

Wm. Weston J. Newton, Chairman
April 28, 2012
Blessing of the Fleet – Wexford Plantation

Good Morning/Afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today as we join together for the annual blessing of the fleet. I am especially pleased to be here on the water with you. This is where I have always felt most at home, around boats, outdoors, along the spectacular waterways of Beaufort County.

Wexford Plantation exemplifies the finest quality of life in Beaufort County. Here, transportation by boat, which once was the customary mode of travel in our Lowcountry region, represents the best of what we hold dear. Before the bridges and roadways were constructed in the 20th century, boats of all size and shape were necessary for survival. Today, they are still a vital part of our healthy outdoor lifestyle and are a constant reminder of the value we place on the quality of our waterways. They are part of our cultural heritage. Fishing, crabbing, shrimping, boating and outdoor recreation are also crucial to our local economy.

In my opinion, these waterways are the most precious natural resource in Beaufort County. As chairman of your county council; I have made the protection of our waterways a top priority of County government. Council has demanded new water quality protection policies that are paying off.

The first round of protection controls began in the late 1990s and focused on maintaining water quality through proven best management practices for cleaning and slowing stormwater runoff.

Then - in 2009 - new controls were established for new developments – thus limiting the volume of runoff. In 2011 - the County adopted controls on vacant lots in already permitted subdivisions and developments. We created a web-based program that walks homebuilders through the process of controlling excess stormwater runoff on their lots. These and other actions catapulted Beaufort County into the vanguard of communities that are serious about protecting their natural environment.

Many of us enjoy filling our dinner plates with local seafood. Sometimes – if we are lucky – we catch it ourselves -- shrimp and oysters especially. Shellfish harvesting is a designated water-use in most of Beaufort County's tidal waters and the bacterial standards for shell fishing here are some of the strictest anywhere in the world. The requirements are ten times greater than those governing recreational uses. This protects us all, Beaufort County had no legal obligation to take action, but a comprehensive investigation was undertaken into the health of shellfish areas and this led to adoption of the strictest protection measures. This is how much we value our waterways, and your good health.

I, for one, am grateful for the quality of our abundant and beautiful waterways. I, for one, am grateful to be a citizen of Beaufort County and have little doubt that you are, too, or you would not have chosen to in Wexford Plantation. Here you can boat to your neighbor's house, in some cases, you can boat to the grocery store. Most importantly you can boat just for the pure pleasure of connecting with our great outdoors.

I often refer to Beaufort County as "Paradise." That is certainly the case here at Wexford and I am so happy to participate in your special moment today. Thank you.