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CAROLINA LIVING

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Arts groups see a break in the clouds

CHARLOTTE SYMPHONY: SURVIVED CRISIS, BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN



GARY O'BRIEN - gobrien@charlotteobserver.com

BECHTLER MUSEUM: \$140,000 SURPLUS



DISCOVERY PLACE: FEARS LESSENED



TOP - T. ORTEGA GAINES - tgaines@charlotteobserver.com
ABOVE - ROBERT LAHSER - rlahser@charlotteobserver.com

TOP: A Charlotte Symphony Pops tympani player plays at Symphony Park.
MIDDLE: The Bechtler Museum's "Firebird."
ABOVE: Tnazia Phifer watches clown fish swim in a saltwater aquarium at Discovery Place.

Fundraising, staff cuts, conservative budgeting have many on better footing than a year ago.

BY STEVEN BROWN
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Fearing the worst as the recession hit, Charlotte's cultural groups took drastic steps. They laid off staffers. Cut salaries. Scaled back performances.

The strategy seems to have worked. Almost all of the city's leading arts groups think they've come through the season with their budgets balanced or better.

And while challenges remain, the picture looks much different from last year, when the groups were bracing for their most difficult season ever. The Arts & Science Council, which helps support many of them, had suffered a plunge of more than 30 percent in its fundraising. The individual groups had felt their own dropoffs in donations or ticket sales.

The Charlotte Symphony faced extra challenges. It had struggled against deficits for years. Then the ASC, judging it not financially viable, cut its support for 2009-2010 by \$1 million.

With the help of an emergency fund drive, the orchestra survived even that - though it ends the season with another deficit.

Because the groups' fiscal year ended June 30, the final book-keeping won't be ready for weeks. But the groups' leaders spoke about the results they expect.

SEE ARTS GROUPS, 5A

Old wells are rarely checked for leaks

Thousands of oil wells were 'temporarily' abandoned in Gulf, some for decades.

BY JEFF DONN AND MITCH WEISS
Associated Press

More than 27,000 abandoned oil and gas wells dot the hard rock beneath the Gulf of Mexico, an environmental minefield ignored for decades. No one - not industry, not government - checks to see if they are leaking, an investigation shows.

The oldest of these wells were abandoned in the late 1940s, raising the prospect that many deteriorating sealing jobs are already failing.

The Associated Press investigation uncovered particular concern with 3,500 of

the neglected wells, characterized in federal records as "temporarily abandoned."

Regulations for temporarily abandoned wells require oil companies to present plans to reuse or permanently plug them within a year. The AP found that the rule is routinely circumvented, and that more than 1,000 wells have lingered in that unfinished condition for more than a decade.

About three-quarters of the temporarily abandoned wells have been left in that status for more than a year, and many since the 1950s and 1960s - even though sealing procedures for temporary abandonment are not as stringent as those for permanent closures.

As a forceful reminder of SEE WELLS, 5A

County to buy part of flood-prone Doral

BY APRIL BETHEA
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A portion of the Doral Apartments, a Charlotte complex that has flooded often and sustained more than \$8 million in damage since 1995, will soon get a new owner: Mecklenburg County.

On Tuesday, county commissioners agreed to spend \$3.1 million to buy 132 apartment units, half of the complex, closest to Briar Creek. The 19 buildings will be demolished and the land preserved as green space to help

capture excess floodwater in the future.

The other 132 units will remain open under private ownership.

The deal announced Tuesday caps a years-long effort to buy the Doral, which is located on Monroe Road.

Past efforts had stalled because only part of the complex qualified for federal money to remove flood-prone properties. The owners did not want to split the property, and they had considered building a mixed-use SEE DORAL, 6A

TODAY'S MUST-READS

Heat danger: Hot weather and poor air quality are a bad mix. **1B**

Ron Stodghill: A Charlotte logo that ought to go. **7A**

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Today's forecast: Sunny and very hot. **6C**

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SORTING OUT THE TRASH SCHEDULES

The biggest change in years to Charlotte's recycling and trash collection is still prompting numerous questions. A map and guide to the changes. **1B**

U.S. challenges Ariz. law

The federal government took a big step into the immigration debate Tuesday when it filed a lawsuit seeking to throw out Arizona's crackdown on illegal immigrants, calling it unconstitutional. **3A**

Free private school is rich in opportunity

Donors cover tuition at Charlotte Community School for Girls. All students are from low-income homes.

BY ANN DOSS HELMS
ahelms@charlotteobserver.com

Eleven-year-old Shayla Babcock can't wait to start at her new all-girls private school, where she'll do yoga, go camping and work on a laptop.

Best of all, especially for her mom, is the tuition at Charlotte Community School for Girls: \$0. Donors are covering the cost of teachers, supplies, lunches and field trips.

The school opens next month in a storefront in uptown Charlotte's South End. The first class consists of 18 fifth-graders, all from low-income homes, with the school expanding to grades 5-8 in the next four years.

For years, former Justice Department lawyer and Duke University law professor Cathy Sheafor (pronounced SEE NO TUITION, 6A



ERIN SMITH - erin@charlotteobserver.com

Saladeesha Jones, 10, is one of 18 fifth-grade girls who will begin classes next month at the school, which appears to be a first in the Charlotte area.

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