

SC residents age 16 and up eligible for COVID-19 shots

Staff Report

Starting Mar. 31, all South Carolinians age 16 and over are eligible to receive the vaccine and can start scheduling their appointments, Gov. Henry McMaster and South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control announced Friday. "Our priority with the vaccine has been to save the lives of those at the greatest risk of dying. By staying the course and resisting distractions, we've expanded South Carolinians' access and eligibility for vaccinations faster than originally anticipated," said Gov. Henry McMaster. "Thanks to the tremendous efforts of our state's health care professionals, we are now able to make the vaccine

available to anyone who wants it, and to do so ahead of schedule." On March 8, South Carolina moved into Phase 1b of the vaccination plan, which allowed those 55 and older, everyone with increased risk for severe COVID-19 disease, and all front-line workers with increased occupational risk to receive the vaccine. Since then, DHEC and other vaccine providers have administered an average of 23,323 doses per day, totaling 419,816 administered doses since March 8. "Thanks to the outstanding work of many people, including volunteers, community groups, vaccine providers, and especially the people of South Carolina, we have given over 1.8 million doses of vaccine to over 1.1 mil-

lion South Carolinians in just over three months," said Simmer. In all, DHEC and other vaccine providers have administered a total of 1,818,939 doses of vaccine to South Carolina residents, with 1,163,103 South Carolinians having received at least one dose and 617,787 South Carolinians having completed their vaccinations. As of today, approximately 15% of South Carolina's population has been fully vaccinated. Currently, Pfizer is the only vaccine available to those aged 16-18. All three vaccines — Pfizer, Moderna and Janssen — are available to those aged 18 and older. Check with your health care provider to determine which vaccine they are administering if you are in the younger age group.



MATT BISE/STAFF



PHOTO PROVIDED

Participants captured in a previous years Dancing With The Ark Star's event, supporting the non profits mission through fundraising and dancing.

11th annual Dancing with the ARK's Stars is in motion

BY ABIGAIL HUTCHINSON
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The 11th Annual Dancing with The ARK's Stars is just around the corner and participants have already begun rehearsals. The event pairs professional dancers from Ballroom Dance Charleston with local personalities for a dance-off similar to the well known TV show, "Dancing with the Stars" from ABC. This year, six local celebrities are working with professional dancers from Ballroom Dance Charleston to create routines. The fundraiser on May 15 will support the ARK, a local nonprofit that cares for families living with Alzheimer's or related dementia. The event is needed more than ever this year amidst COVID-19. The ARK had to shut down in March, like many nonprofits across the globe, in response to the coronavirus. Megan Severn, Director of Development and Communications at the ARK, explained that the year was a hard one for the community they serve. In November, when The Ark slowly began reopening, they were anxious to start finding ways to reconnect safely with families. "We slowly started kind of opening back up in November, but it really took a bit for everyone to come together and kind of figure out what was going to be the safest way to offer support for the families and get the social respite care program back up," Severn said. As they continue to transition back open, many online resources and programs utilized throughout the ongoing pandemic remain available, and the ability to still safely host the upcoming dance event is crucial. Ritamay Ranck, dance participant and nurse consultant, is no newcomer to the event. She has been attending Dancing With The Ark Stars as a table sponsor since its second year. "Several people have unofficially asked me if I would dance in prior years, but

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GRACE BEAHM ALFORD/STAFF//

Cypress Gardens renovated the Heritage Room with a \$125,000 grant from the Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism. It is now open for visitors.

Spring and hope is arriving at local attraction

BY MATT BISE
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On March 23, 2020 at 3 p.m. Middleton Place, National Historic Site in Dorchester County completely shut down because of the pandemic. A couple of months later it reopened but the closing at the height of the spring time tourist season left the thousands of blooming azaleas with no audience. In 2020 the usual 100,000 visitors dropped by 30 percent. It's a new year and now things are beginning to loosen up at the site just as the flowers begin to bloom. The freeze Covid-19 put local tourism is beginning to thaw. People are back to planning weddings and roaming the 110 acres of wide open space.

"Certainly at Middleton Place we have so much space that there's no worry about social distancing. People are just grateful they can be outdoors with their families," said Beth Kerrigan, Director of Development at Middleton Place Foundation. "I talked to some people today from Indiana and New York; lots of families traveling. We're seeing lots of families." For lovers of beauty and history, there may be no better time to visit Middleton Place than in the weeks and months ahead. In 1941 the Garden Club of America declared that Middleton Place had not only the oldest, but also the most important and most interesting garden in America. The over 100,000 azaleas in the Gardens will now have an audience. Sidney Frazier, Vice President of Horticulture, Please see **SPRING**, Page A2

explained that there will almost certainly be camellias in bloom in late March and perhaps beyond. "Given the unpredictable weather the Low Country has recently experienced, mother nature is still in control," says Frazier. He is optimistic that visitors who missed the beauty of Middleton Place in the spring last year due to the pandemic will not be disappointed with how 2021 is shaping up. It's the same in Berkeley County at one of its well know attractions in Moncks Corner, Cypress Gardens. Over the years the attraction that offers boat rides in the swamp, miles of walking trails and South Carolina's largest alligator in captivity, has had a run of bad luck, long before the pandemic.

437th AW conducts all-female flights

BY DIANA COSSABOOM
Joint Base Charleston Public Affairs

Women assigned to the 437th Airlift Wing conducted two all-female flights to commemorate Women's History Month at Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina, March 15 and 17. The first all-female C-17 flight crew conducted an aerial refueling with a KC-135 from the 171st Air Refueling Wing, Pittsburg, Pa., and carried 20 women assigned to various units across Joint Base Charleston. The second flight included two all-female crews who piloted a two-ship C-17 formation, where they flew to Pope Army Airfield, North Carolina, to conduct an airdrop with 80 female 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers, and an aerial refueling with a KC-135 also from the 171st ARW. Due to weather constraints, the airdrop portion was canceled for the safety of the paratroopers. "The fact that it is an all-female aircrew in both jets and it's all female jumpers is



US AIR FORCE/STAFF SGT. RACHEL PYE

Women assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division, Pope Army Airfield, N.C., and 437th Airlift Wing, Joint Base Charleston, participated in an all-female flight in commemoration of Women's History Month.

a huge deal because all of these women have gone through so many hurdles in order to be in their positions, be qualified, and be the tactical air women that they

are," said Capt. Alisha Stroble, 16th Airlift Squadron deputy chief of tactics and C-17 pilot. Females make up approximately 20

percent of the Air Force and 15 percent of the Army. Of the 20 percent of females in the Air Force, approximately 1 percent are pilots. "It's really incredible to celebrate all the women who have gone before us, and open these doors for us that we [now] can put together a mission completely crewed by females in what is typically a more male setting," said Staff Sgt. Rachel Pye, 4th Combat Camera Squadron aerial photojournalist. In 1975, then-Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David C. Jones, launched a test program that would enable women to enter pilot training and staff the all-volunteer force. By Sept. 26, 1976, 10 women began pilot training and trail blazed the future of women in the Air Force. "Being on this jump means to me empowerment," said Command Sgt. Maj. Tonya Sims, command sergeant major for the 407th Brigade Support Battalion. "It lets me know that the 82nd Airborne Division, Center of the Universe, sees me and hears me. They know that I can and I will get it done."