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The State

Columbia restaurants struggle with low staff, high turnover

BY KAILEY COTA
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The three line cooks who worked the closing shift at Jack Brown's Beer and Burger Joint quit within 10 days of each other this month, just weeks before one of the area's busiest days of the year — the St. Pat's in Five Points festival.

General Manager Maz Cotran II and his assistant kitchen manager were the only employees

who could close the popular burger restaurant each night.

After they worked more than 12 hours straight during the festival on March 18 and helped bring in 30% more revenue than Jack Brown's makes in a typical Saturday, some good news is coming Cotran's way: Four new staff members have been hired and will be starting soon.

High staff turnover like this was always common in the food and beverage industry, but it has been exacerbated by the CO-

VID-19 pandemic. The staffing problem is a big contributor to some of the long wait times you might be experiencing when you eat out in the Midlands these days, local restaurant leaders say.

"We had an already understaffed situation, COVID hit and there were massive layoffs and massive quitting, and then our demand started going up," said Robin DiPietro, the director of the University of South Carolina's School of Hospitality and



PHOTO BY CHRIS TRAINOR

Jack Brown's Beer and Burger Joint opened at 711 Harden St. in Columbia's Five Points on Feb. 21.

Tourism Management. "We just don't have the employees. Guests are really having to sacrifice for this."

But there are at least some positive indications that restaurants might be moving out of a rough stretch when it comes to labor.

National data from the Bureau of Labor statistics backs that up. Even though restaurants continued to experience more worker turnover than other industries, January jobs data showed improvement over the

SEE RESTAURANTS, 3A



JAN VAN DE KAM GRIENDTSVEEN Provided

A red knot picks eggs off the shell of a female horseshoe crab. The male crab is the smaller one behind her.

Horseshoe crab harvesting could come to an end on Cape Romain

BY SARAH HASELHORST
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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to stop allowing for the harvesting of horseshoe crabs on Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, largely because of the impact on threatened shorebirds.

The move comes after a 2020 lawsuit against the Fish and Wildlife Service and several reports by The State Media Co. that focused on the threat horseshoe crab harvesting poses to the refuge's wildlife. The service's 42-page draft determination, published March 14, twice cites the newspaper's reporting.

Spanning 66,000 acres located north of Charleston, Cape Romain was founded in 1932 to protect the habitat of migratory shorebirds and other bird spe-

cies. However, for decades the Fish and Wildlife Service allowed fisherman to harvest horseshoe crabs from the refuge for the benefit of pharmaceutical companies, which use the crabs' blue blood to detect bacterial toxins.

But removing arthropods from the refuge while they are spawning endangers the red knot, a threatened migratory shorebird that depends on horseshoe crab eggs for survival, experts say.

In October 2020, a lawsuit alleged the federal service violated several federal statutes when it did not require commercial horseshoe crab harvesters to get a special use permit from the Fish and Wildlife Service to harvest in the refuge.

Since February 2021, The State Media Co. has published investigations uncovering that company representatives of

Charles River Laboratories — the only company harvesting horseshoe crabs in South Carolina for biomedical purposes — minimized how many crabs might die from the biomedical process. The company also downplayed the potential negative impact to red knots' survival.

A Charles River executive also told a reporter he did not know harvesters had illegally taken crabs from off-limits beaches in Cape Romain, even though he'd been informed of the violation since at least 2014 and a lawsuit also challenged the poaching. Further, The State reported that Charles River pushed to discourage the use of a synthetic alternative to its ingredient derived from horseshoe crab blood.

On Tuesday, Charles River said the company had worked with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources for

nearly 40 years to oversee the annual collection and release of horseshoe crabs. In response to the agency's proposal to stop permitting for horseshoe crab harvesting on Cape Romain, the company said it would work with "all governing bodies" to make certain their process "preserves and protects" the arthropods.

NOT COMPATIBLE

On March 14, the Fish and Wildlife Service published a "draft compatibility determination" that draws a strong relationship between harvesting and harm to wildlife on the refuge.

It clearly states that horseshoe crab harvesting does not align with the intention of the refuge.

"It's something that we've

SEE HARVESTING, 4A

Meet Columbia City Council's special election candidates

BY MORGAN HUGHES
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Two people are vying to fill the open District 4 seat on Columbia's City Council, previously held by Joe Taylor. Taylor died unexpectedly in December.

The candidates running for the position are both longtime Columbia residents.

Peter Brown grew up in Columbia, left to attend the University of Notre Dame, and then returned and later relaunched his family's business. He runs Colite, a professional signage company based in Columbia that has worked with the likes of Amazon, Visa, Microsoft and more. Brown is also a former chairman of the S.C. Jobs and Economic Development Authority.



Peter Brown

Beatrice King has lived in Columbia for 30 years and served on the Richland 1 school board for a decade. She came to Columbia from Paris in the spring of 1989, drawn by her brother's love of the South and the University of South Carolina. She worked in corporate jobs in Paris and South Carolina for more than a decade before putting her career on hold to raise her children, and she also graduated from USC's Master's of International Business program.



Beatrice King

The District 4 special election will be held March 28. The district covers much of the eastern portion of the city, including the Lake Katherine area, neighborhoods including Kings Grant and Crosshill, and Fort Jackson.

The State asked both candidates five questions to help voters get to know them better. Their responses to the questions

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