



The State

Richland jury finds Prisma negligent in patient fall case

BY JOHN MONK
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A Richland County jury has found Prisma Health Richland Hospital liable for negligence in a medical malpractice lawsuit and awarded \$315,000 in a case involving a prominent elderly patient who suffered a fall at the hospital.

The jury was out three and a half hours before rendering a verdict in the case. Since the hospital is a charitable entity, the award against it was capped at

\$300,000 under state law.

The patient harmed by Prisma was the late Jack Mills, of Columbia, a former successful businessman and winner of the Order of the Palmetto, who was admitted to Prisma on April 25, 2022, for confusion and shortness of breath, according to a complaint in the case.

While at the hospital, Mills fell and broke his hip, the complaint said. He then had to have surgery.

The hospital should have been monitoring Mills better and failed to do so, the complaint said.

In a response to the complaint, the hospital filed an answer denying all allegations.

The jury found that the hospital was negligent and that the negligence caused Mills' injuries.

However, the jury also found that the negligence did not contribute to Mills' death, which happened in June 2024, a little more than two years after his fall.

The hospital has not responded to a request for comment from The State newspaper.

Mills was 88 when he died, and his

obituary described him as a "self-made man" with a strong work ethic who became a success in the cable contracting business. He learned how to fly and flew all over the Southeast installing phone and television cable, according to his obituary.

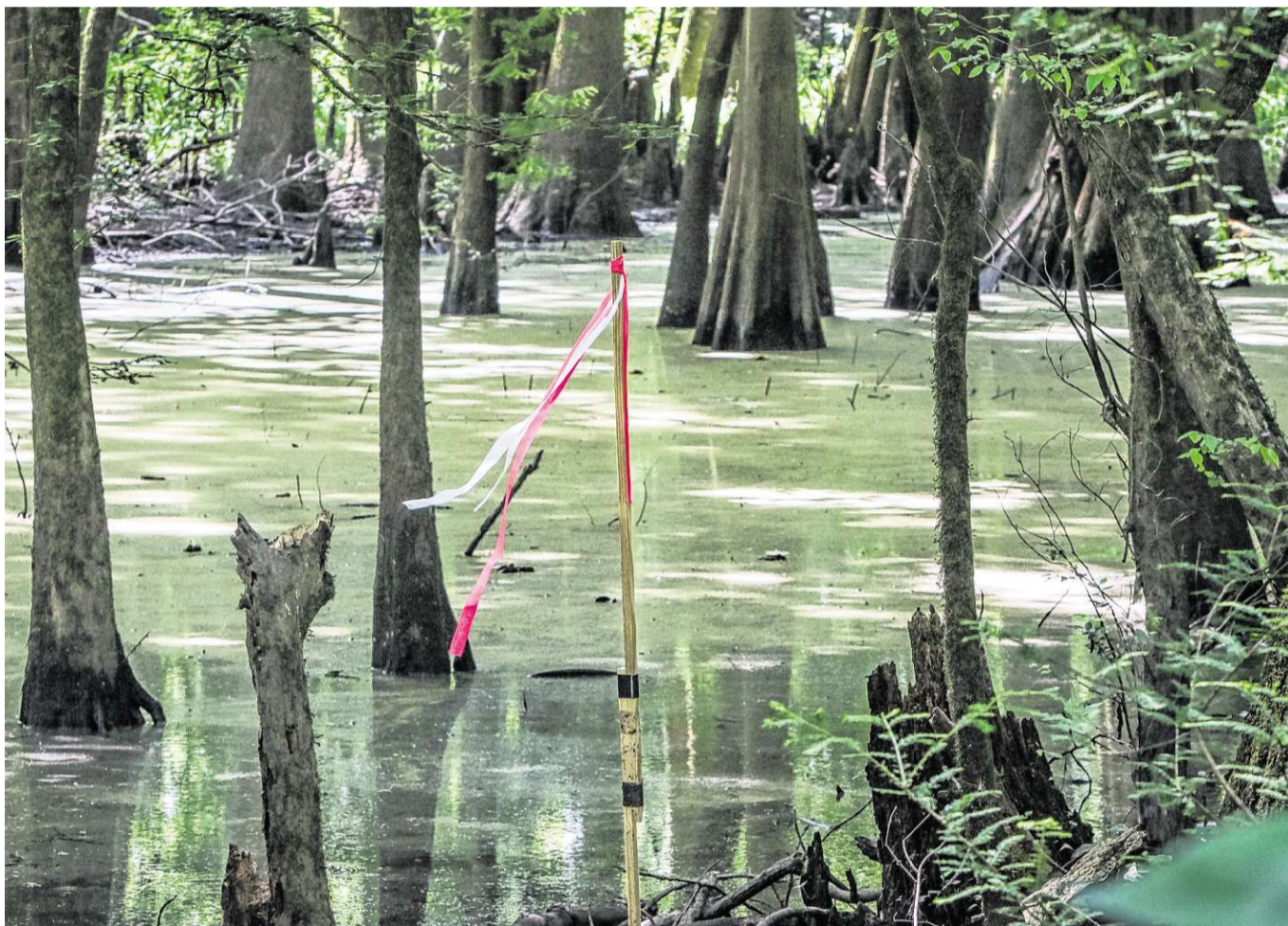
Mills also made contributions to the world of tennis on the state and national level, was an avid NASCAR fan, loved to read and worked for the renovation of the Township Auditorium in downtown Columbia among other civic activities, his obituary said.

During the four-day trial, the plaintiffs put up experts in fall prevention and hip surgery.

Lawyers for Mills' estate in the case were a husband-wife team from Charleston: Joshua and Eliza Cantwell.

Defense lawyers in the case included Brittany Bihun, Allan Belcher and Allison E. Malone, all of the Charleston area.

State Judge Milton Kimpson presided.



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Plans for a major gasoline-diesel pipeline caused an uproar in the Palmetto State about 10 years ago over the use of private land for the line. This is a site near Jackson, S.C., that had been staked off for the pipeline, which was never built. A new natural gas pipeline is now planned for the Lowcountry.

SC landowners who resist pipeline surveys face court action

BY SAMMY FRETWELL
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Attorneys for a company seeking to extend a natural gas pipeline through South Carolina are threatening to take property owners to court if the landowners don't grant access to their property.

Letters were sent earlier this month to multiple South Carolina residents who have not given Elba Express LLC permission to survey their land for possible location of the pipeline, according to the letters obtained by The State.

The pipeline would enter South Car-

olina from Georgia to serve a large new natural gas plant that state leaders say is needed to supply future energy needs. Elba Express is a division of the Kinder Morgan pipeline company.

State Rep. Weston Newton, an attorney for Elba Express, co-wrote the letters to property owners who have balked at allowing company surveyors onto their land for the \$431 million project.

If Elba Express "does not receive your permission to conduct the surveys within 14 days of the date of this letter, we will be forced to initiate legal proceedings to obtain a court order granting access," according to an April 9 letter obtained by The State that New-

ton co-wrote.

The letters went on to say the company would prefer not to go to court, but it needs to move forward with plans for the pipeline. Kinder Morgan has not begun legal proceedings, company vice president Allen Fore said.

Fore said gaining access to property for surveys helps the company decide the ultimate specific location for the pipeline. Sometimes, a visit can help the company determine whether an area of a person's land needs to be avoided, he said.

Newton, R-Beaufort, co-sponsored a sweeping energy bill last year that

SEE LANDOWNERS, 4A

Which version of SC charter school reform will prevail?

BY ZAK KOESKE
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COLUMBIA, S.C.

The South Carolina Senate has a decision to make on charter school reform.

The upper chamber, which earlier this year passed legislation that would bring greater transparency, accountability and procedural clarity to the growing sector, must weigh three options in light of the House's swift and unanimous passage of an amendment to the bill Thursday.

It could:

Accept the House version of the bill, which largely expands on the Senate's accountability framework with some exceptions;

Reject the House version, sending the bill to conference committee, where a small group of House and Senate lawmakers would attempt to hash out their differences;

Work out a compromise bill that precludes the need for a conference.

The bill's sponsor, Senate Education Committee Chair Greg Hembree, said he favored the third approach because it gives lawmakers more flexibility in coming to an agreement.

"If you go to conference, it's either A or B," the Horry County Republican said. "You don't have the flexibility to write a brand new amendment that's in between the two."

House Education committee chair Shannon Erickson, whose amended version of Hembree's bill sped through the lower chamber last week, expressed a willingness to sit down with her Senate counterpart to work out a preconference compromise.

The pair has worked together for years, she said, including last session when they negotiated a compromise on competing school voucher bills.

"We work very well together, we respect one another and we will do our best to come up with what we both think each of our bodies will accept," Erickson, R-Beaufort, said Monday.

While the House's 45-page amendment to the charter school accountability bill

SEE CHARTER SCHOOL, 4A

How Lexington County plans to spend opioid settlement money

BY BRISTOW MARCHANT
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Lexington County is looking for ways to spend \$2.3 million in money from an opioid settlement.

The county council on Tuesday approved funding requests from various agencies to combat drug abuse in Lexington County, from equestrian therapy to making sure those struggling with addiction can make it to their appointments.

Lexington County Council forwarded the request to the board that manages the S.C. Opioid Recovery Fund, which oversees the multi-million dollar settlements the state has received from opioid litigation.

The county is entitled to around \$17 million in payments from drug manufacturers and pharmacies resulting from the opioid epidemic, to be paid out over a 20-year period. Lexington County currently has about \$5 million available for drug abatement services in the state opioid fund.

"We're trying not to spend it all up

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