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LOCAL

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HARRIS MURRAY
IN OTHER WORDS

Who woke you up today?

What will you do with this day? How will you spend it? How will you treat those you meet? What will your priorities be? How will you handle the problems that arise? How will your attitude affect your behaviors? What thoughts will flow through your mind? What will guide your thinking?

Last week, reading in the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, I was reminded that this day, indeed every day, is a gift. Not by accident but by design.

"The Lord God awakens me morning by morning," Isaiah 50:4 reads. The fact that I woke up today is not just a happenstance. God woke me up this morning!

My father used to wake me up in the mornings during my formative years. Mom was usually in the kitchen already, making breakfast for a family of six. We ate together every morning! My father knocked once and said "Time to get up!" He usually returned several times. I was and am a sound sleeper, and it was always difficult for me to wake up from a solid night's sleep.

I was generally grumpy, too, after waking. First, I didn't want to get up. Then, I had to face people. That's something else I didn't like to do in the mornings. My dad was a morning person, chipper and all that jazz. I did not like that, and any attempt to engage me in conversation usually got answered with "hmmmmph."

If anybody had suggested to me in those years that the day was a gift, I would have told them to wrap it back up and put it under my covers with me so I could sleep some more. Such were the days of my youth; I'm sure I left an indelible mark on the mornings in my family. I became a morning person after my daughter was born, basically out of the necessity of her survival. There were still mornings I did not want to drag myself out of bed, but when the crying jag didn't stop, I simply had to get up for peace and quiet.

That's when I discovered what a wonderful time of day early morning is. When everyone else is asleep, the day begins breaking through the darkness and the only sounds I hear are the birds chirping. It's such a quiet, reverent time, creating a sense of awe for the new beginning that starts with each dawn.

Reading that it is God who awakens me each morning adds a new dimension to my awareness of what a new day means. First, there is a keener understanding of who provides the days that I have and that each one is a gift. Then, a deeper sense of gratitude begins to take shape in my heart when I am attuned to the reality that I am never guaranteed a new day.

Thankful to the creator for the gift of another day, I take more time to ponder the purpose of the day. If God woke me up this morning, there must be something he needs me to do or be.

Hence the questions asked previously.

How will I spend the gift of this day? God, who woke me, tells me to give it to him and live it in gratitude. How will I treat the people I meet? God, who woke me, suggests kindness, meekness, compassion and patience. What will my priorities be? God, who woke me, suggests service.

How will I handle the problems that arise? God, who woke me, offers prayer. How will my attitude affect my behaviors? God, who woke me, tells me that an attitude of love is the greatest of all. What thoughts will flow through my mind? God, who woke me, encourages humble thought. What will guide my thinking? God, who woke me, tells me that his word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

My day and yours can be so different if we just remember who woke us up this morning.

■ *This column originally ran April 20, 2008. Harris Murray can be reached by e-mail at writeharris55@yahoo.com.*

The Edisto Gardens webcam can be found on the Orangeburg city website under webcams on the "About Orangeburg" tab.

Webcam offers view of Children's Garden Christmas

By PHIL SARATA
T&D Staff Writer

The Edisto Gardens holiday lights attract thousands of travelers each year, but now part of the scene can be enjoyed from the comfort of your home computer.

The city of Orangeburg debuted its new webcam Nov. 21, which is directed on the lighted countdown to Christmas sign. A brainchild of the Information Technology Department, Parks and Recreation Director Buster Smith said the camera has been installed across from the parking lot near the fountain.

"It is just another element that enhances the presentation and adds to the excitement of the season," Smith said. "During bloom season, it will be turned toward the rose garden prior to the Rose Festival.

"In the years to come, it could be altered to have a live display. I think it's a real neat picture."

The webcam is featured on the city of Orangeburg's home page (orangeburg.sc.us). Orangeburg Administrator John Yow said there are other cameras in use around the city.

"We do have cameras in other key public places that we use for security," Yow said. "This is the only webcam."

The camera picture provides snapshot images of the gardens. Viewers can see new images simply by refreshing the home page on their computer.

Officials are still working out some bugs with the webcam. The device went offline for a short time Nov. 22 before trouble shooting had it up and running again. The webcam is also being featured through the city's Twitter feed.

The webcam also serves as an online promotion for the Children's Garden Christmas and Kids' Walk, whose reach extends far beyond the city's boundaries. Since its inception almost 20 years ago, Smith said the six-week event has become popular with residents and visitors alike.

"We estimate about 300,000 people visit Edisto Gardens during this time," Smith said. "Although we don't have an electronic counter, we did a visual on the number of vehicles coming through Thanksgiving night 2010.

"15,000 people came through that night alone, which equates to about 5,000 vehicles."

The city website received more than 70 hits within two hours of the webcam's first online appearance. A poster on the city's Facebook page felt the move was positive.

Smith said other possibilities for the webcam may be explored in the future.

"Right now, the only discussion is the camera being left static," Smith said. "Certainly in the years to come, it could be altered to have a live display.

"This is just one way we are continuing to look at the technology and the services we can provide to the citizens. This is another way for them to enjoy their city."

■ *Contact the writer: psarata@timesanddemocrat.com or 803-533-5540.*

Bamberg County OKs short-term borrowing

By DIONNE GLEATON
T&D Staff Writer

BAMBERG — Bamberg County Council has approved borrowing funds to help the county meet operational and cash flow needs.

During its meeting last Wednesday, council approved an emergency ordinance to secure a $500,000 Tax Anticipation Note for county operations.

Bamberg County Administrator Rose Dobson-Elliott said Friday that the TAN will give the county a comfortable "cushion" in its financially strapped general fund.

"We have a cash flow issue due to a variety of reasons, including the time of year," Dobson-Elliott said.

She also referenced the delay in the closure of the contract that Bamberg and Barnwell counties are developing with an affiliate of Memphis, Tenn.-based Dobbs Equity Partners LLC to develop a regional health care system. The system is to consist of multi-specialty physician centers in each county and construction of a 30- to 50-bed regional hospital.

"Taxes haven't really started coming in. We anticipated that the hospital deal would have been closed last spring. We've incurred some (legal and management) costs on that, and that has put us in a little bit of a cash flow issue. We're limited in the way we can borrow money for operating, so we approved an emergency ordinance. That was the one option we had based upon the financial and legal advice we've received," Dobson-Elliott said.

The administrator said the TAN will be administered through low bidder Branch Banking & Trust and is separate from a $500,000 TAN that the county has already approved to provide the Bamberg County Hospital with the ability to obtain funds that may be needed.

The TANs allow the county to borrow money based on the taxes it expects to bring in. The TAN for the hospital must be repaid by April 30, 2012, while the TAN approved Dec. 14 must be repaid by April 2, 2012, Dobson-Elliott said.

"People historically start coming in and paying their taxes the week after Christmas. We'll evaluate and, of course, won't spend any of this. If we have to tap into it, it will be by council's approval. We'll have a better look at our cash flow probably by the middle of January," Dobson-Elliott said.

She said the TAN will give the county about $1 million on hand. It typically has a fund balance of $1.9 million.

"The TAN is giving us some breathing room. We cut our budget almost $116,000 last year for this budget year, so we're lean and mean and getting meaner by the day. We just need a little cushion," she said.

She said the hospital has not tapped into its TAN and is staying financially afloat.

"We're sitting on it just in case. The ER has been doing a great job over there. The hospital has not asked us for any money in quite a while, but they did project a shortfall possibly in January. And the (new hospital) contracts just haven't been completed," the administrator said.

Dobson-Elliott said a cut in state funding, particularly in the local government fund, has contributed to the county's cash flow shortage along with building maintenance needs. She also cited engineering costs associated with plans for a county-wide water/wastewater system.

"I think every HVAC that the county has between the courthouse, Kearse building and 911 building has gone out in the last two years. We had to break down and put a roof on the sheriff's office. We just had to delay going after a new building project. We put the roof on the courthouse five years ago," she said, "We've just incurred a lot of expenses in brick and mortar over the last five years that have kind of eaten away at some reserves."

The county will be able to survive financially, the administrator said.

"We're just stretching things out. It's not doom and gloom. We've got a lot of good things coming, but we've got to make due until they come to fruition. We will be developing a long-term strategy to develop a stronger fund balance," she said.

■ *Contact the writer: dgleaton@timesanddemocrat.com and 803-533-5534.*

York County councilman charged with DUI in S.C.

The Associated Press

YORK — A local South Carolina official says he made a mistake by buying whiskey after a rough day on the job and drinking while driving.

The Herald of Rock Hill reported Saturday that York County councilman Eric Winstead was charged with driving under the influence.

A York County sheriff's deputy stopped Winstead's car, reporting that he saw the vehicle swerving across the road's center line. The deputy reported seeing an empty whiskey bottle in the passenger seat.

Winstead is a hospice chaplain and a Republican in his first term representing a district in western York County.

The 39-year-old Winstead said he hadn't had any alcohol in 16 years until his father's death in January. He says he plans to seek counseling for his grief, the "underlying cause" of the drinking.

Try the challenge of the Sunday Puzzler. D4

COMMUNITY DATEBOOK

■ Today's events

● Vance Christmas Parade – 3 p.m.

● Orangeburg Chapter of Jack and Jill of America Inc.'s annual Celebration of Kwanzaa – 3 p.m., Ministers Hall, Claflin University.

● Orangeburg-Wilkinson High School class of 1975 meets – 3:30 p.m., Orangeburg Disabilities and Special Needs Board, Magnolia Street.

● Nix-Stilton Road CIO meets – 4 p.m., Nix School.

● Bethune Memorial High School class of 1969 meets – 5 p.m., Shoney's.

● VFW Post 10729 dance – 9 p.m.-2 a.m., post home, Moorer Road, St. Matthews.

● Orangeburg-Wilkinson High School class of 1975 meets – VFW Post 8166 home, Amelia Street.

■ Finance Committee meets Monday

The Orangeburg County Council Finance Committee will meet at 4 p.m. Monday, Dec. 19, in Conference Room 200-A at the County Administrative Centre.

■ Denmark Council meets Monday

Denmark City Council will hold its regular meeting at 7 p.m. Monday, Dec. 19, at the Brooker Center. Open to the public.

■ Cordova Council meets Dec. 19

Cordova Town Council will hold its regular meeting at 7 p.m. Monday, Dec. 19, at Cordova Town Hall. Open to the public.

■ Health Services Board meeting scheduled

The Edisto Regional Health Services Board of Trustees will meet at 7:30 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 20, in the ground floor board room at the Regional Medical Center.

■ RMC Board of Trustees meeting scheduled

The Regional Medical Center Board of Trustees will meet at 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 20, in the ground floor board room at RMC.

■ Enjoy Christmas in the gardens

Folks are invited to drive through the Edisto Memorial Gardens until Jan. 1 to enjoy the holiday lights and music. The drive-through is open from 6 to 10 p.m., and the Kids' Walk is open from 6 to 9 p.m.

■ Junior Service League will award scholarships

The Junior Service League of Orangeburg Inc. will award scholarships this year based on service to school and community, need, scholastic achievement and character. They are open to all area graduating seniors. Applications can be obtained from school guidance counselors or by writing the scholarship chairman: Scholarship Chairman, Attn: L. Fender, P.O. Box 1225, Orangeburg, SC 29116.

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