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Horry County schools ready for classroom plexiglass installation

BY KATIE POWELL
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Horry County Schools is on schedule to begin plexiglass installation in all of the district's elementary schools later this week paving the way for a possible resumption of five-day school.

"The installs will take place Friday through Sundays," said HCS Spokesperson Lisa Bourcier. "We received confirmation from the vendor that the plexiglass installation will begin after school on November 19."

While no decisions have been made yet regarding when five-day instruction will begin, Bourcier said, the district reiterated that parents would receive plenty of notice before any schedule change occurred.

"As mentioned and voted on during the Oct. 19 board meeting, a minimum of five calendar days' notice will be sent to parents before a change in the instructional model is implemented unless an emergency at an individual brick-and-mortar school warrants an immediate change of that individual brick-and-mortar school's schedule," Bourcier said.

The South Carolina Department of Education is footing the bill for the \$4 million installation.

The use of plexiglass, according to new guidance from the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, says that students could safely be three feet apart instead of six, while still wearing masks.

The plexiglass will surround the front three sides of the students' desks, and extend a foot above their head.

Across social media, some parents had mixed feelings about the use of plexiglass.

Stacey McClure, the mother of a high schooler in the district, said that she thinks the plexiglass is a "waste of the state's money."

"This is not making the kids any safer, as COVID is airborne and can enter from the back ... or over the top of the plexiglass," McClure said. "It's just more for the school to have to sanitize between switches in

classes."

She said the money would be better used for more hot water, sanitizer and soap in the bathrooms, and said more could be done with the state's money to make the children wear their masks and keep them socially-distanced.

"Not saying they shouldn't be playing contact sports, but if you are that worried that you are spending millions on plexiglass, then should they be playing close contact sports with no barriers in between them?" McClure said.

She said she'd rather the district use that money for teacher raises.

"They are doing twice the work and putting in twice the time, and are so burnt out and getting tired and frustrated because they feel they are not appreciated," McClure said. "They deserve more for all they are doing with what they have been given."

Mrs. Deb Bennett, a veteran educator in the district, said she thought the plexiglass would be a great step towards protecting students, faculty, and staff.

"It shows that the district has put thought into our wellbeing. It's not a wasted investment. I applaud the district for showing a commitment to safe and healthy environments," Bennett said.

The district has also partnered with a different company for the portion of the plexiglass frames that needed to be configured differently due to some schools using different table setups. Those setups will begin to be installed around November 16, said Chief Officer of Support Services Daryl Brown during last week's meeting.

"Once we get done with elementary, we will immediately go into middle and high. One at a time," Brown said, and hopes middle and high schools can begin installation before the holiday break.

As of Tuesday evening, Horry County Schools COVID-19 Dashboard numbers show 25 current cases in the district, with 14 students and 11 staff members affected.



JANET MORGAN / THE LORIS SCENE

Lash Bragan's musical experience was limited to playing a recorder as a child. But he asked his family for a bugle on Father's Day so he could learn to play Taps in honor of veterans.

Honoring those who served

BY LARRY C. TIMBS JR.
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Nearly every day at dusk, an enchanting sound of "Taps" emerges from Lash Bragan's backyard.

Bragan, the bugler playing the solemn song, picked up the instrument for the first time last year. Before that, he had never played anything other than a recorder in the fourth grade. But the 54-year-old U.S. Army veteran wanted to honor service men and women with a serious, authentic sound.

"For those of us who served our country, we deserve a real person sounding 'Taps,' not a recording," said Bragan, who lives in the Southwood neighborhood between S.C. 544 and U.S. 17 Bypass.

It's called "sounding Taps" when someone's actually playing the tune through the bugle. This is the forlorn, captivating melody that's often played by a single bugle or trumpet and heard at military funerals, wreath laying services and memorial ceremonies.

Bragan served in the Army for four years in the late 1980s and was part of a security detail for a mobile nuclear missile unit in Germany. His bugling began after he went to the 30th reunion of his Army outfit.

That's where he discovered that five of the soldiers he had served with had passed away. He also learned that many renditions of "Taps" played at funerals come from a digital bugle.

"The person on the honor guard is holding up a fake bugle," Bragan said. "There's a speaker inside it, and that's the sound that's playing the 'Taps.' ... I thought, wait a minute. That's not right. So I made up my mind. I said, 'I'm going to learn how to sound 'Taps.' ... At least those five people that I served with that are gone, I can sound 'Taps' in their honor. They would have a person sounding 'Taps' for them and it's not a recording."

Bragan's family gave him a bugle as a Father's Day gift last year. With the help of a booklet that came with the instrument and a YouTube tutorial, he gradually learned to play.

He sounded his first "Taps" at a gravesite on Jan. 11, and then his daughter helped him create a Facebook page. It's called "TAPS The Last Salute."

He's been sounding and posting on that page every night. And then someone from his nuclear missile unit reached out to him and said maybe he could sound for all of the Persian soldiers (members of that

missile group) who had died.

Bragan asked for a list. The one he received included 500 names, and he's working through it now. He's also started getting more requests, so many he's afraid he might not be able to keep up with all of them.

As of Nov. 2, Bragan had sounded "Taps" for some 275 people.

And the sounding of "Taps" is just part of what he does. For each family he plays for — to honor a fallen or deceased loved one — Bragan sends them a short handwritten note, a challenge coin, an American star and a poem.

He receives no money for his "Taps" ministry. Instead, it's all about "trying to give back," and the friends he's made through something that just started as a random idea at an Army reunion.

For example, a woman who lives just a few blocks away from his home asked him to sound "Taps" to honor her late husband, a U.S. Marine veteran.

"I said absolutely," he said. And he doesn't just start sounding "Taps." He does a few things before hitting the first of the song's 24 notes.

He dresses nicely, wearing a dress

TAPS, A3



FILE PHOTO

During the pandemic, doctors urge residents to get a flu shot.

Doctors say flu shots are essential

BY IAN LIVINGSTON
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As the peak of flu season approaches during the worst pandemic in 100 years, local doctors are urging residents to get a flu shot.

"This is the most important flu shot that you will ever have," Dr. Gerald Harmon, vice president of Medical Affairs at Tidelands Health, said.

Harmon said that after dealing with the COVID-19

pandemic for the past nine months, hospitals are more prepared to fight the flu while also combatting the coronavirus.

"Now that we have more background and experience dealing with the COVID pandemic, we got some extra staffing as well as [an] adequate number of personal protective equipment," Harmon said.

During the 2019-20 flu season, around 3,000 people across South Carolina were hospitalized for that particular viral infection,

according to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. There were 141 deaths connected to the flu that season, with 80 of them being folks older than 65, the department said.

For comparison, DHEC reports that COVID-19 has killed at least 214 people this year in Horry County alone. Across the state, at least 3,776 residents have died of coronavirus, according to the public health agency.

So far, 19 people in South

Carolina have been hospitalized with flu since the start of the season on Sept. 27, according to DHEC's estimate.

While local health experts want people to get flu shots, they are also stressing the importance of the three W's: wear your mask, wash your hands and watch your physical distance between others.

"We don't need to lay our guard down right now," Dr. Sherrill Nielsen, Chief

FLU SHOTS, A3

OUTSIDE



Weather

High 52, sunny
WEDNESDAY NIGHT
Low 34, clear
THURSDAY

High 59, sunny
FRIDAY

High 69, sunny
SATURDAY
High 71, sunny

HAPPENINGS

OHCO Annual Thanksgiving Dinner will be held Thursday, Nov. 26 at Ernie's Diner / Sunshine Pancake House, 3944 Main St., Loris, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Dinner is free and dine-in or carry-out is available. For more information call 843-361-5986.

Loris First United Methodist Church, 3507 Broad St., has a Blessing Box available each Friday, 4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. This box contains nonperishable food items and individuals in need are encouraged to

come to the box. It is located inside the church. Dogwood Hill Baptist Church Food Pantry, 1040 Mt. Zion Rd., Loris, has a food pantry the third Saturday of each month from 8 a.m. until 10 a.m. "In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program

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