

# Advance

## Florence County Progress Newsletter

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### New Members

*EmPower Solutions, Daniel Island  
Pacesetter*



Empower Solutions, LLC was established in 2015 with the merger of two longstanding South Carolina companies to address the increasing need for a local economic development and tax-based consulting firm to provide innovative solutions for commercial business, tax professionals, owner-developers, manufacturers and retailers in South Carolina and across the country.

With more than a century of combined experience, the Empower Solutions team of technical and tax professionals are committed to listening and understanding each client's unique position (project). This allows Empower Solutions to maximize each opportunity while maintaining our core values of service excellence, integrity and accountability.

**The immediate opportunity for Florence and 7 other South Carolina counties is the Federal Disaster Zone (FDZ) Tax Credit for storms in 2018 and 2019. This credit was announced in March at the onset of COVID-19, so for most companies, it went under the radar.**

**There is no upfront fee for EmPower Solutions to investigate which credits your business is eligible for, and these credit amounts will be reported to your business quickly for a decision to proceed. Simply no risk for you to receive tax credits that could add money to your bottom line during these uncertain times.**

For more information, please reach out to your local EmPower representative, Laurie Childress, at 803 391-2056 or [LC@empowersolutionsgroup.net](mailto:LC@empowersolutionsgroup.net).

## Florence County Progress receives infrared thermometers to share with businesses

*Article obtained from Morning News and written by Ardie Arvidson*

Florence County Progress has received 176 noncontact infrared thermometers from the S.C. Department of Commerce that it will offer to its member businesses to use to take employees' temperatures as they return to work.

The first shipment of 76 has arrived, said Cameron Packett, membership relations manager of Florence County Economic Development Partnership/Florence County Progress. She said the organization is expecting the next shipment of 100 soon.

Packett said Florence County Progress has about 235 members and that the thermometers will be offered first to top-level members (platinum, gold, silver, bronze pacesetters) and on down until they run out.

"We have already contacted pacesetter members, and when we get our next shipment we will contact general members," Packett said.

She said in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19, FEMA allocated a specific number of these thermometers to each state for private-sector use.

The S.C. Emergency Management Division is providing thermometers to each county economic development office on a per capita basis.

The thermometers are designated for private businesses with a high degree of person-to-person interaction.



*Hope got the all-clear.*

"Workplaces with unmet needs may need to pursue, independent of the federal government, the acquisition of additional thermometers," said an email sent from the S.C. Department of Commerce. "However, this initiative is recognition of the critical role the private sector plays in disease control and mitigation."

Packett said she is excited to be able to offer the thermometers to member businesses to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

"Most of our members are doing well," she said. "Some were struggling, especially in the hospitality industry, when the shutdown occurred, but all seem to be recovering."

## Niagara Bottling Update



Construction is well underway for the Niagara Bottling site located in the Pee Dee Commerce Park. Niagara Bottling selected two Florence County Progress members to complete the work: Choate Construction as general contractor and Chipley Paving Company for site work. Construction began in March and is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

Plant manager and HR manager positions have yet to be filled but are expected to come from within the company.

### **Florence County Progress sources “clean keys” for members**

*Article obtained in part from the Morning News and written by Lauren Owens*

Susanna Heiden, a Southside Middle School rising eighth-grader, is making key chains that allow users to open doors and press buttons without touching them during the pandemic.

Susanna is making the key chains to raise money for the Miracle League in Florence.

Her mother, Sherry, posted a picture of the clean key to Facebook, and she received a lot of feedback that there were several people interested in the keys.

From there, Susanna continued making the key chains for donations. So far, Sherry said, Susanna has raised about \$3,000 for the Miracle League.

Susanna’s fundraiser has grown beyond a Facebook post. Sherry and Susanna have gotten orders from outside Florence, the keys are now at The Toy Shop on Hoffmeyer Road and the Florence County Economic Development Partnership has ordered them.

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Cameron Packett, member relations manager at the Economic Development Partnership, was looking for something to give the organization's partners and something to help with COVID-19.

That's what led her to Susanna's fundraiser.

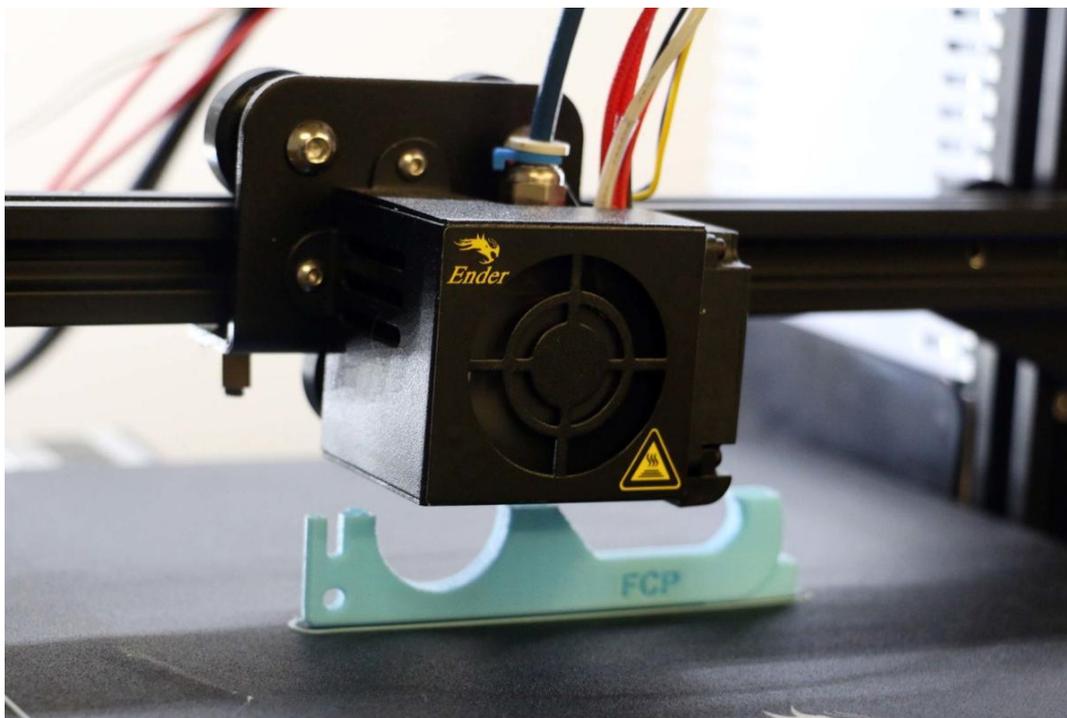
Packett had seen clean keys on the internet, but when she realized that someone local was making them to support a local organization, she wanted to support that fundraiser.

"It means so much more than what it is on the surface level because it is made here," Packett said. "It's not only useful during this particular time, it's also really representative of economic development. The fact that someone from one of our middle schools designed the key, and then SiMT was able to create them in bulk — it's a symbol of the strengths of our county that make us attractive to industries."

Packett needed 500 key chains, but that was too much for Susanna to do on her 3D printer at home, so they turned to the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing Technology to help print the bulk order of key chains.

The SiMT building used the same design Susanna has been using to print the key chains.

"The SiMT was built to support industry, education and economic development in our region," said Tressa Gardner, associate vice president of the SiMT. "We feel that utilizing our 3D printing capabilities to expand the impact of Susanna's project, while also supporting the Miracle League and Florence County Progress, provided the SiMT team with a wonderful opportunity to give back to our community."



## Member News

### **Ruiz Foods to create nearly 200 new jobs for Florence County**

*Article obtained from Morning News and written by Ardie Arvidson*

Ruiz Foods Florence has announced the opening of an additional production line at its Florence plant. The expansion will bring nearly 200 new full-time jobs to Florence County.

Hiring has already begun for the first 100 employees for first shift, which will hopefully begin in August, said Pete Mayadag, director of operations, Ruiz Foods Florence, in a phone interview on Tuesday. He said hiring for a second shift and about 100 more employees should begin in July. He said Ruiz hopes to get the second shift up and running about four to six weeks after hiring begins in July.

Ruiz Foods Florence has more than 900 employees working two production shifts and one sanitation shift.

“When we announced our expansion in 2017, we made the commitment to the community of Florence that we would double our production capacity in the next seven years,” Mayadag said in an announcement. “This opening of a new production line supports that 2017 commitment as the growing demand for our El Monterey products requires we increase capacity as we continue to service our existing and continually growing East Coast customer base.”

The production line is designed to manufacture a variety of El Monterey products including taquitos, quesadillas and empanadas.

Mayadag said the company has three facilities in South Carolina, Texas and California. He said that since the coronavirus pandemic, the company has seen an increase in demand for its products as more people have been staying home and are looking for convenient options for meals.

The expansion is in part due to this increase in demand and the company’s commitment to the community.

“While the Covid-19 pandemic has affected jobs, resulting in record-high unemployment, it’s a pleasure to be able to bring new job opportunities to our community,” Mayadag said.

Mayadag said they are excited to be able to expand during this time when so many people are out of work.

“We love the workforce and the businesses relationships that we have been able to establish in the community in the short time we have been here,” Mayadag said.

He said Ruiz appreciates the support it has received from the community and is doing what it can to get the new line up and running as quickly as possible.

## **McLeod Health announces modified visitation for hospitals in Florence, Cheraw and Clarendon**

Effective June 4, 2020, McLeod Health is modifying its visitation restrictions at McLeod Regional Medical Center, McLeod Health Cheraw and McLeod Health Clarendon.

Moving forward, these changes in visitor restrictions will allow emergency department patients, inpatients and individuals undergoing outpatient procedures to have **ONE** designated visitor over the age of 18 for the duration of their hospital stay. Children under the age of 18 cannot visit at this time. All visitors will also be required to wear a face mask and visitor-issued armband/ID at all times. Any visitors exhibiting signs or symptoms of illness will be asked **not** to visit patients.

The **NO** visitation policy is still in effect for COVID-19 positive patients or COVID-19 rule-out patients under any circumstances.

On the campus of McLeod Regional Medical Center, patients of the McLeod Cancer Center may have **one** visitor accompany them to the hospital. For the protection of our Cancer Center patients, the visitor is asked to not enter the hospital, and **no** visitors are allowed in the waiting rooms. In the McLeod Children's Hospital, Pediatric Intensive Care Unit and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, pediatric patients may have two designated visitors consisting of parents, legal guardians or caregivers.

McLeod Health Cheraw will continue restrictive visitation in the hospital; however patients undergoing elective surgery will be allowed to have **one** visitor accompany them. In addition, McLeod Health Darlington will retain its **no** visitor standards.

An exception to the visitation restrictions remains in place for end-of-life patients. In these cases, the attending physician or nursing supervisor can permit additional visitors (greater than two) to see the patient.

The Universal Masking policy for McLeod Health, effective since May 7, 2020, also requires all physicians, employees, visitors and incoming patients arriving for care, testing or moving throughout the facility to wear a mask (cloth or level 1) while on a McLeod Health campus or in a physician office.

## **CARE House of the Pee Dee has adapted during COVID-19**

To see how the CARE House of the Pee Dee has adapted during COVID-19, please click the link to watch a short video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0VM7KH\\_0KA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0VM7KH_0KA).