.

He loves that the position gives him a platform to make a difference. “There are multiple things, but mainly they all center around the fact that I help people. Whether I give a talk at a school about the value of supporting the grow local, buy local, eat local movement, coming up with new ideas for exhibits in the museum to entice more visitors, or helping a food business start-up get permitted and running,” he said.

“On the larger scale, I love throwing around ideas for improving downtown and the wider Colleton County with other staff members whether in my department or another county department or over in the city offices,” he said.

Mardell envisions changes in Walterboro and Colleton County are on the horizon.

All the work going on right now — the Capital Projects Sales Tax projects and the development of the city’s Discovery Center — Mardell said “are great. We are going to reap so many benefits from these as a community.”

But, he adds, there is still work to be done. “I want to see some of these vacant buildings downtown get a new lease on life. Assistant City

Manager Hank Amundson and I talk about these things all the time. We have a great downtown — we just need to add a couple of points of interest in the form of public spaces that have a multitude of uses for a variety of our citizens.”

Because of his job at the commercial kitchen and farmers market, Mardell said, “I’d like to see more young farmers in Colleton. We have a great market and commercial kitchen that farmers can capitalize on for value-added production. This is the foundation of a lot of things and as we see more and more of these farmers retire, now we are seeing gaps appear in our farmers market that we worked so hard to establish here.

Hardworking and congenial are the two adjectives his wife Holly uses to describe him. He concurs. “I think more often than not, if something can be done, I will figure out the way to do it. I think that’s how I’ve had a lot of success in my current role — just by helping people out and always remaining approachable. How can you not want to work hard and be happy when living in a place like Colleton?”

Mardell, while looking to improve the community, doesn’t seek to change the personality of the city he became part of nine years ago.

“Living in the Lowcountry is about being able to slow down and actually take in the world around you. The pace, people, cultures, landscapes, food and drink, life, diversity ... It’s

all right here on our front porch. The people in Colleton are a treasure and a joy to talk to. We always have time for each other, even if it is just a quick hello — I have traveled a lot in the world and can tell you there are not many places that can beat Walterboro in that sense. It’s one big family of people who share more in common than we know. That’s what it’s all about.”

It builds, Mardell said, a sense of community. “A sense of community is simply about pride. With pride in where you live, you have a community and as a result, you then begin to contribute more to that community. Mardell is involved in a lot of state organizations and works and plays with a number of local groups.

One of his favorites is Friends of Colleton County Animal Shelter. “We always ask for donations to the animal shelter in lieu of gifts for my son’s birthday every year. The stray animal situation here is awful for us and the animals. FOCCAS and its volunteers, as well as Colleton County Animal and Environmental Control and the local vets, are doing incredible work.”

Matt and Holly’s four-year old son Towns sees his dad joining the ranks of fathers volunteering their time and energy. His stepdaughter, Maddie Lucas, 22, rounds out the Mardell family.

Mardell previously coached rugby in Charleston and soccer with Colleton County High School and Walterboro Soccer Club. “I know I’m about to

invest some years into these programs as Towns is now old enough to play.”

“Soccer is one of my favorite sports,” the English-born transplant said. “It’s great for teaching kids communication, keeping them active and fit, and all these skills translate into life lessons.”

“We have so many causes here to work for — why not donate your time to one and make the sense of community even greater?”

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DENISE PINCKNEY

Denise Pinckney is a superhero. She is the one you want on your side if the unthinkable happens.

As the Walterboro Police Department's Crime Victims Advocate Program coordinator for the past 11 years, Pinckney admittedly loves her job. During a 19-year career with the department, she has undoubtedly seen a lot.

"I love my job because it allows God to use me as his vessel to give others hope in their time of sorrow and be the light in darkness," said Pinckney. "My job is not about me, but what God is doing through me for his purpose.

"I love this community because the people here have a genuine love for one another," she said. "When someone in the community is down on their luck, there is always someone who wants to rally up some help to assist the person in need. It is that sense of community and commitment to each other that I love — meaning we will all do our part to take care of each other and not allow our neighbors to be left behind. We are our brother's keeper."

A cause near and dear to her heart is a newly formed sexual assault support group. "It is one of my biggest accomplishments," said Pinckney. "This support group will help sexual assault crime victims with the aftermath of

the crime, which is the healing process. This allows them to breathe and release. This also allows them to tell their story to other victims of the same crime who can relate to what they may be feeling or going through.

"In all my years of assisting sexual assault crime victims, it wasn't until recently, when I struggled to reach the victim in one case," said Pinckney. "No matter how hard I tried, I felt like I wasn't doing all that I could. I was determined to find a way to help her with her healing process. I prayed about it and then came a vision to organize the sexual assault support group. It was an answer to my prayer."

Pinckney's wish for Colleton County it is a humble, selfless one. "The one project and dream that I have for Colleton County is to have a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)," she said. "For many years now, I have been transporting sexual assault crime victims to MUSC to get a sexual assault examination completed. It takes courage and strength for these crime victims to come forth and report a detrimental crime such as this sexual assault. They are humiliated and ashamed. They must first speak with the responding officer at the crime scene, then be transported to our local hospital to be examined to ensure they are

stable and then released to be transported to MUSC. Upon arrival, we then wait another hour or two for the on-call SANE nurse to arrive. By this time, the victim has had to recount what happened to the responding officer, myself as the advocate, the local nurse and doctor, and finally tell the intake nurse and SANE nurse at MUSC. Then, adding insult to injury, by this time the victim has been transported from the crime scene in the soiled crime scene clothing she had on during the rape to the local hospital then to MUSC. This is a continuation of re-victimizing the crime victim and it is unacceptable and humiliating.

"It is my goal to have this long-time problem rectified in the future," said Pinckney. "I am my victim's keeper. I am the voice for the voiceless. It is my duty to ensure that my crime victims are less re-victimized as possible."

The 43-year-old Pinckney was born, raised and lived here her entire life. For her, living in the Lowcountry means no one ever meets a stranger. She is married to the love of her life, Dolphus Pinckney, and is blessed with three beautiful children: Amberlynn Pinckney (23), Justin Allan Pinckney (19) and Hunter Ashton Pinckney (17).



“

As the Walterboro Police Department's Crime Victims Advocate Program coordinator for the past 11 years, Denise Pinckney loves her job and will battle for victims of violent crime."

CINDY CROSBY

PAT GRANT

Colleton County's Clerk of Court is not only experienced and recognized as an esteemed professional at a job that she has held for 18 years, but Grant is also a wife, mother, grandmother and community advocate and volunteer.

"I love my job because it allows me to provide service to the citizens of Colleton County," said Grant. "This community is one I love because it is a friendly place where leaders and citizens work together to improve our quality of life."

Retirement is still a few years away for Grant and she jokingly says she'll retire at the same age as the judges, 72.

Having lived in Walterboro for 66 years, Grant finds many things to love in the Lowcountry. "I enjoy the relaxed environment with lots of green space, minimum traffic compared to large cities, strong family support and a strong community."

Grant firmly believes that being connected to those that live in the community is key to being responsible and a positive influence. Because of her dedication to the community, she has served on the Colleton Medical

Hospital Board, Colleton Alcohol and Drug Commission Board and is presently active with the Colleton Training School/Colleton High School Alumni Association Inc.

"The Colleton Training School/Colleton High School Alumni Association is very important to me," said Grant. "We endeavor to give scholarships to high school graduates and work to preserve a 'Legacy of a Rich Tradition of School and Community for Posterity.'"

One of her wishes for Colleton County is to see an Olympic swimming pool built either at the high school or recreation center.

Grant is married to Glenn (71) and they have two sons, Clashawn (45) and Patrick (40), and four grandchildren, Autumn (19), Kavius (18), Payton (10) and Collin (9).

“

This community is one I love because it is a friendly place where leaders and citizens work together to improve our quality of life."

PAT GRANT

Colleton County Clerk of Court



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DAQUAN WASHINGTON

Daquan Maurice Washington is an administrative assistant for the Colleton County School District's Alternative School. Thirty-one-year-old Washington has been employed with the district since 2007. What is not written on his job description is mentor — but he definitely fills the roll and wears the big shoes for the students who come through the doors. In doing so, he is making a difference, one student at a time.

“I love my job because it gives me the opportunity to help the students of Colleton County strive for greatness,” said Washington. “A familiar scripture I like to quote to my students, whether it be a past or present student, is Philippians 4:13: ‘I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.’

“I share this scripture with them because it often reminds them that no matter what the obstacle may be, God is right by your side,” said Washington. “It also gives them a level of encouragement to push harder and that there is someone depending on them.”

At Colleton County's graduation, Washington

has earned an honored spot: standing with the guidance counselors. “Although, I am not employed at Colleton County High School, I work closely with the guidance department to ensure that the students are college- and career-ready. I am thankful that God has placed me where I am for this purpose. If I can just help one along the way, then I know my living is not in vain.”

Washington, who has lived in Colleton County almost his entire life, believes the youth are our future and therefore invests in them easily and without gain. “A sense of community means the strength to be able to positively influence the lives of people, the quality of life and encourage a sense of belonging in conjunction with your colleagues and neighbors,” said Washington. “Mentoring young people is near and dear to my heart, as I see the need in the community and work as diligently as possible to be a positive influence in the lives of those I mentor.

“I love where I live because no matter how hard I am on these students, wherever I'm spotted, whether it's at the stop light, out eating

or simply in the city, they give me the utmost respect,” he added. “It is my hope that there will be more opportunities for growth in terms of recreational activities for students who are limited in means, but otherwise talented.”

Washington is the son of Mary Washington of Hendersonville and Warren Delaney of Yemassee.

“

Mentoring young people is near and dear to my heart, as I see the need in the community and work as diligently as possible to be a positive influence in the lives of those I mentor.”

DAQUAN WASHINGTON
COLLETON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT'S
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL



MICHELLE STRICKLAND

Michelle Strickland is one of the few who went off to college, then came back to devote her life to the hometown that she loves.

“While Walterboro may be the quintessential small Southern town, the direction and vision of local leadership is so forward thinking and innovative. We are ready for growth — and carefully planning for it. It is exciting to be a part of this movement,” she said.

A 2004 graduate of Clemson University with a bachelor of arts in media communications, her first job was as a reporter for The Press and Standard, then as a photographer, graphic designer, magazine editor and tourism director for the City of Walterboro.

Her present position as marketing director coordinator with Palmetto Rural Telephone Cooperative offers her the chance to assist in the implementation of the marketing strategy for all of its services: internet, video, voice, wireless IT, security and Strickland also handles programming and commercial production for Channel 57. She also assists with community sponsorship: PRTC supports non-profit organizations and community events, as well as PRTC's youth tour of Washington, D.C. and its scholarship program for local students.

“PRTC provides Lowcountry residents with a number of valuable services including a cutting-edge fiber optic network, which not only improves access and quality of life in our rural area, but

puts us in a better position to recruit industry and aid in economic development,” Strickland said. “PRTC plays such a vital role in shaping the future of our region. I am proud to be part of an organization on such an upward trajectory.”

Strickland served as the vice president of the Lowcountry Resort Island Tourism Commission from 2015-2018; on the South Carolina Travel Tourism Coalition and the South Carolina Travel Oriented Directional Signage Committee from 2015-2018; and is a 2016 graduate of Leadership Colleton.

As chairperson for the Walterboro Criterium, Strickland successfully recruited two other cycling events to Walterboro, which bring an economic boost for the region. FestiVELO (which came to Walterboro in 2016) has now made Walterboro its home. The Carolina Cycling Association Regional Criterium Championship came to Walterboro in 2017 and will return in 2018.

As tourism director, she launched the Brag About Walterboro campaign, “a grassroots marketing effort that focuses on reminding local residents about what they love about Walterboro, an effort that continues today,” she said. She also helped organize the first annual Rock In the Holidays Festival, which “brought five organizations together to collaboratively market their events into one holiday weekend.”

As a member of the Friends of the Great Swamp

Sanctuary Committee, Strickland acquired \$250,000 in grant funding for the Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary's Discovery Center, a project which recently broke ground and is scheduled for completion next year. “One of my favorite projects was overseeing the installation of a giant red rocking chair at the Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary in partnership with Thunderbolt Career and Technology Center, Leadership Colleton, the Walterboro Colleton Chamber of Commerce and the City of Walterboro,” she said.

Strickland recently spearheaded a new concept, a Relocation Marketing Campaign, which is set to launch this July, forming a public/private partnership between the city, the county and several local businesses, including PRTC, in an effort to market Walterboro as not only a great place to visit, but also a great place to live.

“Life in the Lowcountry is so natural, not just because of our natural resources, but because our way of life is like a state of mind,” she said. “Walterboro is a place where you can be a part of something larger than yourself, make an impact and really have a voice.”

“With all of the improvements currently underway, we need to establish a better culture among our citizens so they recognize the importance of maintaining those improvements — our roadways and gateways into the city, as well as their own property — in order to attract the right kind of growth moving forward. Litter



continues to be a problem. It is difficult because it requires a change in mindset, and that can take some time. That's the goal of the Brag Campaign, to get folks engaged in loving where they live and reinforcing that we should always strive to be better,” she said.

Strickland lives in Walterboro with husband Kyle and their two-year-old daughter Anna and attends St. Anthony's Catholic Church. She enjoys spending time with her family, playing tennis and graphic design.



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SHARON WITKIN

Sharon Witkin doesn't seek the spotlight for everything she does to make Forest Hills Elementary a great school. She just wants to help the students and teachers

Witkin, a Walterboro native who graduated from Walterboro High School and Clemson University, is co-chair — along with Liza Catterton — of the Parent Teacher Organization at Forest Hills Elementary School.

She and her husband, Spencer, returned to Walterboro six years ago when he took over her father's dental practice. Today their sons Michael, "almost 10," and Sam, 7, attend FHE, the largest elementary school in Colleton County.

The school's PTO spearheads fundraisers and projects, generating money used to improve the schools. Volunteers work with teachers to determine the greatest needs in the classroom, and support solutions with a series of events and projects.

"I started helping with the PTO during Michael's first-grade year," Witkin said. She began volunteering because "I wanted to be involved, to be helpful, and

to do what's best not only for my kids but also their classmates.

"We try to take good care of our teachers and make sure they feel some love and attention, too," Witkin added. "We also utilize their input on which projects to pursue for the school."

A major, two-year project was raising funds for the creation of a new playground, to the tune of \$20,000. The new playground offers swings, slides and a kid-propelled merry-go-round.

Playground equipment is expensive: After the \$20,000 was spent, the project still required some additional upgrades, such as the installation of handicap-accessible swings.

In addition to an annual Fall Festival, with carnival games, vendors, a trunk-or-treat and displays by local public safety departments, the PTO also sells Yankee Candles and Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

Another project involves setting aside funds by grade to meet state-required science standards. To date, \$6,000 has been raised towards the effort.

"We ask the teachers what they need and identify what it is they're trying to accomplish throughout the year. Working together, we determine how the project dollars can help students achieve those goals," she said.

Witkin, who also substitute teaches at FHE, relaxes by "hanging out with my kids and my husband. That's my favorite thing."

“

I started helping with the PTO during Michael's first-grade year. I began volunteering to be helpful, and to do what's best not only for my kids but also their classmates.”

SHARON WITKIN



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LIZA CATTERTON



County where elementary students were given the opportunity to learn to swim — what a potentially lifesaving lesson.”

“

I love how Walterboro always pulls together when anyone is in need.”

LIZA CATTERTON

Born here. Grew up here. Married here. Raising her family here. Goes to church here. Owns a local business here.

In fact, “here” is the only thing Liza Catterton really knows — and she doesn’t mind that in the least.

The 42-year-old “sort of” stay-at-home mom to Grayson (10) and Walker (7) and wife to Louie (48) is not sure what not being “here” even means.

“I am not sure what it means to not live here in the Lowcountry,” said Catterton. “I would say the best part of living in this area is we have a small town atmosphere, a strong sense of community and we are only an hour from three major cities. I love the ease of a short drive to the river, beach, mall or an international airport, but we do not have to deal with the traffic of a big city just to get to the grocery store or work.”

Why stay here? “I love how Walterboro always pulls together when anyone is in need,” said Catterton. “I love that the local businesses support local events and the schools. Our children enjoy the parks and trails around town and love being part of the Children’s Theater each year.”

Catterton considers her most important role to be motherhood. “I love being able to be home with my boys,” she said. “We don’t have to be as scheduled as some families, and I appreciate that. Like any other mom, I am trying to teach manners, respect and how to be polite young men. I feel lucky I am in a situation where I can work part time and balance my family. I love being able to attend local events with them and knowing no matter where we go in town, we will see friends we know.”

When Catterton isn’t being a “sort of” stay-at-home mom, she can be found helping her husband out at Louie’s Liquor, where she gets the title of administrative assistant and delivery girl, or volunteering as the PTO co-chairman at Forest Hills Elementary.

“I enjoy the few hours each week I am able to work at the store,” she said. “Socialization is what I miss most from not working full time outside of the home. Although I am often in the back office, I really enjoy working the register and helping customers.”

Catterton is highly regarded by the teachers and staff at Forest Hills Elementary, where she is often found lending her support.

“I help with fundraising efforts, staff appreciation activities and help determine the best projects for the PTO to fund that would benefit the largest number of students and staff,” said Catterton. “I most recently helped pull together several science-based projects that would both beautify the school grounds and function as outdoor classroom space for students in first through fifth grade. Our PTO funded a butterfly garden, a large rock and flower bed and two outdoor seating areas with plants.”

As for the future, Catterton is excited about the growth projected for the local community. “I am very excited about the amphitheater that is being built at the new discovery center,” said Catterton. “I also understand the Colleton County Recreation Center will have a splash pad in the near future.”

On her wish list for the community — a swimming pool where children could learn to swim. “I would love to see a facility where swimming lessons could be offered, as far too many children drown in this world,” said Catterton. “We are in the Lowcountry where we have many rivers, lakes and beaches. I recently spoke with an educator in Beaufort

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CHRIS MYERS

Not only does Colleton County have the ACE Basin Sports Complex but they also have an “ace up their sleeve” in Chris Myers, director of parks and recreation.

Over the past seven years, Myers has led the recreation department to becoming a top destination in South Carolina for travel ball and collegiate showcases. In doing so, the economic impact has been felt across the community.

Last year, the ACE Basin Sports Complex hosted 28 weekend tournaments, drawing visitors to stay, dine and shop in our community.

Recently, Colleton County began the renovation and expansion of the 54-year-old Colleton County Parks and Recreation Complex. The \$3,220,000 project is part of the Colleton County Capital Projects Penny Sales Tax and is slated to add approximately 12,949 square feet of new construction including a splashpad, a new fitness facility, basketball court/gym and office space, along with 16,802 square feet of renovation to the current gym, restrooms, administrative office space and assembly rooms.

So, how does Chris Myers manage to keep so many irons in the fire?

“I have always been super competitive in everything — from sports to jobs,” said Myers. “The last two jobs I had, I was told by some people not to accept them because no one could be successful at them. I took that as a challenge.

“The most important project I have wanted to see happen over the last few years is finally happening at the recreation center right now,” said Myers. “The expansion is something we have wanted for a long time. Being able to be a part of the entire new ballfield complex from the ground-breaking to the ribbon-cutting and now being able to witness the same thing with our expansion has been an amazing experience.”

Myers, a Citadel graduate, was immediately attracted to the area because it felt like home. “When I first came to Colleton County to teach and coach, I realized even though it does have a lot of the amenities that a large town or city might have, it still has that small-town feel. The Lowcountry is a special place because

it’s one of the few places within driving distance to the beach, river, lake or even the mountains, which makes outdoor activities like boating, hunting or fishing available almost year-round.”

Myers, at age 33, is helping Colleton County grow and develop. His family has also been growing as he, his wife Courtney and daughter Kinleigh (2) recently welcomed Kaelyn (1).

“

I firmly believe we need to take pride in what we have — and that doesn’t necessarily just mean the places we have, but also taking pride in the people who live and work in our community.”

CHRIS MYERS
Director of Parks and Recreation



STEPHANIE DRAWDY

Stephanie Drawdy can bring down the house — in more ways than one.

Not only does the 35-year veteran Walterboro High School and Colleton County High School choral director know how to put on a show, but she can flat out SING. And, at 57, she is finding her best self — owning it and loving every minute of it.

Over the 35 years Drawdy has lived in Colleton County, she has made a tremendous impact on the arts by introducing full theatrical musicals, not only to her students, but also the community. Honored as Teacher of the Year in 2009-2010, Drawdy has proven music education and the arts have a place in our history and our future.

Drawdy began her career here in Colleton County in 1983 at Forest Hills and Black Street Elementary as the music teacher between the two schools. The following year, she split her time between Forest Hills and Hampton Street. Then in 1985, Drawdy found her home at Walterboro High School when she took over the reins from the much-loved Dorothy Mae Buckner.

Across her career, she has provided travel-based learning opportunities for her students, from singing in a choir across England and France and performing at Carnegie Hall to trips

to destinations like New York and Nashville. In fact, Drawdy’s impact on her students has led many of them to find careers or contribute in some way within the arts.

When it comes to community, Drawdy said living in Colleton County means belonging. “Living here gives me a sense of pride and belonging,” she said. “People here care for one another and want to see each other — and this community — succeed”

The talented educator is hopeful about the future of education. “As an educator, I would like to continue to promote the importance of education in the lives of our Colleton County students, as well as the importance of accountability for their actions,” said Drawdy. “However, as a music educator, I would like to continue to promote quality music education and performances. It concerns me when performances in our community, whether sacred or secular, have been ‘dumbed down.’ Learning the correct structure of music and technique in singing and performance can open doors for our young people that desire a life in performance.

“I would love to see more opportunities for parents to become involved in our schools and community,” said Drawdy. “So many of

our parents, and often students, are working diligently to provide for their families, so there simply is no time left. Many often work more than one job, and sadly, that is not always enough to sustain them.”

Passionate about her family, Drawdy enjoys spending time outdoors at their farm and boating along the waterways of the ACE Basin with her husband William (Billy) Drawdy, her son (Graham) and her daughter (Meredith) and son-in-law (Clark Odum) and her grandchildren Tradd and Parker.

Across the years, Drawdy has established herself as an institution. But that doesn’t mean she is done or that she is ready to retire. In fact, she isn’t fond of answering questions about retirement. And, she is right. After all, she is young, her best self and clearly owning it.

“

People here care for one another and want to see each other and this community succeed.”

STEPHANIE DRAWDY
Colleton County High School Choral Director



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