

...remember fondly.

Celebrating milestones

Pickens County also took time to look back.

Cool Springs Baptist Church celebrated its 185th anniversary — older than Pick-

pus on West Church Street was put up for sale. The nearly 70-year-old property holds memories for generations of students, teachers, and families, but leaders said maintaining the aging property no longer made financial sense.

The campus is 19.43 acres and includes the main build-

yard for sometimes 12 hours at a time. "I like it altogether in the tub for long periods; made to sleep in the tub without coverings or pillows; and was physically and verbally abused, including being kicked by the parents and beaten with a dog leash.

...up, Pickens County like it always has — proud of its past and hopeful about its future. From big openings and unforgettable wins to heartbreaking losses and hard decisions, this year told the story of a community that keeps moving forward.

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Dr. Robert Ke executive officer o said he hopes the j turn out for this to l the housing afforc sues here from a t on the subject.
Whether you'r ate about the c forward.

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Hangar

the Quonset hut in 2008, and has support among other pilots there who asked the *Progress* to find out more about this eviction, with one also writing an Other Voices column on it in the December 18 edition.

His current lease was the FAA standard of 22 cents per square foot, or \$50.42 a month, for the land lease. Under FAA regulations, private individuals may build hangars, but the county owns the property beneath them. The lease for Cobb ran from May 1, 2017, until April 31, 2047.

An open records request to the county filed by the *Progress* returned more than 25 digital documents totaling several hundred pages.

Most concerned a complaint sent to the FAA in February 2025 by Laura Thornburn-Gundlach and David Thornburn-Gundlach, the owners of another hangar and Get Inspired Flight. The complaint alleged numerous instances in which the airport had given Cobb preferential treatment, including favorable lease terms and operational leniency regarding parking and tie-down use.

Two documents obtained were responses from the FAA sent to the county, seeking more information on various aspects of airport operations, with many spe-

cific to Cobb's hangar and Joe Aircraft's operation.

One came from Kris Green, an aviation planner/compliance specialist at the FAA's Atlanta office, who responded seeking information on 34 points.

A second in April was from Keturah A. Clark, a regional airport compliance specialist with the Safety and Standards Branch and the Southern Region, Office of Airports. It noted they were investigating the original complaint and sought more information on several subjects. It also stated that with federal funding there are "certain assurances" with the airport sponsor that are binding.

This complaint was initially answered by the airport authority and was later responded to by the commissioners in November with a 30-page follow-up discussing both general airport operations and the points made against Cobb. **See this entire document at [PickensProgress.com](https://pickensprogress.com).**

Commission Chair Kris Stancil said in an interview this week that the county reviewed the authority's response to the FAA and then amended it with its follow-up which took months to compile. "We had to own what was there and defend what we can defend," Stancil said.

The response acknowledged "wide-ranging" non-compliant issues at the airport in general, unrelated to the hangar lease, that commissioners are working to correct. The document

begins by stating, "the problematic situation at the Pickens County Airport requires substantial long-term corrective actions be taken by the BOC [board of commissioners]." It acknowledges general non-compliance issues in two alphabetical lists with topics such as aircraft fueling and illegal hunting.

Regarding the lease with Cobb, the response states, "The H-11 lease emerged in the airport environment as a deeply non-compliant product of a flawed culture." And it states that the county's special counsel recommended terminating the lease. The response called the termination, "an indispensable early corrective step on the long journey to achieve future betterment of the airport situation through the eradication of existing noncompliance, the deterrence of future non-compliance and the encouragement of future compliance."

However, Stancil said ultimately the FAA complaint was not the sole deciding factor in terminating the lease. "It was combination of issues," he said. He said that it could have been resolved with a new lease, but there was also the condition of the hangar.

He said the Quonset hut is one of the "oldest, most blighted structures on airport property," and it is "not consistent with what we are trying to build and make it look like."

It lies close to the new terminal now under construction and "really stands out from the terminal," said

Stancil. He said that, since the original lease with that building runs until 2047, they wanted the opportunity to re-lease that space.

Airport operation lacks aviation experience, says hangar owner

In an interview conducted with Cobb in late December, he made several points about the termination notice and discussed the airport in general.

The Quonset hut was the first building at the airport. Cobb does about 100 annual inspections and 150 repairs through his business. The inspections are not simple and can be time-consuming. He said they require "undressing" the plane to look for anything that can break.

As several local pilots have attested, these are crucial for pilots and a valuable service. There is one other at the Pickens airport.

Cobb said his eviction is particularly disappointing as he has been "the guy they called for years at 2 a.m. if they had a problem" with a plane.

He said that since the airport authority was created, things have gone downhill. Management by committee, he said, is never good, as the more people who provide input to a committee, the lower the overall IQ drops. The original authority comprised seven, plus the airport manager, and the seven managed the airport. It's like having a broken bus with seven drivers and the airport manager pushing, he said.

"The county over, but they c anyone with a b in aviation, and problem," he sa evident, looking rules being imj the county is try the airport, listen yers and not to p understand aviati airports. They ar input from loca with long experi ating at many airj
He said the air ing after him as ing fruit, as he b hangar is deem and that county want it gone to c for tie downs and an ongoing wate problem.

"I really don't have quit trying i ic where there is said regarding the

His hangar m first they go aft lease is unique, l liesves they ultin to create more spa
He said oth hangar owners s ware, as it may n his Quonset hut.

He also expre ticism about th airport plans an terminal (FBO) i construction.

"Building a r sive FBO won't here," he said. "I here because it's need to be."

He said that a ens airport, th enough room for three jets at one could create a "tr