

## LIBPA January 2004 Newsletter

### From The President:

Last month I reported to you what our organization had accomplished in 2003. As we start a new year allow me to share with you what the Board of Directors and I see as the role of LIBPA on our island in 2004.

**Transportation:** This is an area that is going to require a lot of effort and attention on the part of LIBPA. With the new interest in a Beaufort Bypass and a third bridge to Lady's Island our challenge is to not only stay informed of the status of these projects but to insure that the residents of Lady's Island have a voice in the process. The associated subject of both the reestablishment of transportation impact fees and what they will be utilized for also deserves close attention by our transportation committee. The forthcoming decision regarding the design of a new Highway 21 through St. Helena will impact our island and deserves our attention. The committee will continue to work with the district DOT engineer in regard to evaluation of the need for stop lights on the newly widened portion of Sams Point Road. In this line we will continue to seek a solution to the stoplight at the entrance to the High School and the afternoon (4-6 PM) traffic. Although progress has been made in regard to the maintenance and cleanliness of the streets and sidewalks in the Village Center we will be faced with finding a similar solution for the newly widened portion of Sams Point Road.

**Community Preservation Committee:** The project to establish a redevelopment district to encourage residential development and redevelopment in the vicinity of the Village Center will continue through the first quarter. There is a very real possibility of a planned unit development being proposed on Lady's Island this year and, if such occurs, will merit close evaluation by the committee to evaluate the potential impact on the island. Hopefully, property will be selected and if possible purchased for a new elementary school and a new park. The school district and the county have both indicated a willingness to work with LIBPA in regard to the final site selection. The committee will continue to meet the first Monday of each month to consider and evaluate any recommended changes to our present zoning originated by members of the community.

**Community Projects:** During the project to widen Highway 21 the "Welcome to Lady's Island" sign on this side of the Wood's Memorial Bridge was destroyed. LIBPA was unsuccessful in getting anyone to accept financial responsibility and thus we have no such sign today. The Board of Directors has approved, as a LIBPA project, to erect a new welcoming sign but the funds necessary (\$4000/sign) are not presently available. Pat Harvey-Palmer has graciously agreed to serve as coordinator for this project. In 2004 we will pay for renovation of the "Welcome to Lady's Island" sign located on this side of the Mcteer Bridge. In the future when the funds become available we will consider replacing it with a new sign. The Lady's Island business pamphlets developed last year will continue to be distributed at the Chamber of Commerce Center and the businesses on the island. This is an election year and in October we will conduct such candidate forums as may be appropriate. This year we will schedule two social functions for the simple reason our members enjoy them and they provide us an opportunity to get to know each other better. In this area, I offer we should include the service of keeping the community better informed regarding what is happening on Lady's Island. Our monthly newsletter and web site continues to improve thanks to the support and generosity of a large number of people. With the new web site ([www.libpa.org](http://www.libpa.org)) we offer to the entire community, at no charge, a way to keep informed about events on Lady's Island. I suspect we have just scratched the surface in regard to what is possible with our website.

**New Business Promotion:** This is a relatively new area for LIBPA and is in no way in competition with the Chamber of Commerce. Rather, individuals or corporations that have already decided to establish a new business on Lady's Island come to LIBPA for information or assistance to facilitate that decision. As the word gets out regarding the benefits of having a business on Lady's Island this is a service of our organization that will be more and more in demand. In that regard, thank you to those in LIBPA who continue to respond so graciously to my request to provide help for potential new businesses.

**Membership:** We have increased our membership by over 20% for each of the last two years. The key to this increase would appear to be that you, our members, continue to identify those who you believe would enjoy and benefit from membership in LIBPA and guide them into membership. Please continue your efforts in this regard and thank you for what you have accomplished to date.

Support of our Schools. In this area we welcome our new school board representative Rich Tritschler to the LIBPA Board of Directors. We are prepared to provide Rich such support as he may feel that LIBPA can provide in regard to supporting both the public and private schools on the island.

Finally, LIBPA serves as the voice of Lady's Island to the many governmental commissions, committees and councils that make decisions which affect our island. We do this with 100% volunteers and it is an extremely difficult and complicated task. Yet, thanks to the support of each of you and your willingness to give of your time and talents we have to date enjoyed a degree of success in our efforts. Thanks to the reputation of LIBPA as being non political and concerned only with the best interest of our island, we are always received with courtesy and consideration as we attempt to present the case for Lady's Island. Again, as we start a new year, thank you for your support. I have yet to hear the word "no" when I come to our members requesting assistance.

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**Lady's Island Dinner Theater A Success:** Marie Lewis, owner and manager of Sea Island Conference Center recently joined forces with Carolyn Donaghy and Susan Larson to offer the Lady's Island community a taste of the arts in the form of a Dinner Theater. With Susan performing in the "Belle of Amherst" and local caterer Steve Brown providing the dinner the community supported the effort with the majority of the 6 shows being "sold out". A special added touch was the valet parking, which not only parked your car for you, but also had it waiting in front after the performance. Since the community indicated its support for a dinner theater on the island, Marie hosted the comedy "The Santa Land Diaries" which had performances in November and the first part of December. In addition, she hosted 2 special Christmas shows for children. In response to request for season tickets, Marie expressed her appreciation for the great community support of these first performances and promises the availability of such tickets as soon as she gets the 2004 season scheduled. Future events will include a murder mystery play presently scheduled for February. In addition to supporting the Dinner Theater the Conference Center continues to be available for conferences and private parties. For details regarding the schedule for future dinner theater performances or to reserve the conference center, please call 522-3924.

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### **Pathways and Bike Trails for Lady's Island:**

The Beaufort County Trail and Blueway Master Plan, that will be considered by County Council in January for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan, has a significant portion of the plan located on Lady's Island. The Lady's Island portion of the plan was completed in early 2000. It was the result of the combined efforts of Lady's Island residents and representatives of the Counties Planning Department.

The Plan identifies 22.4 miles of "spines", or major paths, for future construction on Lady's Island. A spine is a term for a major route that connects the neighborhoods to schools, shopping and recreation. These spines, once built, would connect the Lady's Island Village area and the City of Beaufort with all the neighborhoods on the Island. Of the 22.4 miles planned, 4.0 miles along Rt 21 and 2.8 miles of Sam's Point Road have been built by SCDOT as a part of our road improvements. These are the portion of the Sea Island Park Way dedicated use by bikes and the sidewalks along the recently widened portion of Sams Point Road. This leaves 15.6 miles of trails to design, fund and build. Those future trails are planned primarily on Brickyard Point Road, Springfield Road, the Northern end of Sam's Point Road, Meridian Road, and the balance of Sams Point Road/Rt 802.

In addition there are 11.7 miles of "spur routes". Spur routes are short trails which help people move through their neighborhoods and connect to the major trails.

The combined total of all of the various paths and trails called for on Lady's Island by the plan would result in about 34 .1 miles of paths and trails. By comparison, the Beaufort City portion of the Counties Master Plan has approximately 22 miles.

As the County task group develops the priorities, ( LIBPA and Pathways Connect are represented on the County task group ) we will need to establish a Lady's Island committee to define a priority of construction for these trails, as well as promote and coordinate the design, funding, and construction of the trails. We are a special community with special requirements and the residents have spoken loud and clear in regard to pathways and bike trails---they want them to be a part of our island. With the

support of the residents of Lady's Island and LIBPA members hopefully we can make it possible for Lady's Island residents and guests to walk, run, or bike safely on our island.

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### **January - The Month For LIBPA Annual Dues:**

Each year we take the "real vote" as to how our organization lived up to the expectations of its members. During January the notices to remind each of us that it is time to send in our annual dues will be mailed out. After all of the dues were collected last January LIBPA had a 96 % renewal rate. Some of our losses were due to residents moving from Lady's Island and businesses relocating or no longer in existence. The remaining individuals and businesses chose to drop their membership. Assuming that our annual dues of \$35 do not pose a financial burden then the remaining rationale is that for the small number that we lost in 2003, our organization failed to convince them that membership was worthwhile. As proud as all of our members should be of the many things LIBPA has accomplished this year, the bottom line is the question "Is membership in LIBPA worth your continued support in the form of dues and participation?". Our goal this year is 100% renewal of members. However, if you choose to not renew, please take the time to tell a member of the board of directors why we lost your membership. For those of you that choose to avoid another piece of paper in your mailbox, please mail your check for \$35 made out to LIBPA to:

LIBPA  
P. O. Box 70045  
Lady's Island, SC, 29907

As we start a new year with new challenges thank you for your support and participation in our efforts to keep Lady's Island a special place to live, work and raise our families.

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### **Sam's Point Road Report:**

A year and a half after starting work, our work on Lady's Island is complete. This work addresses several critical long-term road needs for the Lady's Island community. These include the widening of Sams Point Road, adding of a center turn lane to Lady's Island Drive, the paving of Ashley Drive, Factory Creek Road, and Woodbine Drive, and the completion of several storm drainage enhancement projects.

While we faced numerous hurdles, we have been able to keep this work moving ahead of schedule. With the last work items completed in December, we were able to finish before the deadline, without needing to request additional time for delays caused by factors beyond our control, such as weather and delayed relocations of utility lines.

We wish to thank the people of Lady's Island for their role in the partnership which allowed us to finish ahead of schedule, and with a minimum of disruption to the community. Very seldom have we seen a community show such concern and commitment for improving their community. Your input has been critical in managing this project with an eye on meeting the expectations and concerns of your community. We also appreciate the patience and hospitality shown by many of you as work has progressed on these projects.

It is important to note the valuable roles played by the staff of the S.C. Department of Transportation, as well as the volunteers of LIBPA. The S.C. DOT staff helped us confront the complex web of challenges we faced on this project, and LIBPA served as an effective watchdog over the work, helping keep us aware of community concerns, and working to help minimize problems in the community. There is no way this project could have been a success without their active involvement and support.

We believe the successful partnership on this project is a positive example of well-managed road construction projects that are responsive to the needs of the community, while being completed on or ahead of schedule. Please accept the new and improved Sams Point Road as our "Christmas present" to the Lady's Island community with our best wishes for the future of your community.

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### Island Notes:

**Relocation.** Harry (Colonel, USA Ret) and Marie Smyth, long time Lady's Island residents and members of LIBPA, are moving to their new home on Amelia Island, Florida. Harry served as president of the Royal Pines Home Owner's Association for many years and was a frequent contributor of "letters to the editor" in the local newspaper. He and Marie are great examples of those individuals that quietly and without desiring recognition contribute to making our community a better place to live. We, in LIBPA, wish them all the best in their new home.

**New Member of LIBPA Board of Directors.** Congratulations to Jane Hinchler, of Mitchell Brothers Construction, who was a recent addition to the LIBPA Community Preservation Committee and has also been elected as a new member of our 2004 Board of Directors. Jane will replace Chris Baker who regretfully resigned from the board due to conflicting professional and personal commitments. Chris has graciously offered to continue assisting in the conduct of our monthly meetings.

**Signs of Success.** Nick Hunt, president of Peoples Insurance Agency and long time LIBPA member, is taking advantage of the space recently made available by the relocation of Waters Drycleaners from 46 Sams Point Road (next to his present business location) to expand his operation and the size of his staff. Although there will be no change in the address, phone number, fax number or entrance to his business the additional space and staff will allow him to better serve his present and future clients. He hopes to have the necessary renovations completed by the early part of 2004. Nick and the success of Peoples Insurance Agency are another example of the benefits of locating a business on Lady's Island.

**Correction.** Last month we incorrectly identified the 2003 winners of the Beaufort County "Adopt a Highway" program as the Sea Island Rotary Club and the Beaufort High School Interact Club. It should have been the Low Country Rotary Club not the Sea Island Rotary Club.

**Renovation.** Brian Ranger of Palmetto Design and Construction, Inc. recently purchased the building at 71 Sams Point Road. This building was previously the home of a child care center. He is in the process of completing a "whole house" renovation and intends to have it available by February for lease as commercial office space. Those interested in leasing this space can contact Brian at 522-1404.

**New Year's Resolution.** We, who each month write, compile, edit and coordinate the printing and mailing of our newsletter, do promise each of you that we will strive harder in 2004 to catch the misspelled or missing words, improve our use of the English language and double our efforts to improve the quality of our newsletter. Also, thanks for your patience, support and understanding during 2003.

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### Your Help Is Needed!:

This is the new proposed Welcome to Lady's Island sign. Unfortunately the cost of this sign will deplete our reserves making members of the Board very nervous. We are trying to find ways to save money in 2004. **WE HAVE FOUND A WAY—WITH YOUR HELP.** In 2004 we will have the capability to email your monthly newsletter to you. Naturally, this would save on printing and postage. If delivery of the newsletter by e-mail only is acceptable to you please call Judy at HomeTown Realty 522-0066 with your email address or indicate such on the form below and send in with your dues payment.



**YOUR HELP WILL MAKE THIS SIGN POSSIBLE.**

Thank you so much.

Pat Harvey-Palmer—Sign Coordinator

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### **BB&T To Open branch On Lady's Island:**

BB&T has announced that it will open an additional branch office in the Beaufort area by August 2004. The 14,600 square-foot, two-story branch is currently under construction on Lady's Island at the new business office park which will be located on Lady's Island Drive. It will offer a full array of services, including commercial and small business banking, checking and saving accounts, personal and mortgage loans, and investment services. In addition, the branch will also offer four drive-thru lanes and a full-service drive up ATM.

A single-entry deposit box system is just one of several technological advances this branch will have. Clients will be able to access his or her safe deposit box without having to wait on a branch employee to gain access. By placing his or her palm on a scanner, the palm print can be instantly recognized therefore granting access to the safe deposit area.

Other conveniences include a commercial teller office where commercial clients can make deposits and business transactions, which will make banking much more convenient for retail and commercial clients. The branch will have flat-screen televisions in the lobby tuned to news and financial stations so clients can stay up-to date with world news and financial markets while taking care of banking needs.

"We are excited to break ground on this new banking facility because it will give us a much needed second location in Beaufort and make it even easier for those who live or work on the Sea Islands, as well as Port Royal and the surrounding areas, to bank with BB&T," said Eric Lowman, Beaufort city executive. "This will be a full-service banking facility, and as always, we stand ready to help our clients with any banking need they may have."

"I want to assure all of our clients that we will continue to operate our full service banking facility in downtown Beaufort located at 706 Bay Street. Plus, we are also opening a new branch facility in mid-January 2004 on Hilton Head Island in Hilton Head Plantation. The new Lady's Island office and the new Hilton Head Plantation branch will give us four full service banking facilities in Beaufort County — one each in Beaufort, Lady's Island, Bluffton, and Hilton Head. Beaufort County is a very important market for us, and we are committed to serving our clients for many years to come."

BB&T divides its banking network into autonomous regions – each with its own president and operates like community banks. Nearly all lending decisions are made locally.

Winston-Salem-based BB&T Corp. operates more than 1,400 banking offices in the Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Indiana and Washington, D. C.

With \$90.4 billion in assets as of Sept. 30, BB&T Corp. is the nation's 12th largest financial holding company. BB&T was named this year to the Forbes Platinum 400 list of America's "Best Big Companies" for the fourth year in a row. BB&T has operated continuously since 1872.

BB&T and its subsidiaries offer full-service commercial and retail banking and additional financial services such as insurance, investments, retail brokerage, corporate finance, international banking, leasing and trust.

*Editors Note: A special thanks to Eric Lowman, BB&T Senior Vice President and Beaufort City Executive for providing this article. We in LIBPA look forward to working with BB&T as part of the Lady's Island business community.*

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**The Legend of the Third Bridge:** by Jim Hicks

**Editors Note: Normally, as editor of our newsletter, I do not put a byline on articles, which are primarily designed to present information about our community. However, this article may have crossed the line into personal opinion and thus the byline.**

Most small communities in the south have their legends. Whether it is about things that go bump in the night or strange creatures that only few are privileged to see the legends not only exist but survive and often grow over the years. For residents of Lady's Island their personal legend has to do with the construction of a third bridge to their island. Stories about this bridge have been in existence for over 20 years. There are many variations of the story in regard to location, size and impact on the area. Many of our local engineers, while in college, wrote papers regarding proposed solutions to building a bridge to Lady's Island from Port Royal Island. Over the years a number of studies, in an effort to separate fact from fiction, have been completed with varying results. Long time local residents offer that the popularity of the legend is cyclical in that ever so often the story of a third bridge will regain popularity.

In the past, it was always the state and federal government who were the source of the funds for the bridge. Now there is discussion regarding the bridge project and the connecting roads being included as a part of a funding mechanism call "Impact Fees". Impact fees are based on the concept that the developer of projects or builder of individual houses should pay a fair portion of the cost for the increased infrastructure his project will require. In Beaufort County, since 1995, we have used impact fees to help pay for the increased requirements of fire protection, libraries and parks which occurred as the result of growth. Overall it would appear to have worked well. South of the Broad River Beaufort County, Hilton Head, and Bluffton were able to agree on a fair system of impact fees for transportation requirements with the provision that money collected in that area stays in the area (south of the Broad River). Beaufort County started collecting impact fees north of the Broad River in 1995 and when the City of Beaufort and the Town of Port Royal declined to require similar fees for transportation the county stopped that part of the program in an effort to keep the playing field level even though it significantly reduced the funds available for transportation needs. Who was right and who was wrong in this matter is irrelevant. Due to an inability to reach consensus north of the Broad River transportation impact fees were not collected, south of the Broad River did collect them and thus had available additional funds to address transportation problems.

The transportation impact fee, which was being charged for a new home on Lady's Island in 1995, was \$1684. Since 1996 we have seen 1369 new homes built on Lady's Island with an apparent loss of revenue of \$2,305,396, which could have been used to mitigate the transportation impact of those homes. Could Lady's Island have effectively and efficiently used the \$2 million that wasn't collected by transportation impact fees to reduce the impact of the additional homes on our roads? You bet we could. Perhaps it is time for us to join the rest of the county and reinstitute transportation fees before we take a second look at such things as a 1% revenue sales tax.

It would appear that the time has come to bring the legend of the third bridge into the sunlight and judge it on merit versus the cost. Included in this evaluation would have to be an estimate of the impact of a third bridge on our island. If a third bridge plan will not stand the test of common sense, maybe we should look for other solutions. Perhaps we may find solutions which are just as effective and less expensive than the northern by pass plan and the legendary third bridge to Lady's Island.

**Location Versus Price:** By Jerry Marlow, President, Beaufort Association of Realtors

In 2003 the price required to purchase a home was directly related to where one purchased it. The median price for a house bought in South Carolina in 2003 was \$132,000. The median 2003 purchase price of a home on Lady's Island (\$165,000) and a home purchased in Beaufort County was identical. Simply stated in 2003 the median purchase price of a house in Beaufort County was the highest in the state and only the Charleston Trident area was reasonably comparable in price. This highlights the challenge we face as a county in regard to availability of affordable housing whether it be purchase or rental. As can be seen from the following data there is a wide difference in housing prices, dependent on the general location.

Area	Median Price
Aiken	\$117,000

Beaufort County	\$165,000
Lady's Island	\$165,000
Charleston Trident Area	\$164,000
Cherokee County	\$ 79,000
Piedmont Regional Assoc. (Rock Hill, York, Lancaster)	\$134,000
Coastal Carolinas (Myrtle Beach area)	\$123,000
Greater Columbia	\$131,000
Greater Greenville	\$135,000
Greenwood	\$108,000
Hilton Head/Bluffton	\$352,000
Greater Pee Dee (Florence)	\$101,000
Spartanburg	\$107,000
Sumter/Clarendon Co.	\$102,000

These figures are year-to-date through September 2003. The figures for Beaufort County do not include Hilton Head and Bluffton as they are shown separately.

*Editor's Note: A special thank you to Jerry Marlow for continuing to support LIBPA with his monthly articles. In addition to being President of the Beaufort Realtors Association he is also Broker in Charge of Coldwell Bankers Keyserling Real Estate.*

#### Property Tax Review:

The Coastal Conservation League recently prepared the following comparison of the change or increase of property taxes for a home appraised at \$100,000 and serving as a primary residence. The data is applicable only for the unincorporated area of Beaufort County.

Tax District	1998 Taxes	2002 Taxes	% Change	Increase 1998 - 2002	% Change Annually
Port Royal	\$494	\$710	44%	\$216	11%
Lady's Island	\$402	\$590	47%	\$188	12%
St. Helena	\$402	\$590	47%	\$188	12%
Hilton Head	\$401	\$566	41%	\$165	10%
Bluffton	\$381	\$546	47%	\$196	12%
Sheldon	\$416	\$612	47%	\$196	12%

Assumes no increase in home's value over period evaluated

Does allow for SC Tax Relief of \$303

Difference in rates of increase among tax districts is due to differing fire district millage

Data provided by Robert Reams, Beaufort County Tax Assessor's Office

#### LIBPA 2003 YEAR END ACCOUNTING:

The following information is provided regarding the financial status and operation of the Lady's Island Business and Professional Association during the calendar year 2003.

Category	Amount
<b>Disbursements:</b>	
Monthly Meetings	\$1,100.00
Special Events	\$1,153.00
Printing (newsletter/brochure)	\$1,947.59
Administrative Support	\$1,200.00
Postage	\$1,116.77
Awards (Plaques/engraving) (See Note 1)	\$491.43

Miscellaneous	\$425.85
<b>Total 2003 Disbursements</b>	<b>\$7,434.64</b>
<b>Total Deposits for 2003</b>	<b>\$6,718.11</b>
<b>Beginning balance as of 1/1/03</b>	<b>\$1,552.97</b>
<b>Balance (Operating account)</b>	<b>\$836.44</b>
<b>Reserve in the form of a CD</b>	<b>\$3,258.07</b>

Note 1: Due to the timing of the receipt of bills the indicated cost of awards represents expenditures in this area for 2002 and 2003.

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**Coosa Elementary School: Striving for Academic Excellence in a Growing Community**  
By Cindy Keener, Principal, Coosa Elementary School

Beaufort County is the fastest growing county in South Carolina, and Lady's Island is the fastest growing community north of the Broad River. Lady's Island schools are faced with an increasing number of students each year. An average of two new families of three relocates to the island each week. Since opening our doors in 1998, Coosa Elementary School has gained one to three classrooms of students each year. In addition, the mobility of our families has increased. Fifty to one hundred students enroll and withdraw (move to/from Coosa during each school year). This mobility, along with the increased yearly enrollment, provides a continuous challenge. The staff, students, and community willingly and enthusiastically "greet" that constant challenge.

As principal of Coosa Elementary School, I would offer that our past and present success is directly related to the participation and involvement of students, parents, staff, district administrators, and community volunteers in the total educational process. Our outstanding facility is the culmination of a three year process which began with the passing of a bond referendum, the collaboration of a twenty member educational specifications committee, and the district level promise to support the stakeholders (parents, staff, and students) in their decision making efforts for a new Coosa Elementary School.

As with any organization or business, the people can either make or break its success or failure. Coosa is so fortunate to have a staff of experienced, diverse, caring individuals. Each is devoted to the goal of providing the best educational setting and climate for the Coosa student. Many continue to improve their professional skills. Quite a few live within the school community and wear the hat of both teacher and parent. For this staff, student failure is unacceptable. Daily focus on reading, writing, math, science, and social studies standards is the norm. Expectations for student proficiency in these areas are high. As a variety of national, state, and local assessments prove, the vast majority of Coosa Students are meeting or exceeding those expectations. However, there is a relentless effort to continue to move those students who are and are not achieving onward and upward.

Support for Coosa from the community comes from various sources. Parents, community members, and district office personnel offer and provide financial and instructional expertise. The Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs offer the priceless gift of spending time with individual students. The Coosa Business Partners frequently offer assistance to our school, and we are truly blessed with a very active PTO and School Improvement Council. The challenge for every school is to convey its needs to members of the school community capable of meeting those needs. In addition, it is imperative to build a lasting, trusting relationship among the stakeholders benefiting our children. There may be times when points-of-view are not always in agreement, but the bond of that relationship can not be minimized. When a bonding relationship joins with a trained, educated school staff, the result is a school that continually strives for academic excellence and each year comes closer to that goal.

*Editors Note: A special thanks to Mrs. Keener for her willingness to contribute this article to the our newsletter and for her demonstrated dedication to the children of our community.*

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**A New Year Of Opportunity:** By Mark Generales, County Councilman, District 7

As County Council meets for its first session on January 12, we look forward to the coming year with great anticipation. The most important development is that our new Administrator is on board. The direct impact on the County will be most felt by employees. Organized and deliberate, Gary Kubic brings his 29 years of experience to bear on the challenges facing Beaufort County.

As a Council, we will formalize our goals for the year in our retreat. This annual session is open to the public and I invite all to attend. We meet over a weekend in a public place somewhere in the County. Dates and location are yet to be announced, but it is a good bet that we will most likely meet in the southern part of the County this year as we met at the County building this past year. If you can't join us, but would like to provide me with some input as to those issues you feel we need to review, please give me a call.

Also in January we begin the arduous task of budget review. In preparation for the coming discussions, I have already met with representatives of the school district. Mr. Kubic and I have already met to begin to map out the timing and process for County departments. And we all know the pressure on the local taxpayer continues to grow.

This is a year of property assessment and Council is serious about limiting the dramatic and almost runaway increase in property assessments. Expect to hear a lot more about the 15% assessment cap on property. At this point in time, it is the only legislation available to us to reign in double digit increases.

Massachusetts, California, Florida and many other states provide this type of relief to their taxpayers. Their most positive experience is exemplary. The naysayer's here echo the same sentiments that were offered in every other state that has enacted this form of relief – that it only benefits the rich. Nothing could be further from the truth. By limiting an increase in your property tax assessment to a maximum of 15% over a 5 year period, increases will closely track the historic rate of inflation.

Today, regardless of what a buyer pays for a new property, they are assessed and taxed on the value at the last assessment – up to five years ago. To make the 15% assessment cap system work, we must have those that buy a property in the middle of the five year period have their new property assessment equal the purchase price they paid for their property. Yet, it is that ability to assess a new purchase in the years in between the five year assessments that is legally being challenged. With this ability, the system really works. Without it, the system fails. So we await the Charleston/N. Charleston court case the time to clarify this issue before we make a decision.

I wrote in my last letter about the Beaufort By-Pass. For our area, no other issue has the ability to more dramatically change our lives then the proposed bridge. For the past several years I have not spoken loudly about the By-Pass as I did not wish to alarm those who reside in the path of the proposed roadway. But we can no longer be quiet about this issue. Specifically at risk are Walling Grove, Pleasant Point, all the neighborhoods on Middle Road and the northern end of Lady's Island ending at the boat landing on the Whale Branch. Also, it will impact anyone that resides along or drives Sams Point Road. We are all going to be dramatically affected if this proposal ever attains approval. The rural nature of our island will be eliminated forever.

Unfortunately, the Beaufort By-Pass proposal has never included a study on the traffic impact on Lady's Island – only the improvement of traffic in the City of Beaufort. I am working to ensure that we study the effects on Lady's Island and also review alternatives. I believe there are other less costly and far less impactful ways to solve the City's and the Island's traffic problems. For example, we can begin by "four-laning" 802 and the McTeer Bridge – the roadway from Publix to Port Royal. We need to work with the City on this issue of traffic, for I know of no other issue where our needs are so tightly aligned. As I stated before, we will be holding "town hall" meetings on this, and other issues, in the first quarter. Please come out – I need your input and support.

2004 promises great opportunities. I believe that we enter this year with a renewed spirit of cooperation and collaboration. I look forward to visiting with you soon – and please feel free to call me anytime (263-6797).