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### Developer hopes boat business revives marina

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A long-dormant marina beside a Chechessee River boat landing could be bustling with boaters and fishermen by this fall.

Ahler's Lemon Island Marina has signed a lease and, once it has approval from the town of Port Royal, will renovate one of three buildings on a three-acre site on S.C. 170. Co-owner Almie Ahler, whose husband, Andrew, has run a marine-repair business from the family's Okatie home for many years, said the operation will expand to the new location and include boat and personal-watercraft rentals. The store also will sell boating

accessories, souvenirs, fishing tackle, live bait, beer, ice and food.

A "soft opening" is planned for later this year and a larger grand opening for the start of the boating season next spring, probably in April, she said.

The marina has been shuttered for about five years. The Ahlers will be partially responsible for some of the renovations to the weathered storefront, according to Dick Stewart of 303 Associates, which owns the property.

Stewart's company purchased the property in late 2008 for \$2.4 million and planned a restaurant and dry-stack marina. Those plans have been stalled by a sour economy and a credit crunch that has made it difficult for prospective tenants to finance renovations and startup costs, Stewart said.

To get redevelopment rolling again, 303 Associates will make many of the improvements to the other two buildings on its own, Stewart said. The company also has hired an engineering firm to help bring sewer service to the site.

A restaurant in a larger waterfront building behind the future home of Ahler's Lemon Island Marina remains a goal, but plans for dry-dock boat storage have been dropped for now, Stewart said.

A tenant also is being sought for a former antiques shop that sits farther off the water.

The property has several selling points, Stewart has said, among them, the area's natural beauty, water access and proximity to the Edgar Glenn Landing, which is connected to the marina property by a road that runs underneath the Chechessee River Bridge.

Earlier redevelopment plans fizzled, however.

Clark Lowther, who owned the marina for 30 years, waged a seven-year legal battle with Beaufort County

over its refusal to connect a sewer line to the property. Lowther won the battle and planned a 200-seat restaurant, but he changed his mind and sold the property in 2005.

The new owner, the Lemon Island Development Group, planned in 2006 to build a 150-slip dry-stack marina with 9,600 square feet of commercial space but abandoned the project two years later, in part because some living nearby believed large-scale development would alter the rural environment.

Aimie Ahler said her company likely will employ 16 to 30 people, including marine-certified mechanics, dock workers and cashiers. Prospective employees can call 843-645-9388 for more information.

In other new-business news:

- Iron Mountain Cycles & Leather recently opened at 1750 Ribaut Road, Port Royal.

The business repairs motorcycles, sells leather and paint and builds custom bikes. The shop is owned by Dominick D'Ottavio and managed by his father, Mike.

Details: 843-522-1669

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**ThomasOBrien**

I say Good Luck!! This is taking an old building and reusing it!! At one time Lowther had a thriving business there selling bait, gear and seafood (also gas). There is no reason it can't be a lively location again.

Great place for a Restaurant, OR a Full Marina complex!!

Best to you. Work hard and make all the negative ones eat their words!!!

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**rickybobby**

best of luck to the entrepreneurs.....(sp) but I would have to say, you've got your work cut out for yourself.

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**sclifty**

I don't understand how the Town of Port Royal can possibly have jurisdiction over Lemon Island. I guess they must have done a whole lot of annexing to get there. That land should revert back to Beaufort County given its distance from the town.

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**crablegs**

sclifty , we went thru that months ago ....welcome to Beaufort , home of the SLOWCOUNTRY

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