

# The Herald



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A recent expansion of the airport in Lancaster County is one of many projects aimed at keeping up with growth in the area. Lancaster County is the highest-growth county in the Charlotte metro area from 2020 to 2025. The county just named a new county administrator.

## Lancaster County names Tucker as administrator

BY JOHN MARKS  
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The fastest-growing county in the Charlotte metro region has a new leader.

Brian Tucker will start as Lancaster County Administrator on July 1. The Lancaster County native and assistant city manager for Myrtle Beach will replace Dennis Marstall, who announced late last year he would leave for a job in Kansas.

Tucker has more than 20 years of experience in public, private and non-profit work. In his role in Myrtle Beach, he oversaw operations for about 1,000 employees and a \$300 million annual budget, according to information provided by Lancaster County. Tucker had direct responsibility there for more than 400 employees.

Lancaster County runs on a \$160 million budget.

“Coming home to serve my family and friends is overwhelmingly surreal,” Tucker said in an announcement from

the county. “I have watched the growth and evolution of Lancaster County over the last number of years.”

Lancaster County routinely ranks among the highest-growth counties both in South Carolina and the Charlotte metro region. The county grew 19% from 2020 to last year, easily the highest rate in an 11-county area surrounding Charlotte, according to new U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

There are more than 114,000 resi-

SEE TUCKER, 2A

## Fort Mill school has TB exposure, SC health department says

BY JOHN MARKS  
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There’s an active exposure case to tuberculosis at a Fort Mill school, the state Health Department said Thursday.

The South Carolina Department of Public Health identified one exposure at Pleasant Knoll Middle School and is working with the Fort Mill School District to identify anyone else who may have been exposed or needs to be tested, according to the Health Department.

The Health Department didn’t give details on whether the exposure was a student or staff member, or how it occurred in the school.

Pleasant Knoll has nearly 1,000 students. As of mid-school year, it was the largest of the Fort Mill district’s six middle schools by enrollment.

### ABOUT TUBERCULOSIS CASES

Tuberculosis is a bacterial disease typically found in the lungs. It spreads person to person through the air. Without treatment, about 10% of people who are exposed to the bacteria develop the disease at some point in their lifetimes, according to the health department.

The state averaged 87 tuberculosis cases per year in the past five years.

One quarter of people worldwide are infected with it, according to the U.S.



JOHN MARKS

The Fort Mill School District has a tuberculosis case being investigated by the state health department.

Centers for Disease Control. There are more than 1.4 million tuberculosis-related deaths each year worldwide, according to the S.C. Health Department.

More men than women typically get

tuberculosis and in South Carolina, most cases occur in Black males, state health officials said.

The Health Department lists facts related to tuberculosis in schools here.

*This is a developing story.*

## Immigrant admits killing girlfriend, unborn child in Rock Hill

BY ANDREW DYS  
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YORK COUNTY SC

The York County courtroom gallery late Thursday afternoon filled with tears of the heartbroken, and the sounds of soft Spanish speakers and interpreters translating into English. And then came the English-speaking voice and face of an 8-year-old boy who watched his mother and unborn sister killed in a vicious stabbing almost a year ago to the day.

A boy who called 911 and met the police when they arrived after he first had tried to save his mother, who was sprawled on the deck of a mobile home with more than 20 stab wounds. His voice and his face played on speakers and video screens in the courtroom.

The courtroom, almost filled to capacity, was otherwise totally silent.

“Please, please ... my mom, she’s pregnant, I can’t lose her ... she has a baby,” the 8-year-old told the 911 dispatcher.

The boy told officials on 911 and again in a police body camera video how he watched his mother stabbed over and over and how he tried to fight off the attacker, his mother’s boyfriend, but could not. The man took his mother’s SUV and fled before police arrived.

There was no saving Leonor Alpizar, 37, and her unborn daughter who was going to be named Brittany on that May 16, 2025 night. Both of them died.

Alpizar suffered 16 wounds to her torso. Her arms and hands had more wounds.

Brittany, 29 weeks pregnant at the time, lived 42 minutes after being born by C-section at a hospital, testimony showed. But she did not survive. Cause of death, prosecutors said: her mother’s trauma.

Visiting Judge Jane Merrill heard that 911 call from Alpizar’s son, Justin. Merrill watched the police body camera video of Justin begging the officer who was first on the scene to help.

The video that showed the tiny, heroic boy telling police what he asked the man who stabbed his mother: “Why did you do this?”

Pedro Mondragon Ramirez, 43, is the defendant. Lawyers and officials in the case say he is an undocumented immigrant from Mexico who has been in the country for at least 20 years. Ramirez has been on an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) hold in the York County jail since his arrest shortly after the killings.

Using an interpreter, he admitted the brutal crimes and pleaded guilty to two murder charges.

Merrill spoke of the stab wounds. She spoke of the frantic 911 call from the boy that when played in court had people wiping tears from their eyes in the gallery.

“What this essentially boils down to is you killed your child, and the mother of your child,” Merrill told Ramirez.

Merrill sentenced Ramirez to the maximum under a plea deal between prose-

SEE IMMIGRANT, 4A



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