

The Beaufort Gazette



Surprise visit

President Bush made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on Wednesday. See World, 6A

Architects seek to preserve buildings and the environment. 1C, Neighbors

Beaufort, Battery Creek track teams compete in final tuneup. 1B, Sports

Weather: High 80°, Low 52°. Mostly sunny, breezy and warm today. Partly cloudy tonight. 8B

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Former assessor sues county for \$10M

Wright says conspiracy drove her from office

By GREG HAMBRICK
The Beaufort Gazette

Former Beaufort County Assessor Bernice Wright has filed a lawsuit seeking more than \$10 million from Beaufort County and three staff members who she claims con-

spired to remove her from office.

Wright retired in January 2005 after county staff members, including County Administrator Gary Kubic, forwarded concerns to state agencies regarding what they thought to be questionable tax

breaks applied to property owned by Wright's family. The State Revenue Department, the State Ethics Commission and the State Law Enforcement Division handled individual investigations, and by September each had determined there was

no evidence of wrongdoing by Wright.

Though Wright's lawsuit calls for a \$10 million award — \$5 million from Kubic, former auditor Cindy Levy and Treasurer Joy Logan and \$5 million from the county — the South Carolina Tort Claims Act limits the government's liability to \$300,000.

The suit also asks for punitive damages to be determined by a jury. The state act pro-

hibits punitive damages against the county and protects individuals if they were acting within their work responsibilities.

The lawsuit, which was filed Monday in the Beaufort County Courthouse, claims that Wright was "scorned, ridiculed and caused to resign from the position she held under extreme duress and pressure."

► ASSESSOR, 9A

Arts schedule sparks debate

By JASON RYAN
The Beaufort Gazette

The leader of Beaufort Performing Arts has stirred the pot with programming decisions for the 2006-07 season that include reducing the number of chamber music performances by Charles Wadsworth.

Executive Director Dee Dee Sandt and the board of the two-year-old arts group chose last week to approve contracting three performances next season with the classical musician instead of the regular five, opting to contract two other chamber musicians to fill the gap.

During a Wednesday meeting with angry chamber music lovers at the University of South Carolina Beaufort, Sandt cited the loss of revenue and flagging attendance at the events, as well as a wish to diversify next season's 18-show lineup, which also will feature dance, comedy and circus entertainers.

Sandt has said most shows sell more than 90 percent of the 500-seat theater but that Wadsworth consistently undersells and is of appeal to a limited audience. Regular tickets cost \$35 or \$40.

► ARTS, 9A

Video: Bush was warned of Katrina's deadly path

By MARGARET EBRAHIM
and JOHN SOLOMON
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In dramatic and sometimes agonizing terms, federal disaster officials warned President Bush and his homeland security chief before Hurricane Katrina struck that the storm could breach levees, put lives at risk in New Orleans' Superdome and overwhelm rescuers, according to confidential video footage.

Bush didn't ask a single question during the final briefing before Katrina struck on Aug. 29, but he assured soon-to-be-battered state officials: "We are fully prepared."

The footage — along with seven days of transcripts of briefings obtained by The Associated Press — shows in excruciating detail that while federal officials anticipated the tragedy that unfolded in New Orleans and elsewhere along the Gulf Coast, they were fatally slow to realize they had not mustered enough resources to deal with the disaster.

► VIDEO, 9A

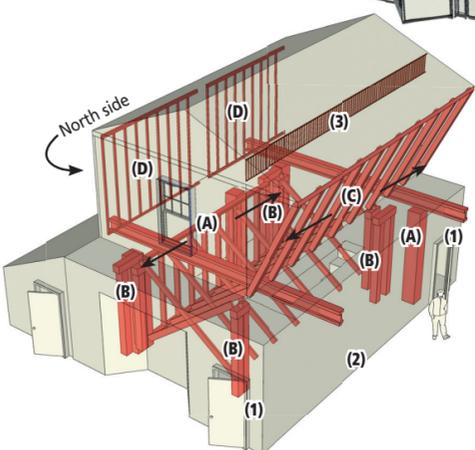
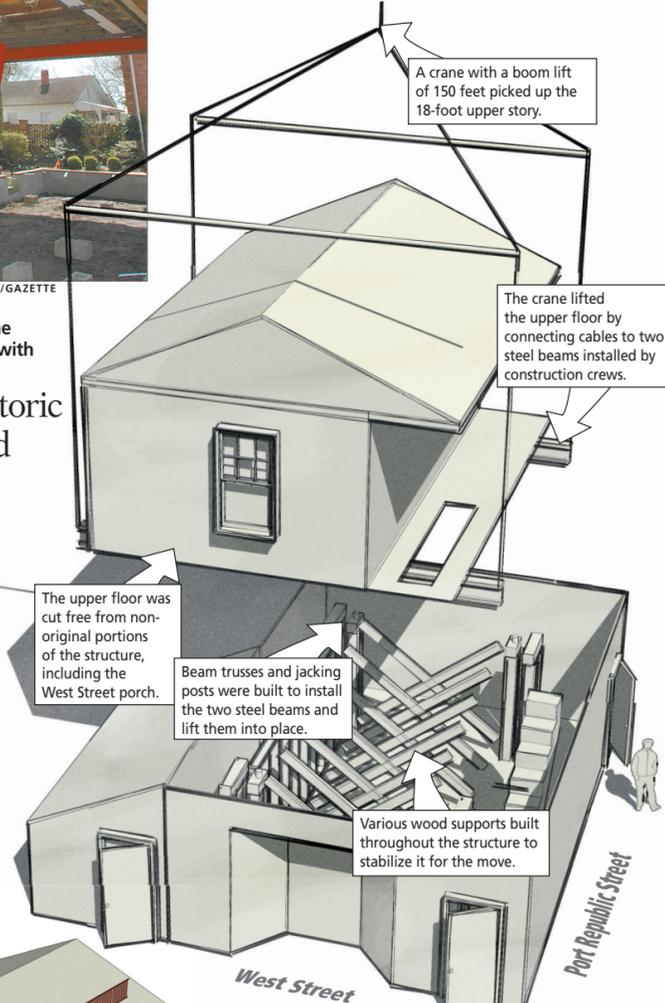


The Thomas Edmund Rhett law office was nestled into its new niche Wednesday morning by workmen with All Crane from Charleston.

A crane lifted the historic law office of Edmund Rhett, a two-room cottage, Wednesday morning from a second-story perch at the corner of West and Port Republic streets to a new ground-level home on the property of the Beaufort Inn.

► SEE STORY, 2A

Splitting, moving an office



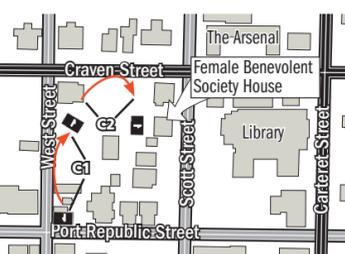
Nos. 1-3: A weakened understory

The lower floor (constructed in the early 1900s) has been damaged by rot. Here are a few highlights of the damage: (1) Weakened corner posts, (2) a sinking foundation, (3) snapped timbers connecting the main roof to the porch's roof, and (4) a generally unstable lower floor that needed to be stabilized before the top floor could be moved.

The movement sequence:

- The three house locations
- Ⓜ Ⓜ First and second crane locations
- Movement process

The turning radius required the crane to be moved to two spots. The crane first moved the house halfway, set it down, then the crane was repositioned and then finished moving the house to its new home behind the Female Benevolent Society House.



DRAWINGS ARE SCHEMATIC GRAPHICS BY KEN HAWKINS/GAZETTE KHAWKINS@BEAUFORTGAZETTE.COM

Letters A-D: A myriad of fixes

- (A) Some necessary support posts on the lower floor were either missing or never constructed — five were built to help stabilize the structure.
- (B) Beam trusses were built to help guide the insertion of two steel beams (each weighs more than 1,000 pounds) and jacking posts were built nearby to carry the weight of the upper story.
- (C) Support posts were used to carry the load of the sagging porch roof.
- (D) A wooden support structure was constructed to help hold the north side of the upper floor together. Acting much like a giant paper clip, the support structure was tightened to two metal bars (one in the attic and one on the underside of the second floor).

Commission calls for less development

By JASON RYAN
The Beaufort Gazette

An area planning commission will advise the Beaufort City Council to reduce the amount of commercial and residential development allowed as part of a 5,000-acre annexation in Grays Hill and Seabrook.

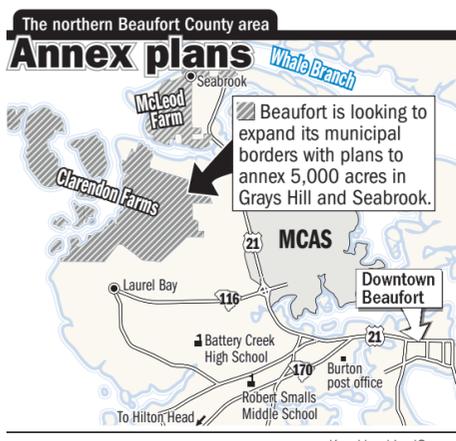
The City Council gave preliminary approval Jan. 24 to the annexation and development of Clarendon Farms and McLeod Farm, moving forward agreements that would allow the construction of up to 16,000 homes, and amenities that include golf courses, marinas and trains

on the rural marshside land.

But the city's plans were delayed after several groups, including the County Council, Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort and the Beaufort-Port Royal Joint Municipal Planning Commission called on the City Council to further review the development plans.

In addition to calling for reduced versions of the development plans Wednesday, the municipal planning commission agreed to ask the city to require traffic studies and more detailed road planning.

► DEVELOPMENT, 9A



Ken Hawkins/Gazette

Sectarian clashes could precipitate civil war in Iraq

By BUSHRA JUHI
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The sectarian cleansing that drove 68-year-old Abbas al-Saiedi from his home may be as alarming a sign of a country on the brink of civil war as the killings that have swept Iraq in the past week.

Masked gunmen carrying rocket-propelled grenade launchers and automatic rifles kicked down the gate at his house, fired into the air and told the Shiite he had 48 hours to get his family out of the predominantly Sunni neighborhood in west Baghdad.

Al-Saiedi's story, a tale of fear and desperation, represents a growing phenomenon of religious cleansing in which members of each Muslim sect are driving the others from neighborhoods where they have long lived

side by side. The practice, which has been going on for some time in neighborhoods south of Baghdad, is a barometer of the degree to which the Shiites and Sunnis have moved on the path to civil war.

The number of incidents cannot be fully gauged, but is not yet at the level of mass expulsions of the kind that took place in the Balkans during the civil war there in the 1990s.

For their part, Sunnis have long-standing claims of attacks by Shiite-dominated and, some say, government-linked death squads and eviction from homes in the very neighborhoods now being occupied by Shiites displaced from Sunni areas.

► SHIITES, 9A

Daily 25¢

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FRIDAY
Southern art
Documentary showcases lives and work of folk artists in the South.
► SCENE, 1C

ON THE LIGHTSIDE:
Shoe shiner donates \$100,000 to hospital
PITTSBURGH — A man who started shining shoes at a hospital in 1982 set a goal of donating \$100,000 in tips to the hospital's fund for poor children.
Albert Lexie on Tuesday was honored by Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh for reaching that milestone.

Lexie, 63, of Monessen, received a commemorative plaque; a second plaque will be placed at the hospital.
"It is inspiring to see what Albert has achieved through his hard work, generosity and dedication to the patients and families of Children's," said Roger A. Oxendale, the hospital's president and CEO.
Lexie charges \$3 for a shoeshine, which he does using a box he built at age 15.
— The Associated Press

DEATHS
Julia Palmer, 73
St. Helena Island
Billie Turnbull, 67
Decatur, Ga
► Full obituaries, 9A

BUSINESS	7B
CLASSIFIED	6C
COMICS	5C
DEAR ABBY	4C
ENTERTAINMENT	8A
ENTERTAINMENT	4C
LOCAL	2A
NEIGHBORS	1C
SPORTS	1B