

COMMUNITY

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STAFF PHOTO BY DEDE BILES

Cannon Turner, left, and Emma Lowe make lifestyle of the monarch butterfly displays using pasta and paper plates while Eli Lowe looks on Saturday during the Earth Day Aiken festival. They were visiting the Butterfly Monarchy Club exhibit.

Earth Day event aims to promote, preserve, protect the environment

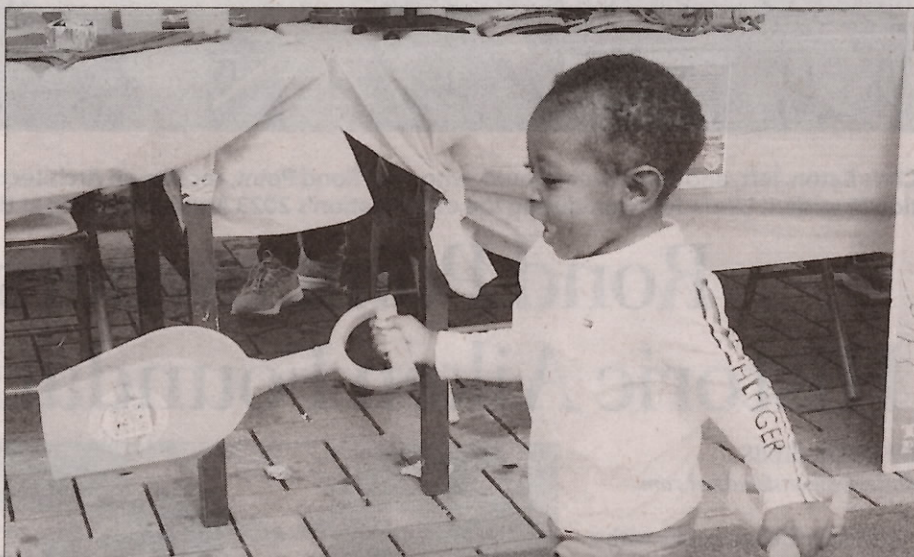
BY DEDE BILES
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Cathy isn't a pretty bird. The turkey vulture's eyes are beady, and her red head is bald and wrinkled.

She also has a nasty habit. When Cathy gets nervous or scared, she throws up, and the smell "can drive you out of a room," said Sean Poppy, outreach coordinator for the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory.

Cathy was part of the facility's exhibit of live animals at the Earth Day Aiken festival on Saturday.

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"For an event like this, we try to plan and not give her as much food as usual the day before," Poppy said, "but she's already thrown up once this morning. Hopefully, she won't do it again."

Even though Cathy isn't cute and cuddly, she represents a group of birds that plays an important role in nature, so her appearance at Earth Day was appropriate.

Turkey vultures "are good at cleaning up the environment and keeping down the spread of disease and bacteria because they eat dead animals," Poppy said.

The Earth Day Aiken celebration was held in the downtown area where the Newberry Street Festival Center, The Alley and the old Aiken Municipal Building's Conference Center are located.

This year's theme was "Preserving for Tomorrow What We All Enjoy Today."

In addition to the ecology lab, exhibitors included the Aiken Beekeepers, Hitchcock Woods Foundation, Southern Pickleball Academy, Ruth Patrick Science Education Center and Aiken Gem, Mineral and Fossil Society.

Among the activities offered were guided tours of nearby Hitchcock Woods and a 2-mile fun run.

In the Southern Pickleball Academy's exhibit, there was a display of used pickleballs that had been turned



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Josiah Finnie practices scooping poop to keep the environment cleaner during the Earth Day Aiken festival Saturday. The poop was fake.

while," said Beth Eberhard, a member of the Southern Pickleball Academy's board. "Instead of throwing them away, you can repurpose them. You can make wreaths and all kinds of other decorations."

Electric and hybrid vehicles were on display on Newberry Street. Three of them were Tesla Model Y electric automobiles.

Using the Light Show feature in the cars, their owners demonstrated how the vehicles could be programmed to flash their lights in unison to music.

"This is the best car I've ever owned," said Ben Christensen of his blue Model Y. "The whole thing is basically a moving computer. It's the coolest car in the world. It's just magic."

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions was the presenting sponsor of Earth Day Aiken's 2023 edition.



STAFF PHOTO BY DEDE BILES

Michael Varnedoe, left, and Christopher Garrison, right, pose for a photo with Smokey Bear on Saturday during the Earth Day Aiken festival.

tendees to the City of Aiken event.

"Thank you for being here for our annual Earth Day celebration," he said. "We took a hiatus for several years because of COVID-19

exhibitors. The attendance here is just wonderful, with all ages present."

Millions of people worldwide celebrate Earth Day each year on April 22. The event began in 1970 as a way