

The Post and Courier

TOGETHER

YOUR DONATIONS. OUR STORIES. **MAKING A DIFFERENCE.**

By [Robie Scott](#)

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hot

having a high degree of heat or a high temperature.

If you're reading this from anywhere in South Carolina, chances are you're either indoors, or you're hot. Air conditioners are working overtime, gardens are begging for rain, and the reminder to drink plenty of water is ever present.

So, imagine being asked to limit water consumption. On June 28, The Post and Courier reported that the [Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority requested customers to cut back on irrigation and permanently change their watering habits to reduce pressure to raise rates](#). It's understandable. But tell that to the backyard gardener doting over their tomatoes or the farmer awaiting the next crop of watermelons, okra and butterbeans, and it's a hard sell.

The fact is things are heating up. On June 12, [The Post and Courier Rising Water's lab](#) reported on the ongoing story of perennial flooding in Charleston's medical district, and the concern that warming waters that fuel rising seas can also supercharge hurricanes. That same story, however, indicated a possible flooding solution, at least for the medical district. And we need more solutions.

The Rising Waters lab will continue to share stories about how flooding and rising waters impact South Carolina's diverse communities and tell the climate stories of the South. It is fully funded by donors just like you and we thank you for giving us the opportunity to continue this important work. From time to time you may read a story that makes you hot under the collar, or gives us all a possible solution.

Donors Making an Impact



Dr. Jack Schaeffer doesn't have to say a word when he enters a room. You feel his presence. But engage in conversation with him, and you'll witness reverence for his beloved Charleston and his personal commitment to preserving its treasures, his dedication to his profession as a doctor of optometry (OD FAAO), his direct impact on philanthropy across diverse charities, and the glue that holds him together – his family.

I had the opportunity to meet with him recently and learned that in addition to his many accolades (far too many for one story, hopefully, he'll write a book), he's a treasure trove of true, classic Charleston stories – you know, the ones you can't make up. Get ready, because one of those is below. But first, here's a high-level look at his background, accomplishments and legacy.

Schaeffer is a native of Charleston and has had roots in the Holy City his entire life. He graduated from the University of Georgia (as did all three of his children, also all optometrists), and Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, Tenn. He practiced in Atlanta, Ga., and Birmingham, Ala., where he was president of an 18-location group practice and refractive laser center. He sold the practice, but continues to lecture internationally, and serves on many industry boards including Johnson and Johnson and Bausch and Lomb.

He has owned several homes on Sullivan's Island and across peninsular Charleston. Notably, he purchased [20 South Battery](#) in 2018 and restored it with historical integrity to its due glory and furnished it with his impressive collection of antiques. "Everything in the mansion is period, from 1870 or before," he shared. He credits his girlfriend, Dr. Melanie Petro, a facial plastic surgeon practicing in Birmingham for keeping him on track throughout several of his renovations.

20 South Battery under his leadership now serves as one of the South's most prestigious inns, with 11 guest suites, a parlor, ballroom, dining room and a generous library (with a spectacular view of Charleston Harbor), all wrapped by two welcoming piazzas and accentuated by an impressive rear courtyard.

Schaeffer is also quick to point out that there are two resident ghosts living in rooms eight and 10 that have been the focus of both PBS and ABC feature broadcasts.

But, it's the staff he's most proud of. "I have the best staff, they make everything happen and bring spirit to the mansion."

Although 20 South Battery welcomes guests, it has also served as a beacon of philanthropy. The Post and Courier Public Service and Investigative Reporting Fund held its first fundraiser at there, hosted by Schaeffer, raising \$90,000.

Likewise, there have been 71 other charity events at the mansion (not counting political fundraisers) representing 37 different charities.

So how did this doctor come to embrace Charleston with such devotion? It may have started when he was five years old.

A Night at the Museum

At the age of five, young Jack loved nothing more than to visit the former Charleston Museum on Rutledge Avenue. He dreamed of seeing the exhibits come to life, so much so, that while visiting with his aunt Sandra Kirschner, he hid in the old Model T automobile. She thought that he had returned home with others and left. It was around 7 p.m. when the family began to ask, "Where's Jack?"

Meanwhile, locked in the museum after closing, Jack realized that the exhibits were not going to come to life, and he needed to get out. There was just one problem. There was a mummy statue by the front door that he was morbidly afraid of. He took refuge with the Confederate soldier statues "because, I knew no matter what, they'd take care of me," he said. He did try sliding on his belly to get out so the mummy wouldn't see him, but at the end of the journey, he wound back up in the care of the soldiers.

The museum director was called, came with the keys, and Jack was rescued.

The Quintessential Charleston

Schaeffer has many memories growing up all along the Southern coastline. His father owned a grocery and general merchandise store called the “Bargain Corner” on Calhoun Street in Charleston that catered to minority families that couldn’t pay at the time of purchase, so he kept running tabs for them on index cards. Later when the family lived in South Windemere, his father purchased a kosher bakery, which Jack proudly shares “kept Charleston kosher.”

He remembers driving with his buddies from St. Andrews High School (they all remain friends) to Savannah with their dates – or to find new ones.

And he remembers The Post and Courier as part of his life. “When I started reading about what y’all were doing with the smaller newspapers, it just felt right. All these newspapers in little towns were going away and people could do whatever they wanted. Now, they can’t, and that’s amazing,” he said.

The Schaeffer family includes daughter Dr. Brooke Kaplan and husband Justin, son Dr. Mark Schaeffer and wife Sarah, son Dr. David Schaeffer and wife Lyndsey and grandchildren Edith, Maddie, Sam, Libby, Maya, Nate and Miles.

Because of You

Because of your donations, projects reporter Thad Moore was able to reveal that at least six of South Carolina’s [elected clerks of court have treated themselves to bonuses or boosted their pay](#) using little-watched pots of federal money intended to support children and families. Using SC’s Freedom of Information Act, Moore sought records from all 46 of the state’s counties about how clerks spend the money, which is intended to underwrite the cost of enforcing child support orders. He found several instances in which clerks used the money instead to pay themselves extra. And he found that the state S.C. Department of Social Services has taken a hands-off approach to monitoring how clerks spend the money even after a series of high-profile scandals.



File/Kingstree News

Reader donations also funded projects reporter John Ramsey's efforts to [dig deep into the double life of a Myrtle Beach pastor](#) whose actions come under scrutiny following his wife's untimely death. Mica Miller, whose body was found in a North Carolina park, was determined to have died by suicide. But her family and friends have continued to push for a deeper accounting of her husband J.P. Miller's alleged behavior during the marriage and the toll they said it took on his young wife. Ramsey spoke with a dozen people connected to the Miller family, the church and the bar that Miller co-owned until recently. He also reviewed sermons, text messages, property records, police reports and court filings. Together, they illuminated the secret life of a religious leader accused in court records of sexually molesting underage girls and abusive behavior toward women, including both of the women he married. They paint a portrait of a pastor who didn't practice what he preached.

Your donations also supported efforts by investigative reporter Jocelyn Grzeszczak and Ramsey to [chronicle the lives of a group of homeless people in Charleston](#) and how the city is addressing the needs of the unhoused at a time when rental prices are soaring. The reporters and photojournalist Andrew Whitaker followed the lives of their subjects over a period of months, following

their journey from the streets to the promise of new shelter. The team also provided disposable cameras to their subjects to allow them to document their lives from their perspective. And the reporters examined a new plan by Charleston's mayor to provide a pathway off the streets for the unhoused while also calling for police to arrest people for minor offenses if they refuse other forms of help being offered. The resulting special report showed the complexity of the problem at a time when cities across the country are grappling with how to address a nationwide spike in homelessness.



Zolan Mace (left) plays on his phone while his mother Annita Martinez cleans up dog hair after trimming up her dog Precious on Thursday, April 18, 2024, in Charleston. Andrew Whitaker/Staff

With the help of reader support, senior projects reporter Tony Bartelme also continued his coverage of a critical and fragile shorebird sanctuary south of Charleston. After Bartelme chronicled threats to Deveaux Bank, one of the nation's most important way stations for migratory birds, South Carolina [wildlife officials moved to temporarily close the rapidly eroding island](#) to human activity. The state had a change of heart after his initial story ran, saying a complete closure was necessary to protect the state's nesting pelican population.



Laughing gulls and brown pelicans rest near a "No landing" sign on Deveaux Bank on April 24. Gavin McIntyre/Staff

Donations also supported Bartleme's work with statehouse reporter Nicholas Reynolds to shed more light on a controversial plan to build a new gas-fired power plant in the Lowcountry. The pair revealed that Santee Cooper, a partner with Dominion Energy in the plan, had [blocked the release of information about a future gas pipeline](#), citing trade secrets -- a move that one open records expert said "strained belief." Bartelme and Reynolds also uncovered documents that show that a key architect of 2007's Base Load Review Act, which led to the V.C. Summer \$9 billion nuclear fiasco, [has his fingerprints on a new South Carolina energy plan](#) that also could shift financial risks onto the backs of the public.

In Your Words

As donors to [The Post and Courier Public Service and Investigative Journalism Fund](#), this is your newsletter and you have a voice! Each month, we will share your comments regarding what's important to you and why you've chosen to

invest in The Post and Courier. Please keep them coming! We will also share your contribution notes.

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