

Wm. Weston J. Newton, Chairman
September 2010
Hilton Head Island Monthly Magazine

It is my hope that the majority of citizens in Beaufort County are mindful of the opportunities for public awareness and transparency offered by The County Channel, the broadcast service of Beaufort County government.

We are particularly proud of the nature series, Coastal Kingdom, produced in partnership with the non-profit group, Lowcountry Institute, based at Spring Island. Naturalist Tony Mills hosts the program which is shot and edited by our broadcast services staff. Episodes feature local wildlife and animal habitat. Recently, the show earned four national Telly Awards. The Telly Awards are considered the premier awards for outstanding local, regional, and cable TV commercials and programs. A thirty-minute feature documentary on Hilton Head Island's Concours D'Elegance 2008 also earned a Telly.

The channel is carried on all local cable services and at www.bcgov.net 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Here, you will see live and recorded meetings of Beaufort County Council and its boards and commissions as well as documentaries featuring local history, culture and nature. It broadcasts youth sports offered by Beaufort County PALS and other events of interest to the community such as commencement exercises at the University of South Carolina Beaufort and USCB baseball games.

Another very important aspect is the ability to reach residents during an emergency such as a hurricane evacuation or a bridge closure. These safety messages can appear as a "crawl" at the bottom of the screen during regular programming or full screen when warranted. Traffic cameras are also televised during rush hours.

The County Channel has also proven to be a valuable tool in unifying and engaging citizens in the public process. The service allows people to "attend" County meetings several miles away. They can ask questions and offer their comments through fiber-optic interconnectivity in real time. This saves precious time, gasoline and ferry tickets required for travel to meetings.

The broadcasts bring transparency to Beaufort County as citizens can view the government process from their homes or from other meeting places such as the County library on Hilton Head Island, the Mary Field School on Daufuskie Island, or council chambers in Beaufort. This has led to a deeper public understanding of County programs, policies and issues. It has helped citizens become better acquainted with the positions of individual council members and the development of County policy from its initial introduction at the committee level to its implementation by the full council.

The gap has diminished between County council and the people and as a result, citizens are more connected to Beaufort County government than ever before. Citizens no longer have to rely solely on synthesized newspaper articles or 20-second talking heads for an understanding of council decision-making processes.

With less and less local money back from the state for funding public education and with a multitude of other financial challenges wrought by the recession, we are pleased to prevent additional burdens to taxpayers by continuing to keep a tight belt on spending in Beaufort County and, at the same time, offer good public services such as The County Channel.