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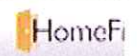
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Beaufort developer launches foundation to protect Port Royal Sound

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It seemed appropriate that Beaufort developer Dick Stewart and his wife Sharon would pick Earth Day to unveil their new initiative aimed at protecting one of the Lowcountry's most valuable natural resources.

More than 50 people gathered Thursday night behind the Beaufort Inn to celebrate the launch of the Port Royal Sound Fund, created by the Stewarts to improve the health of the local estuary system and encourage sustainable development and redevelopment practices near area waterways.

Dick Stewart said he hoped the fund would help bring together residents from across the county concerned about the future health of the area's rivers and creeks.

"What makes the Port Royal Sound so special is that there's no place like it," he said. "Politically, people sometimes think that Beaufort County is divided by north of the Broad and south of the Broad but we are all united by our concern for the estuary and that it remains well and stays healthy in the future."

The couple donated \$100,000 to kick-start the fund, which Stewart said will eventually award grants to conservation-minded programs and projects.

Fund organizers also hope to develop an educational program for elementary school students to learn more about the estuary and have the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designate the sound a National Wildlife Refuge.

The fund will be administered by the Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina, the same nonprofit group that oversees the Beaufort Fund and awards more than \$500,000 a year to charities in Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton and Jasper counties.

George Stevens, the foundation's president and CEO, said his organization was excited about what the fund could mean for the community.

"The purpose of this fund is to go beyond just conservation and help establish a conversation in the community about the balance between development and conservation," Stevens said. "This project is going to bring together people with different points of view and becomes a catalyst for change. A project like this builds community."

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