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COURTESY

Children and adults enjoyed a wide variety of activities at the 33rd Annual Swampfest at the Playcard Environmental Center Saturday.

Kids and adults enjoyed nature at the 33rd Annual Swampfest

BY SCOTT HARPER
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Saturday was a great day for the 33rd Annual Swampfest at the Playcard Environmental Center. Children and adults enjoyed a wide variety of activities such as soap-

making, archery, farming, reptile exhibits and hayrides.

It was also a chance for kids to hold some animals they may rarely get a chance to see such as geckos and bearded dragons.

They also got a chance

to scoop for minnows in the swamp and roast marshmallows over an open flame.

Ben Abercrombie of the Playcard Environmental Education Center says one of the reasons Swampfest is so important is because it "is very important that

children have that hands-on connection with green spaces, and the more we promote that in Horry County the healthier our lives will be."

"We will have a more vibrant economy and a lot better future for our children, he said."

Governor in talks with Horry County, Myrtle Beach about I-73 funding

BY CHRISTIAN BOSCHULT
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Gov. Henry McMaster recently began meeting with Grand Strand leaders about their hospitality fee dispute as part of his effort to preserve funding for I-73,



McMaster

two officials who met with the Governor said. McMaster and DOT commissioner Tony Cox met with Myrtle Beach Mayor Brenda Bethune, North Myrtle Beach Mayor Marilyn Hatley and Horry County Council Chairman Johnny Gardner earlier this month and they plan to meet again in November, local leaders said.

"The Governor, he's concerned about Horry County not being able to pay for their share of I-73 that was previously talked about and he asked if there was a way that we could come to some kind of decision," Hatley said. "But with Myrtle Beach and with Horry County being in mediation, there was no way that could be settled until the mediation was settled."

The discussions are not part of the county and cities' formal mediation, which will continue Thursday at 10 a.m. Officials from the county and the cities have already met twice to discuss hospitality fees, but so far the mediation hasn't been successful.

The legal fight between the cities and the county began earlier this year when Myrtle Beach leaders decided they no longer wanted the county collecting a 1.5 percent hospitality fee inside city limits on

restaurant meals, hotel stays and admission tickets. North Myrtle Beach and Surfside Beach leaders agreed with Myrtle Beach, which sued the county in March.

The cities maintain the hospitality tax agreement they supported in the 1990s expired in 2017 and the county never obtained their permission to extend it. They have also objected to county officials' suggestion that some of the money be used for improving public safety services in the county.

Earlier this year, the cities approved new fee structures that did not require them to share similar revenues with the county.

County officials have argued that the traditional fee system brought in over \$12 million more per year than the cities' new funding method. They also maintain that both the county and the cities should help pay for the proposed interstate.

McMaster's interest in the case stems from a contract that county leaders signed with the S.C. Department of Transportation (DOT) in late 2018 to pay for work on I-73.

County officials had planned to use hospitality fee revenues to pay for \$12.4 million worth of projects in the first year of the DOT contract as well as tens of millions more in subsequent years.

The contract is also a critical part of a federal grant application the DOT submitted for I-73 funding. DOT Secretary Christy Hall has warned that the state could be forced to withdraw its request for the \$348 million grant because of uncertainty about how much local tax money would be available for the

I-73 FUNDING, A2

State charges against convicted murder Brandon Council to be dismissed, but could be reinstated

FROM STAFF REPORTS
INFO@MYHORRYNEWS.COM

Fifteenth Circuit Solicitor Jimmy Richardson has dismissed the state's charges levied against convicted murderer Brandon Council, but prosecutors maintain they still have the opportunity to pursue the case if they so choose.

Recently, Richardson talked about plans to dismiss the charges with leave to restore at a later date. He announced Tuesday of this past week the charges had been dropped.

Richardson spoke with family members of the two

women Council gunned down during the Aug. 21, 2017, robbery about the pros and cons of different options, and he said that the families supported his decision.

"They're in total agreement," he said.

Last month, a federal jury sentenced Council to death at the conclusion of his weeks-long trial in Florence.

The jury had found the Wilson, N.C., man guilty of two counts — bank robbery resulting in death and use of a firearm in furtherance of a violent crime in a manner that constitutes murder. Council's charges came from



Council

the killing of bank employees Katie Skeen and Donna Major during a robbery at the CresCom Bank branch

on 16th Avenue in Conway. Attorneys described how Council committed two robberies in his home state before heading to Conway.

He stayed at the Conway Express Inn near the bank for a few days before the murders.

The day of the Conway robbery, he shot both Skeen and Major multiple times before fleeing in Skeen's Chrysler.

Council headed to North Carolina where he shopped, partied and paid for a Mercedes-Benz before he was apprehended by police two days after the crime.

During an interview with

federal agents, he confessed to the murders, records show.

Apart from the federal case, Council once faced state charges of two counts of murder, armed robbery, entering a bank with intent to steal, possession of a weapon during a violent crime, sale or delivery of pistol to, and possession by, certain persons unlawful; stolen pistol, and grand larceny after being served warrants by the Conway Police Department.

In a different case resulting in the death penalty, Dylann Roof — the white supremacist convicted of murdering

nine black worshippers at a Charleston church in 2015 — was convicted in federal court and pleaded guilty to state murder charges.

"We felt it was best in these circumstances...not to offer [Council] some sort of plea deal," Richardson said.

Richardson explained Council could be re-indicted by an Horry County Grand Jury in the future. He said new warrants would not have to be obtained.

Council is currently being held at the Federal Transfer Center in Oklahoma City, according to information from the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

OUTSIDE



Weather

High 69, sunny
WEDNESDAY NIGHT
Low 49, partly cloudy
THURSDAY
High 74, mostly sunny
FRIDAY
High 57, cloudy
SATURDAY
High 53, mostly sunny

HAPPENINGS

Bethany Baptist Church, 3160 Hwy. 45, Loris, will hold its Fall revival Nov. 10-13. Sunday service will begin at 6 p.m. and Monday through Wednesday at 7 p.m. The Rev. Davin Johnson will be the guest evangelist. Special singing nightly. Pastor Robert Lewis and the congregation invite everyone to attend. For more information call 843-756-6611.

Silent Grove Missionary Baptist Church, 3420 Highway 917, Loris, will be having a

workshop on the importance of probating family property after the death of a family member Nov. 14 at 6 p.m. Who, what, when, where and how to probate will be discussed.

There will be an evening to remember to celebrate what God is doing through the Buckners in Zambia. There will be a meal, door prizes, a presentation by Ken and Karen Buckner, a silent auction and a regular auction at The Center for Health and Fitness auditori-

um, 3207 Casey St., Loris, Saturday, Feb. 22, 2020, 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. Tickets for the meal are \$20 per person. (Only 200 tickets available. Cash and checks accepted.) Door prizes will be given. Special guest and emcee will be Ed Piotrowski and the auctioneer will be Dale Shelley. Some of Ken's original wildlife prints will be available at the auction, as well as many other great items. All proceeds will go toward purchasing a bus for the ministry in Zambia.

Come early to view the items up for bid. Contact Frances Gregory at 843-283-4662 if you would like to purchase tickets or for more information.

Loris First United Methodist Church, 3507 Broad St., has a Blessing Box available each Friday, 4:30 p.m. - 6:30 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. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



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