



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

To: News Media, Community Leaders, and Concerned Citizens

From: Bamberg County Administration

Date: December 11, 2023

Re: Bamberg Celebrates Grand Opening of Veteran Affairs Office and Health Department

Bamberg, South Carolina (December 2023) – “When old becomes new...”

Throughout 2023, Bamberg County’s record progress and development has been inspiring to witness and has given its citizens hope for brighter days ahead. The entire Bamberg community now has even more reason to celebrate. In fact, Bamberg County Council hosted another ribbon-cutting ceremony in the former hospital building that is being transformed into a law enforcement and health and human services complex. On Friday, Bamberg County and City officials celebrated the grand opening and ribbon cutting of the new Bamberg Veterans Affairs Office and Health Department. The grand opening of the Ed Darnell Law Enforcement Center, also housed in the former hospital building, occurred in July, and the building is also the future home of several other county and state offices.

According to County Administrator Joey Preston, “The project was 100% funded by the Capital Project Sales Tax, which includes the penny sales tax that was approved by voters in 2018.” Preston estimated construction costs to be around \$1.3 million and exterior costs to be roughly \$2.4 million for a combined total of \$3.7 million.

During his welcoming remarks, Vice Chairman Comer said, “It’s a remarkable day when something old can be transformed into something shiny and new.” Friday’s program included a video presentation and overview of the project from County Administrator Joey Preston and Greg McFarland of Pike McFarland Architecture Firm as well as participation from County and City officials, including Bamberg County Veterans Affairs Officer Craig Walker, County Council Vice Chairman Evert Comer, Mayor Nancy Foster, and City Councilman Corey Ramsey. Additionally, special guests from DHEC (Dr. Edward Simmer, Director), DHEC-LowCountry Region (Public Health Director Taylor Lee and Region Senior Consultant Dennis Thompson), and South Carolina Department of Veterans Affairs (Major General [RET.] Todd B. McCaffrey, Secretary) served as special speakers.

Low Country Healthcare System CEO Dr. Ashley Barnes and MUSC Health-Orangeburg CEO Walter Bennett, III also shared congratulatory remarks. Dr. Barnes stated, “A state of the art facility like this in such a central location, just across the street from Low Country Health, is exciting, especially in rural communities, and provides a great opportunity for growth.” Mr.

Bennett added, "Our mission is to optimize and preserve human life, and this transformation of the old Bamberg hospital is amazing and aligns with our mission."

Notably, a few surprises were on the horizon; Bamberg Veterans Affairs Officer Craig Walker was presented with a new County vehicle that Walker said will be pivotal in transporting veterans to their appointments. "What a beautiful day to celebrate a new beginning for Bamberg; our veterans will no longer have to stand in the rain to get the care they deserve. Now, they have a brand new, blue waiting room, which as an Air Force veteran, I greatly appreciate," said Walker.

Vice Chairman Evert Comer also presented Bamberg 125th Anniversary Challenge Coins and Bamberg Veterans Trail bricks to Dr. Simmer, Director Lee, and Major General McCaffrey.

Lowcountry Health Region (DHEC) Senior Consultant Dennis Thompson marked the day as one of "celebration only possible because of the foresight of the Bamberg County Council and dedication of their staff." Director Taylor Lee detailed the layout of the health department, which will include three preventative care rooms, a WIC room, a pharmacy, a maternity and child room, a lab, and a waiting room that will also serve as a training room. SC DHEC Director Dr. Edward Simmer reflected on how "cool it is that a hospital that had been closed has been brought back to life...as a veteran myself, I'm honored to share this facility with the VA." DHEC contributed \$250,000 toward the endeavor.

Finally, Major General McCaffrey commended Bamberg's continued commitment to rural veterans, noting the unique combination of veteran and health services, which he described as "innovative, efficient, and effective."

Mayor Nancy Foster and County Council members reflected on the history of the hospital building and how devastated they were when it closed, leaving 200 employees without a job. Foster's husband was one of the two doctors on staff, and she recalled the days when her girls would roam the halls of the building. She was heartbroken when the building was left empty and deteriorating, but "Joey Preston and Bamberg County had a plan to revitalize the space and combine much needed law enforcement, veterans, and healthcare services." County Council members Donaldson, Hammond, Myers, and Haynes acknowledged the importance of the penny sales tax and encouraged voters to remember how far one cent can go in making Bamberg a better place for all. "This is a part of the Bamberg legacy," commented Councilwoman Sharon Hammond.

"Because of the community, commitment to progress, and a collaborative spirit, Bamberg citizens will now have access to cutting-edge treatment and resources," said Administrator Joey Preston who also thanked Senator Brad Hutto and Representative Justin Bamberg for their support.

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For more information on this press release, email info@bambergcounty.sc.gov.