

# The outlook is brighter than you think in Old Town and beyond

It's been a rough few months for our collective state of mind in Bluffton.

The Streetscape project has Old Town in a state of revolving chaos. The roundabout at S.C. 46 and Bluffton Parkway continues to deteriorate. Our neighbors who put their savings on the line to chase a dream shuttered their businesses one after another.

A pair of friends in my neighborhood were excited to see their houses sell after

being on the market for just a few weeks. The bad news for us is the selling price was well below what most of us bought for. Mrs. Medium

and I feel like bats, hanging upside down in our mortgage.

See what just happened. My first thought when they told me their news was financial depression. That got me thinking. I'm tired of this funk that I, like many of you, have succumbed to.

We're hammered with it every night on the news. The economy still looks bad. Foreclosures are still high. More jobs are being lost.

Enough of that brainwash of negativity. It's easy to dwell in it. I've lost co-workers and friends, as well as a nice chunk off my paycheck,

in the interests of keeping my job and attempting to entertain you fine readers daily. That bitterness begets more bitterness.

So I would like to thank the Beaufort County School District for helping me to get my head out of my rear. My wife and I took a tour of the new Red Cedar Elementary School, where T.J. will attend first grade this fall.

I walked in the front door thinking, "Oh great, let's see how they've wasted my tax dollars this time." But as we walked the Red Cedar corridors, we were flabbergasted by the efficient design and the overall beauty of the school.

T.J.'s section of the building, the Pups, highlights a brilliant layout feature. His classroom is one of five in a cluster with a large discovery center in the middle of the space. The center has a skylight which immediately changes the feel of the school. Gone are the dingy, darkly lit halls of my youth that made school feel like more of a dungeon.

No, this is a masterpiece of a school design — by far the best school layout I have seen in my five years of reporting stories in the Beaufort County schools. I'm not just saying this to get my son excited — I'd actually be more critical if his new school stunk. I have found more to take issue with Superintendent Valerie Truesdale than

to praise in her time on the job, but fair is fair.

This is an achievement for our area, under budget and built on time. Once the school gets its copiers, computers and Promethean blackboards, it has all the makings of being a signature accomplishment for Truesdale's time in charge.

Red Cedar was the first eye opener of many in the last week. The opening of Captain Woody's in the Old Town Promenade is another. It is a game changer for the entire Old Town area.

My grouper melt was outstanding, but more than that, the restaurant has the feel of a perfect chill-out spot. Shiny new flat screen TVs all over the place makes this feel like a prime football viewing spot this fall. The upstairs open-air bar is excellent. The lounge chairs and sofas on the outside deck have my name written all over them, much like those at The Blind Pig Saloon, another recent addition to a previously left-for-dead Bluffton nightlife scene.

Captain Woody's is a centerpiece for The Promenade, the kind of traffic draw that is so desperately needed. Ted Huffman's barbecue spot is nearly complete. Cork's has just expanded — that they were able to thrive as the only draw in the space should only mean great things ahead for the swanky happy hour meeting spot.

The Dispensary Bar across

the street in the Calhoun Street corridor will be open soon enough. Streetscape is showing signs of wrapping up. So it's not hard to imagine a near future where both tourists and locals can explore the history and creative magic of Calhoun and stay downtown for dinner and drinks with a multitude of options.

Progress is evident even through the rubbly roads on the outskirts of the Streetscape project. Corner Perk coffee shop has already carved a niche among the caffeine addicts in town and Monster Pizza's Ryan and Leah McCarthy are dreaming up inventive ways to draw more folks to the space with the best pizza in town (my opinion, nobody asked). Their first-of-many cornhole leagues launched this summer and has been a resounding success.

Sure, there's plenty of doom and gloom around within eyeshot — you don't even have to search it out. But more and more, the signs of a new wave of growth are popping up all over.

The storefronts in the Best Buy plaza that have sat mostly empty since Best Buy, Dollar Tree, GNC and Petco moved in are filling up.

Five Guys Burgers and Fries officials report the restaurant is one of the top-performing locations in the South. Two new "coming soon" signs sprung up in the last week — one for Jersey

Mike's sandwich shop and the other for Sake House Japanese restaurant.

Head the other way down U.S. 278 and you see the same kind of growth in Okatie and Sun City. Okatie Ale House is booming, a second SportsClips location opened up in the plaza and the Food Lion is doing well.

Across the street, a new Publix is under construction near Wal-Mart and it finally appears that the long-rumored Okatie Crossings mall project is taking root. The developer, Sembler, has put a sparkly new sign in the ground advertising "The Colony," a supposed luxury shopping offshoot of the Crossings. While it's likely years away from opening, a sign is better than no sign.

Hey, the Dow was over 9,000. Our 401Ks may be worth resuscitating after all. And our home values may creep back to some semblance of 2006 levels (dare to dream).

So turn that frown upside down, get out of the house and see all this happy development for yourself.

Want more Tim? Join the "Wood is Burning" fan club on Facebook, Tweet Tim on [www.twitter.com/timwoodbt](http://www.twitter.com/timwoodbt), e-mail him at [tim.wood@blufftontoday.com](mailto:tim.wood@blufftontoday.com) or call him at 815-0830. And check out his brain dumps on TV at 7 p.m. weeknights on "My Lowcountry 3."



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Tim Wood

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