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Pursuing justice with a passion

State Murdaugh prosecutor leaves no stone unturned

BY AVERY G. WILKS
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WALTERBORO — For more than a decade, Alex Murdaugh lived a double life, state prosecutor Creighton Waters told the judge at a recent court hearing.

On one hand, Waters said as he raised his left arm for dramatic effect, was the person the highly respected Hampton trial attorney “professed to be to the outside world.”



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On the other, Waters said, dropping his left hand and lifting his right, was “who (Murdaugh) really was that only he knew, that no one else knew.” That man was a con artist who would ul-

timately be charged with killing his wife and son to prevent the exposure of his myriad alleged financial crimes.

Perhaps no one is more responsible for exposing that dichotomy than Waters himself, the gray-haired and goateed prosecutor who for more than 17 months has led a sprawling web of state criminal investigations into Murdaugh and his influential Lowcountry family.

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Creighton Waters, South Carolina's state grand jury chief prosecutor, argues before Judge Clifton Newman at Alex Murdaugh's motion hearing on Dec. 9.

ANDREW J. WHITAKER/STAFF



Terry Lambert Jr. listens to other technicians while adjusting the new printing press of The Post and Courier in North Charleston on Dec. 12.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HENRY TAYLOR/STAFF

Paper's printing operation getting a new home, press

Move from peninsula to North Charleston a big investment in future

BY DAVID SLADE
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One of the few remaining manufacturing facilities on the Charleston peninsula is scheduled to shut down before the new year as The Post and Courier shifts printing operations to a new location and a newer press in North Charleston.

The two gigantic presses in the former newspaper building at King and Columbus streets, an assemblage of machinery three stories tall and nearly the length of a city block, are expected to print their last editions in December.

The move to a new 48,000-square-foot facility and Evening Post Publishing's related purchase of a 2008 Goss Magnum Single Width Press is “a big deal,” said Tom Harmon, the company's director of facilities and manufacturing. “There are not a lot of companies that are investing in printing presses.”

Newspapers are increasingly focused on online subscriptions, which suit modern reading habits while avoiding the costs of printing and distributing papers, but The

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Victor Trivett of imPressions Worldwide operates switches to rotate and clean rollers on Evening Post Publishing's new printing press.



Darryl Carter squeezes between printing rollers to make adjustments to Evening Post Publishing's recently acquired 2008 Goss Magnum Single Width Press at a new facility in North Charleston.

Coroner's missteps revealed in records

Violates ethic rules, hires ex-chief snared in kickback scheme

BY TONY BARTELME
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ORANGEBURG — In 2019, Michael Bartley applied for a part-time job as a county deputy coroner. He seemed well-qualified, with previous mortuary experience and having served as police chief at South Carolina State University.

When asked on a hiring questionnaire whether he had ever stolen anything from his employers, Bartley wrote no.

Left unmentioned was his guilty plea in 2013 to federal charges that he used his public law enforcement job for personal gain, records obtained by The Post and Courier show. The charges involved a kickback scheme that prosecutors said would have netted Bartley \$30,000 and an all-terrain vehicle had it not been exposed. At the time of his court appearance, then-U.S.

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Printing operation will have major role in SC

PRESS, from A1

Post and Courier still delivers printed newspapers to more than 30,000 readers in the greater Charleston area each weekday.

The company will print most of the other 10 South Carolina newspapers it owns at the North Charleston site, as well as print publications it does not own and commercial printing jobs.

Evening Post Publishing Chairman of the Board Pierre Manigault said many community publications would have very limited printing options but for the company's new press.

"I think a lot of the products that people in the Low-country are used to seeing are printed by us," he said. "I think that, just like we are doing the Uncovered series and helping smaller community newspapers that don't have the resources, we are trying to boost journalism in South Carolina."

He said the press will also help the company diversify its revenue through commercial printing jobs.

"It is a pretty big investment, and we think it will pay for itself," Manigault said.

Harmon said the newer press will do the work of the older two presses it is replacing more efficiently and with higher quality.

"In South Carolina, we are one of the main printers," Harmon said. "That's kind of our niche right now."

Up close, the newer printing press is an imposing piece of machinery, 130 feet long and 40 feet wide. It consumes ink by the barrel and can rapidly turn a huge roll of paper into tens of thousands of printed, collated and folded newspapers, ready for delivery.

The former Post and Courier building in downtown Charleston has two older and larger presses, currently performing their final weeks of service. Replacing them at the World Trade Center industrial park in North



Jim Krassow and Darryl Carter adjust the ink levels while fine-tuning The Post and Courier's new printing press in North Charleston on Dec. 12.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HENRY TAYLOR/STAFF

Charleston is the newer press purchased from a seller in Sweden, which made its way to Charleston in multiple shipping containers.

Just creating a foundation for the machine in its new location involved eight truckloads of concrete, said Harmon.

"We've added a lot of upgrades and redid all the controls, and all the newest bells and whistles," he said in November. "Right now, we're at the stage where the press has been completely assembled and we're going through the test process."

A newer press in a new location is just one of many changes that followed the 2021 restructuring of Evening Post Industries, a company that traces its roots to The Courier newspaper founded in 1803.

More than 200 years later, the family-owned company was a multi-state business with interests in television



Technicians make adjustments to the press in North Charleston.

stations, multiple newspapers, extensive real estate holdings on the Charleston peninsula, a forestry company, pharmaceutical company, a chain of hospices and a book publishing operation.

In recent years, those holdings were trimmed down, the television stations were sold off and so were the hospices. And in 2021, Evening Post Industries was split in-

to three companies. Today, The Post and Courier and 10 other papers, along with book publishing, commercial printing and White Oak Forestry, are run by Evening Post Publishing Inc.

A different company, Evening Post Industries, owns about 12 acres of real estate on the Charleston peninsula, which is slated for a redevelopment called Cou-

rier Square. Those holdings include much of the land between King, Spring, St. Philip and Line streets, as well as the former newspaper building along the east side of King Street between Columbus and Line.

Previously, the company leased vacant land that it owns at Meeting and Columbus streets for the development of the \$100 million The Guild apartments and the \$38 million headquarters of Greystar, an international real estate manager and developer.

Evening Post Industries CEO Ron Owens said the company has received permission from Charleston's Board of Architectural Review to demolish the block-long newspaper offices and manufacturing facilities at King and Columbus streets.

"We're not going to tear it down right away because we don't know what we're going to build there," he said, add-

ing that plans will be worked on over the next year with input from community and civic groups.

The more immediate plans involve a large surface parking lot on the west side of King Street and surrounding properties owned by the company, where the company has received conceptual approval from the BAR for retail businesses, apartments and a senior living facility.

"If everything goes as planned, we should break ground late next year," Owens said.

The Post and Courier is South Carolina's largest news organization and has been expanding statewide, with reporters in Beaufort, Bluffton, Charleston, Columbia, Hilton Head, Greenville, Myrtle Beach, Rock Hill and Spartanburg.

"All of the expansion is digital, so that doesn't affect the printing press," Manigault said.

The Post and Courier is available in print and online in the greater Charleston area, and online elsewhere. Weekly editions of The Post and Courier are published in print for Columbia and Georgetown. Evening Post Publishing also publishes the daily Aiken Standard and weekly printed editions of the Moultrie News, Kingstree News, North Augusta Star, Summerville Journal Scene, Berkeley Independent and Goose Creek Gazette.

"We've been looking at this whole thing since the split-up of Evening Post Industries a year ago, and we're really looking at it (Evening Post Publishing) as a startup company," he said. "It's a little bizarre, looking at it as a 200-year-old startup, but that's how it is, and we're looking for the best ways a media company can operate in this era."

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Probe: Coroner violates ethic rules, hires ex-chief caught in scheme

CORONER, from A1

Attorney Bill Nettles said Bartley "used his position and relationships in an effort to line his pockets at the university's expense."

Bartley's hiring in the coroner's office comes amid lingering questions in the death this year of a South Carolina State student — a case Bartley worked on, according to the student's family. The 2013 federal conviction could make it difficult for him to testify in court as it goes directly to his credibility, one legal expert said.

Adding to the uncertainty, his boss, Orangeburg County Coroner Samuella Marshall, ignored public records requests about the case for weeks. What's more, Marshall owes the S.C. Ethics Commission \$12,430 over violations of open government rules, as revealed in a new investigation through The Post and Courier-led Uncovered project — a collaboration of local newspapers across South Carolina that explores questionable government conduct.

The Post and Courier asked Marshall and Bartley to discuss these issues. Bartley did not respond. Marshall declined to comment.

Marshall's personal attorney, Maya Grace Slaughter of Orangeburg, said the coroner strives to be timely in her response to public records requests and apologized for the delays. She said Marshall plans to pay her Ethics Commission debts.

Marshall grew up in Holly Hill, attended SC State and is owner-funeral directress and embalmer of Shuler-Marshall Funeral Home, according to the company's website. She was elected county coroner in 1992, becoming the first Black woman to hold such an office in South Carolina.

But during her decades-long career as coroner, she also racked up a reputation for blowing off state ethics rules, a previous Uncovered report found.



FILE/GLENN SMITH/STAFF

Michael Bartley, former police chief at SC State University, seen arriving at the federal courthouse in Charleston, pleaded guilty in 2013 in a kickback scheme.

Last year, the state Ethics Commission fined Marshall \$22,600 for a chronic failure to file her required financial disclosures. These disclosures include information about campaign fundraising and spending, as well as details about her sources of income. Such disclosures bolster government accountability, revealing potential conflicts of interest. Marshall repeatedly ignored the commission's efforts to reach her about those disclosures and her growing tab of late fees, ethics investigators testified in a June 2021 hearing.

The commission ultimately reduced her \$22,600 fine to \$17,000 — if she paid five monthly installments of \$3,400. Marshall paid the first three. The fourth payment wasn't honored by the bank, the commission said. The agency has filed a legal judgment over the remaining debt. Slaughter said a "personal family expense" triggered her client's failure to pay on time.

"Ms. Marshall has every intent to satisfy her debt," her attorney said.

Marshall also slow-walked public records requests after her office handled the death of Amya Carr.

Carr, 21, was co-captain of the Champagne Dancers, SC State's dance team. She had been having breathing problems that seemed to worsen when she was in her dorm, her mother told The Post and

Courier this year. Students in the dorm complex had reported problems with mold, a known cause of asthma flare-ups.

SC State records show the school logged dozens of complaints about mold in recent years, with most involving Hugine Suites — the dorm complex where Carr lived. The university, however, said no one in Carr's suite had reported mold problems.

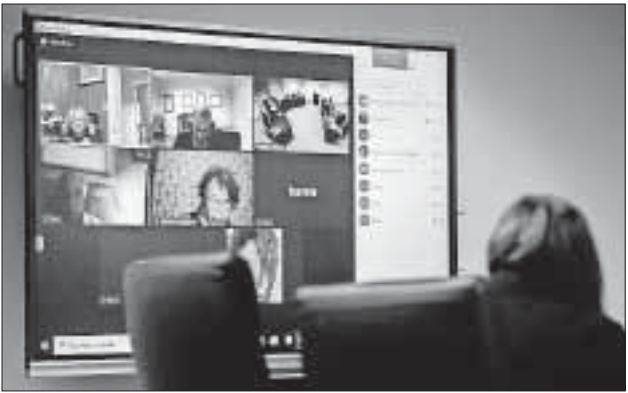
One night in April, students rushed her to a local hospital. She died there. A campus police report said Carr died from an asthma attack, but questions about what might have triggered the attack lingered long after her death.

Under South Carolina law, death investigations are required when a person dies in any suspicious or unusual manner, or when in apparent good health. Experts interviewed by The Post and Courier in the wake of Carr's death said an autopsy normally would be done.

No such postmortem examination was conducted.

Marshall defended her decision not to do an autopsy with a brief statement earlier this year: "The answer is simple. After careful review and investigation of her medical history, an autopsy was not deemed necessary." The State Law Enforcement Division is now investigating Carr's death.

Given Bartley's past



GAVIN MCINTYRE/STAFF

Orangeburg County Coroner Samuella Marshall addresses the S.C. Ethics Commission over Zoom during an appeal of fines she owes the agency.

connections to SC State, The Post and Courier in June asked for the coroner's final report. The newspaper asked again in early October. The newspaper also sought documents in his personnel file from the coroner's office and Orangeburg County. Under state law, public bodies must respond to a Freedom of Information Act request in 10 business days if records are less than 2 years old. The agency then has 30 calendar days to gather the materials.

Marshall failed to meet those public record deadlines. In a brief email in late July, Marshall brushed aside the request, saying merely that "reports housed in the coroner's office are protected" from public release by a federal privacy law and the state Freedom of Information Act.

Taylor Smith, an attorney for the South Carolina Press Association, said that when ignored public records requests are "brought to the attention of the public body and silence persists then two questions are reasonable to ask: Why? And what are they hiding?"

County staff eventually supplied redacted documents in Bartley's personnel file, which raised new questions about his hiring.

A letter Feb. 27, 2019, from the county's human resources department offered Bartley a part-time job as deputy coroner, paying \$85 per call. On March 18, 2019, a "new hire

checklist" said he had passed his background and reference checks.

Another form asked three questions about whether he had stolen money, items or filed a false expense report. "No" was checked for all three questions.

The form didn't ask whether new hires had been convicted of any crimes. The files also didn't document his previous work for the coroner in early 2013.

Marshall fired him then when he told her he was about to be indicted in a corruption scheme, The (Orangeburg) Times and Democrat reported at the time. "The Orangeburg County Coroner's Office has and will continue to be an office of utmost integrity, professionalism and ethical standards for the citizens of Orangeburg County," she told the local newspaper.

Bartley's personnel files also contained job references, including one in 2019 from an SC State employee. An administrative assistant in the university police department gave him excellent marks. In the space set aside to explain why he left the job, a county intern who completed the reference check wrote "N/A" on the form. An SC State spokesman said the university doesn't comment on personnel matters.

Orangeburg County's publicly available files didn't

mention Bartley's federal conviction. Neither did ones from the state Criminal Justice Academy.

One of the academy's roles is to keep track of law enforcement misconduct.

But when SC State fired Bartley in 2012 amid a SLED investigation, the university's interim police chief wrote to the academy that Bartley lost his job for "violating agency policy NOT involving misconduct," academy records show.

Following his sentencing in 2015, when he received three years of probation and was ordered to complete 100 hours of community service, federal prosecutors noted that his conviction was for conspiring to use his influence as SC State police chief in exchange for a gratuity.

It could be problematic for a coroner to hire people with criminal records, said Miller Shealy, a professor at the Charleston School of Law and a former prosecutor. If those employees had to testify during a criminal proceeding, attorneys could attack their credibility by focusing on their criminal pasts. "That's why the FBI and other law enforcement agencies don't hire convicted felons."

Unlike his county personnel files and state law enforcement records, Bartley's conviction was well-chronicled in the courts and news stories after an FBI investigation exposed corruption in the highest tiers of SC State's leadership.

Bartley, then SC State's police chief, was accused of working with the university's board chairman, Jonathan Pinson, to have the school buy a plot of land known as "the Sportsman Retreat." In exchange, Bartley was to receive \$30,000 and an ATV, prosecutors said at the time.

At his sentencing hearing, U.S. District Judge David Norton said to Bartley: "It's amazing you sold your integrity so cheaply."

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