

Back to work

As USC returns to practice, it seeks to bolster its return game, featuring Ace Sanders and Bryce Sherman
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The State

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2010

BUILDING OUR CITY | BULL STREET TRACT

Historic land deal reached



FILE PHOTOGRAPH/THE STATE

The Babcock Building on the South Carolina Department of Mental Health campus along Bull Street is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Upstate developer to pay \$15 million for old State Hospital

By **JEFF WILKINSON**
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An Upstate developer has signed a contract to buy the 165-acre state mental hospital campus on Bull Street in one of the most anticipated and significant land deals in city history.

Bob Hughes submitted a signed contract to the S.C. Department of Mental Health late Thursday afternoon agreeing to a total guaranteed price of \$15 million to be paid on a maximum seven-year installment plan. DMH retains ownership of individual parcels until they are sold.

Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin called the site the largest piece of land in any major city's

downtown east of the Mississippi River. A 2005 plan called for construction of more than 1,200 homes and nearly 1 million square feet of office and retail space, which would have added significantly to the city's tax rolls. It is unclear whether Hughes will be bound by that

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AT THESTATE.COM

Memories and Time:

S.C. Mental Health special projects manager John Laschuma narrates a visual essay on the state of the Babcock Building on Bull Street.

DJJ chief tapped to run state's prisons



Byars

By **GINA SMITH**
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Bill Byars, credited with turning around the troubled Department of Juvenile Justice, will now oversee the state's prisons, taking charge of the deficit-running Department of Corrections.

"This is a man known as 'Mr. Fix

It.' And we are sending 'Mr. Fix It' to the Department of Corrections," said Gov.-elect Nikki Haley, who announced Byars as her pick during a Thursday news conference. "He took an agency 10 years ago that was under lawsuit, that had sexual abuse, that was in the papers every day, and he has made it one of the big-

gest success stories in the country."

The federal government was monitoring DJJ following a 1995 class-action lawsuit that claimed overcrowding at the Columbia complex, physical and sexual abuse of juvenile offenders and inadequate medical care. Little progress was

SEE **PRISONS PAGE A6**

STORES, SHOPPERS EYE END OF BLUE LAWS

Dec. 26 sales might mark their demise in Lexington County

By **TIM FLACH**
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After-Christmas sales are likely to start a few hours earlier this year in Lexington County.

County Council is slated to take a final vote to repeal Sunday shopping limits on Thursday, less than three weeks after it was proposed. Its nine members will listen to public comment beforehand on ending the area's status as the last urban area in South Carolina with the Sunday restrictions.

The "blue law" restrictions would be lifted immediately, which means retailers may open before 1:30 p.m. on Dec. 26.

And that has some retailers scrambling to prepare for the prospect of being able to sell any type of merchandise so soon on a Sunday.

Local outlets of major national chains "probably will be the ones that benefit most" from the change, said Gregg Pinner, executive director of the West Metro Chamber of Commerce.

Eliminating the limits was a demand by on-line retailing giant Amazon.com, which an-

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WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

Report: U.S. will be there for a while

By **NANCY A. YOUSSEF, WARREN P. STROBEL** and **MARGARET TALEV**
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama and his aides released a strategy assessment of the war in Afghanistan on Thursday that asserts U.S. troops are making gains but acknowledges serious threats to the effort and lays out a timeline that promises several more years of U.S. involvement.

The terse, five-page unclassified version of the secret review says that U.S. military operations have disrupted the Pakistan-based al Qaeda terrorist network over the last year and halted the momentum of the Taliban insurgency in southern Afghanistan.

But the Afghan government hasn't yet proved that it can take over areas that have been cleared of insurgents, nor has Pakistan done enough to eliminate al Qaeda and Taliban havens on its territory, the report says.

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