

# INSTITUTE FOR ENGAGED AGING Newsletter

Mind and Body Wellness | Issue No. 8 | Spring 2026



## IEA news

IEA faculty presented at the Gerontological Society of America and the South Carolina Academy of Audiology.

## Research spotlight

Learn simple ways to protect your well-being by understanding stress and healthy aging.

## Artist spotlight

Meet our featured pour paint artist, Aubrey Coffee, Ph.D., whose artwork is now on display at the IEA.





The spring 2026 edition of the IEA newsletter focuses on raising awareness about stress management and mental health. We hope this issue offers a variety of avenues to help you thrive.

We are pleased to share the artistic journey of Aubrey Coffee, Ph.D., which may inspire you to explore a new interest or reconnect with a favorite hobby. This issue also includes simple relaxation techniques for better sleep, an important foundation for supporting mental well-being.

We hope that taking a few minutes to peruse the newsletter might be its own form of stress relief for these busy times.

Thank you so much for your continued support. We cannot do this important work without you.

— **Lesley Ross, Ph.D.**

Professor, Psychology Department  
SmartState/SmartLife Endowed Chair  
in Aging and Cognition  
Director, Institute for Engaged Aging  
Clemson University  
Director, South Carolina Alzheimer's  
Disease Research Center



**COMMITTED TO ENHANCING  
SUCCESSFUL AGING**

## Learn more about the IEA

### Who we are



Research - PACT study

At the Institute for Engaged Aging (IEA) we believe aging should be active, connected and meaningful. Our mission is simple: to help older adults thrive through research, education and community partnerships.



Community outreach - health bingo

We are dedicated to empowering older adults to stay involved with their families and communities by promoting practices that truly enhance quality of life. Through close collaboration with Clemson faculty, local organizations and partner universities, we address the diverse range of needs faced by older adults. Our goal is to help individuals enjoy an engaged life, regardless of their background, income or health.



Education - "Avoiding grandparent scams" talk

With the aging population expected to nearly double by 2030, the IEA is proud to serve as a trusted source of knowledge, support and inspiration for older adults and the communities they call home.

## Share your voice!

**Help shape future programs that matter to you.** The IEA is exploring new programs for older adults, as well as ways to better support individuals and families affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementia support (ADRD).

We invite you to take a few minutes to complete this short survey and let us know which programs interest you. Your feedback will directly guide our planning and help us create programs that truly meet the needs of our community.

Scan the QR code below or visit the *"We want to hear from you!"* section on the IEA website to complete the survey.

**YOUR FEEDBACK IS  
IMPORTANT TO US!**



**SCAN ME**

### How to scan a QR code?

1. Open your camera app on your cellphone.
2. Point it at the QR code.
3. Tap the link that appears to get started.

## Faculty present at GSA Cognitive Health Symposium

Clemson University Institute for Engaged Aging faculty and students recently presented at the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) symposium titled "Social Determinants of Cognitive Health and Cognitive Health Care Planning." The session was co-led by Abby Stephan, Ph.D. (faculty at Clemson University), and Alexa Allan, M.A. (graduate student at Pennsylvania State University). Angie Sardina, Ph.D. (faculty at Clemson University), and Alexa Allan shared findings from an active NIH/NIA-funded project (UF1 AG072619; primary investigator Alyssa Gamaldo, Ph.D.) examining the biological, social and psychological factors linking sleep and cognitive health.

Abby Stephan, Ph.D., and Lena Simon, M.A. (graduate student at Clemson University), also shared their observations from the state-funded South Carolina Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (SC-ADRC) community outreach and engagement initiative, which focuses on cognitive health care planning among Black/African American families.



From left to right is Alexa Allan (Pennsylvania State University); Lena Simon, M.A. (Clemson University); Abby Stephan, Ph.D. (Clemson University); and Elizabeth Munoz, Ph.D. (The University of Texas).

## S.C. Academy of Audiology Healthy aging and cognition

Lesley Ross, Ph.D., presented at the South Carolina Academy of Audiology 2026 Annual Conference on February 5, 2026. She spoke about the IEA, healthy aging and cognition, and current IEA research projects to an audience from across the state.





# Fall prevention classes

## New dates this spring!

The IEA offers FREE fall prevention classes featuring the evidence-based program, A Matter of Balance (AMOB). This program is designed to help older adults reduce their risk of falling through group discussions, exercise training, mutual problem-solving, role-play activities and homework assignments. E-mail us at [IEA@clermson.edu](mailto:IEA@clermson.edu) for more information or to register.

Limited spots available, register today!

 **When?** Now enrolling for SPRING 2026 classes!  
May 5, 7, 12, 14, 19, 21, 26 & 28 (Every Tuesday and Thursday)

 **What time?** From 1:30 to 3:30 PM

 **Where?** Clemson Balance Lab - IEA (5th floor),  
Oconee Memorial Hospital, Seneca, S.C.



### What some participants are saying about the Fall Prevention Class

“Loved this class, especially the instructor! The class was able to share all their experiences and worked well together.”  
— Laura

“We learned how to maintain a proactive methodology to preserve our independence while minimizing fall risks.”  
— Lonne

“I loved the class! Cheryl Dye is so knowledgeable. I learned things I didn’t know that will help me prevent falls.”  
— Emily

“Exercises were great!”  
— Pam”

“Classes have made me more aware of all things that could contribute to falling.”  
— Anonymous

“Cheryl was an exceptional instructor. She has the perfect personality to work with seniors. Cheryl was very patient and understanding!”  
— Martha

“Reinforced some things I knew and made me aware of a few more things.”  
— Anonymous

# Help yourself while helping others

## We are looking for dedicated volunteers just like you!

There are many ways you can get involved with the Institute for Engaged Aging. Your involvement in research is essential for advancing treatments and prevention for Alzheimer's disease, promoting healthy aging and improving the lives of older adults in South Carolina, including our friends, family and community. Please contact each study or program to learn more or sign up.



### Active Mind Study

**Where:** Seneca & Greenville S.C.  
**Coordinators:** Megan Schumpert and Marissa Ashwood  
**E-mail:** activemind@clermson.edu  
**Phone:** (864) 916-6220  
**Objective:** This study will determine if computerized brain training exercises can improve everyday abilities and reduce the risk of dementia in persons at a higher risk.



### TEALE Study

**Where:** Seneca, S.C.  
**Coordinator:** Angie Sardina, Ph.D.  
**Phone:** (864) 916-6206  
**Objective:** We seek to learn more about the non-medical factors and their relationships with thinking and memory. We also want to identify interest in participating in future research related to these factors.



### Human Movement Study

**Where:** IEA - Seneca, S.C.  
**Coordinator:** Reed Gurchiek, Ph.D.  
**E-mail:** hhentni@clermson.edu  
**Phone:** (609) 320-3875  
**Objective:** The Free-Living Human Movement Study measures human motion in everyday life to understand how physical and cognitive functioning are related in older adults.



### CHAP

**Where:** Jacksonville, Florida, residents only  
**Coordinator:** Marsha Hampton  
**E-mail:** mhampt3@clermson.edu  
**Phone:** (864) 916-6220  
**Objective:** The study identifies the mechanisms through which interpersonal conscientiousness promotes healthier cognitive aging and its role within close relationships in a sample of participants.



### BA-UMAP

**Where:** Nationwide (Online)  
**Coordinator:** Marsha Hampton  
**E-mail:** mhampt3@clermson.edu  
**Phone:** (864) 916-6220  
**Website:** secure.ba-umap.com  
**Objective:** The Black American United Memory and Aging Project (BA-UMAP) examines how factors across multiple domains impact progressive cognitive decline in a longitudinal sample of middle-aged and older Black adults.



### Grandparent Caregivers

**Where:** IEA - Seneca, S.C.  
**Coordinators:** Abby Stephan, Ph.D., and Hye Won Chai, Ph.D.  
**E:** GrandfamilyStudySC@gmail.com  
**Phone:** (864) 916-6220  
**Objective:** The study evaluates use of smart tools to track grandparent caregivers' daily activities and health over 14 days, examines links between their experiences and health and explores their interest in health education.





## Find support

### Dementia caregiving

**Do you know someone supporting a loved one with memory loss?** We are here to help. The IEA facilitates a supportive space for caregivers, family members and friends (age 18+) of individuals living with any type of dementia to ask questions, share experiences and receive guidance on caregiving.



Friday, April 17, 2026  
Friday, May 15, 2026  
Friday, June 19, 2026



**What time?**  
From 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM

**Respite program for dementia caregivers.** While you attend the support group, your loved one with dementia can participate in a separate, supervised brain-stimulation activity program. Participants must be able to engage with others with minimal supervision.

**Need help with care during the support group?** To apply for a **free sitter service** for your loved one through the Alzheimer's Association, please contact 1-800-272-3900.

To register, please contact IEA@clemson.edu or call (864) 916-6220. We hope to see you there!

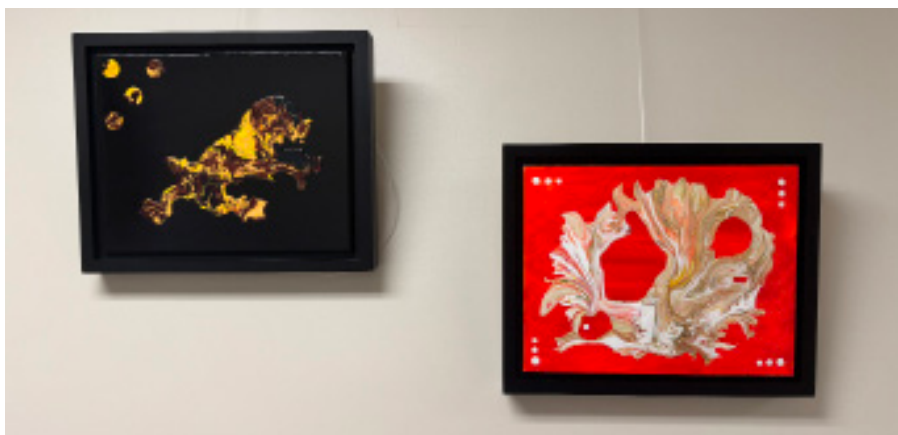
## What do you see?

### Where art begins a conversation

For Aubrey Coffee, Ph.D., creativity has always been part of her life. Raised in a family of culinarians, she learned presentation matters. "People eat with their eyes," she explains, a philosophy that shaped both her culinary career and her artistic vision. Color, balance and composition were just as important on a plate as they would later become on canvas.

Coffee's first artistic outlet was photography. She was inspired by extensive travel and a deep appreciation for food, flowers and place. These early images became the foundation of her artistic eye. While life's responsibilities, career, family and daily demands temporarily pushed art to the background, creativity remained. "It was always there," she says. "Art was a spark." That spark reignited in retirement. Watching her husband come across a video of pouring paint opened the door to a new medium. She began exploring this abstract art in 2015, embracing it as new opportunity.

Coffee's work has been featured in public art projects and regional exhibits. Sharing her art with the community feels deeply personal. "It is about improvement," she says, "and about opening a conversation." The idea is captured in her tagline: "What do you see?" An invitation for viewers to pause, reflect and engage with the artwork in their own way.



**What do you see?** The artworks shown are "Tiger" (left) and "Gamecock" (right).

Staying active in local art organizations keeps Coffee motivated and connected. Being around like-minded people, she believes, is especially important as we age. Creativity remains her 'happy place', a stress-free way to engage the brain and nurture emotional and social well-being.

Today, Coffee, teaches fluid painting workshops for adults. She loves seeing participants let go, becoming freer and more confident in the process. Her message is clear, "it is never too late to return to a passion." You can currently find Coffee's artwork at the IEA.

**Aubrey Coffee contact info:** csquareprods@gmail.com | coffeecuppainting.com

# Managing stress as we age

## From awareness to action

Stress is a natural reaction to life's challenges, whether it is health concerns, caregiving responsibilities or financial worries. Chronic stress can harm both body and mind, especially as we get older.



### Why it matters?

Chronic stress increases inflammation, which can contribute to conditions like:

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Arthritis
- Dementia

### Common causes of stress for older adults

- Chronic illness
- Caring for a loved one
- Loss or grief
- Loneliness or boredom
- Financial concerns
- Major life changes, like retirement

### Signs you may be stressed

- Headaches or digestive issues
- Sleep problems or irritability
- Heart palpitations
- Poor concentration
- Social withdrawal
- Frequent crying or mood changes

### Simple ways to reduce stress

- Address the source: Take steps to solve what is causing stress.
- Seek support: Talk to friends, family or join a support group.
- Eat well and hydrate: Nutritious meals and enough water support body and mind.
- Move daily: Gentle exercise like walking can lift mood.
- Prioritize sleep: Good rest restores both mind and body.
- Practice mindfulness: Meditation or deep breathing can calm racing thoughts.

Stress happens to everyone. Small, consistent steps may make a big difference in your health and well-being. Pick one or two strategies that feel realistic for you and start today.

Reference:  
<https://www.ncoa.org/article/stress-and-how-to-reduce-it-a-guide-for-older-adults/>

## It is okay to seek help!

### Where can I find mental health support?

Whether you are seeking help for yourself or for someone you care about, the resources below offer support:

#### Nationwide

- **National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)** - Contact your local NAMI Affiliate to learn what programs and supports they offer.
- **Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** - Call or text 988 to reach trained counselors anytime. This free and confidential service is available 24/7 across the U.S.
- **Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH)** - For immediate emotional support related to disasters or traumatic events, call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746. Service is free, 24/7 and multilingual.

#### South Carolina

- **SC Department of Mental Health (SCDMH)**: A 24/7 statewide mobile crisis team provides emergency psychiatric screening and assessment to link you to care.
- **Blue CareOnDemand**: For State Health Plan members, offers virtual therapy for anxiety, depression and stress.

# Sleep and healthy aging

## How better sleep supports well-being

People spend one-third of their lives sleeping or trying to sleep. While older adults still need the same 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night, changes in the body's internal clock often cause earlier bedtimes, lighter sleep and more frequent awakenings. Being older does not mean you have to be tired. Quality sleep remains essential for brain health, mood and overall well-being.

Throughout the night, your body cycles between non-REM (deep, restorative sleep) and REM sleep (when dreaming occurs). Both types of sleep help store memories and support emotional health. When sleep is poor or interrupted, it can affect how you think, feel and function during the day.

### How aging affects sleep

With age, sleep often becomes shorter and lighter. Medical conditions, medication, pain and stress can also interfere with rest. People with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias may experience nighttime confusion, waking or wandering which affects both the individual and their caregiver.

### Healthy habits for better sleep

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and comfortable.
- Exercise regularly, but not within three hours of bedtime.
- Avoid late-day caffeine, alcohol and heavy meals.
- Limit naps late in the afternoon.
- Turn off TV, phones and tablets before bed.

If you struggle to fall or stay asleep most nights, consider keeping a sleep diary for two weeks and sharing it with your doctor. Good sleep helps you feel more energized, engaged and ready to enjoy each day.



**Angie Sardina, Ph.D.**, is a licensed (North Carolina) and certified recreation therapist, and a research associate professor within the Department of Psychology at Clemson University.

As a licensed and certified recreation therapist, she is interested in the development and implementation of multifaceted, person-centered, health promotion interventions and programs tailored to the specific needs, interests and preferences of older adults in South Carolina and beyond.

Sardina is also a faculty affiliate of the IEA and serves as the associate director for the Outreach, Recruitment and Engagement Core of the South Carolina Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (SC-ADRC).

Sardina's research interest is understanding the dynamic interconnections across biopsychosocial (e.g., pain, sleep, loneliness/social isolation, mental health, leisure activity engagement and constraints) and contextual factors (e.g., home usability, neighborhood quality) that support or constrain cognitive health, well-being and aging-in-place among late mid-life and older adults.

On a personal level, Sardina is originally from Florida and is enjoying all of the wonderful outdoor recreation opportunities that S.C. has to offer.



# Caring for your brain and emotional well-being

## Insights and practical guidance from Angie Sardina, Ph.D.

As we grow older, caring for our brain is just as important as caring for our physical health. According to Sardina, Ph.D., everyday factors such as sleep, stress and social connection play a powerful role in how our brain functions, how we feel emotionally and how well we maintain our memory and thinking skills over time.

Sleep is essential for brain health at every stage of life. While getting enough sleep is important, sleep quality matters just as much. Poor or irregular sleep can affect daily memory, attention and mood. Over time, it may increase the risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, depression and dementia. Creating a comfortable sleep environment and maintaining consistent sleep routines can support both brain and emotional health.

Stress is another major influence on the aging brain, Sardina mentioned. Short-term stress is a normal part of life and can even be beneficial in certain situations. However, chronic and unmanaged stress can take a serious toll. Ongoing stress may lead to forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating and trouble making decisions. Over time, it can disrupt sleep, increase inflammation, speed up brain aging and raise the risk of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Loneliness is a growing public health concern, particularly among older adults. Loneliness does not always mean being physically alone; it can also occur when meaningful connections are missing. It has been

linked to higher stress levels, depression, anxiety, faster cognitive decline and increased risk of dementia. Life changes such as retirement, loss of loved ones, caregiving responsibilities or health challenges can increase feelings of isolation, making social connection especially important.

Early signs that stress or mental health concerns may be affecting brain health can include headaches, muscle tension, stomach issues or trouble sleeping. Cognitive changes such as increased forgetfulness, difficulty finding words or trouble focusing may also appear. Emotional shifts, including irritability, low motivation or withdrawing from social activities, are important signals not to ignore.

Sardina considers spring as a natural time to refresh routines and focus on emotional balance. Some ways to promote introspection and mindfulness are journaling or other forms

of art, and/or talking with a mental health counselor.

Consider the following stress management strategies:

- Physical activity
- Eat nutritious meals
- Maintain healthy sleep habits
- Engage in hobbies or relaxation activities
- Find ways to stay socially connected through family, friends, community programs or volunteer opportunities

During Stress Awareness Month (April) and Mental Health Awareness Month (May), readers are encouraged to remember that stress looks different for everyone. Being patient with yourself, exploring coping strategies that work for you and remembering that the mind and body are deeply connected goes a long way. It is never too late to invest in your well-being.



## Doll therapy

### Support OMH patients

Bring comfort and joy to Prisma Health Oconee Memorial Hospital (OMH) patients with Alzheimer's disease and/or related dementia (AD/ADRD).

The IEA is accepting donations for the OMH doll therapy drive. Doll therapy may significantly reduce behavioral and psychological symptoms in patients living with AD/ADRD.

#### How you can help:

- Donate NEW baby dolls or life-like toy dogs and cats.
- Drop-off location:  
Front desk of the IEA on the 5th floor of OMH.

Your donations will make a meaningful impact on the lives of those living with Alzheimer's. Thank you for your kindness and generosity!



## Word search puzzle

### Mind and body wellness

Complete the word search puzzle by finding and circling the hidden words related to healthy habits, mental well-being and self-care. Words may appear horizontally, vertically, diagonally or backward. Take your time, stay focused and enjoy discovering each word as you find habits that support a healthy mind and body.

J M L K I N G T E W E H I M  
R E A T H E A L T H Y A G L  
M D U S C L E S E M R V Y I  
G I L O V E Y O U R S E L F  
N T B R E V B L O J L F T E  
O A D R I N K W A T E R W S  
I T P H E J L A H Y E I O T  
T I G W Q A E L G W P E R Y  
A O S I R K T K S Y E N K L  
X N E B P G C H R D I D O E  
A M O T I V A T I O N S U S  
L D A O Z E N V W N S I T E  
E Y Z A L S T R E N G T H Y  
R H A V O I D A L C O H O L

Workout  
Love yourself  
Motivation  
Avoid alcohol

Sleep  
Walk  
Relaxation  
Lifestyle

Have friends  
Eat healthy  
Meditation  
Breathing

Drink water  
Strength

SCAN ME



## Join the PALS Network

Partners and Advocates for Lifespan Science (PALS) Network connects individuals of all ages interested in participating in research and receiving information about healthy aging.

To sign up, please call (864) 916-6220, e-mail [IEA@clermson.edu](mailto:IEA@clermson.edu) or complete the survey on our website. *Please consider joining!*





# Cucumber spring salad

## Deliciously fresh

The aroma from this salad is a deliciously fresh scent of cucumbers, parsley and crunchy green peppers. The only thing better is how good it tastes.



Serves: 6



Preparation time: 20 minutes

### DIRECTIONS

1. Prepare the vinaigrette first to blend flavors as you prepare the salad. In a small bowl whisk together the olive oil, red wine vinegar, lemon juice, oregano, salt and some freshly cracked pepper. Set the dressing aside.
2. Peel the cucumbers (if desired). Dice the cucumbers, tomatoes and bell pepper. Thinly slice the red onion. Pull the parsley leaves from their stems, then roughly chop them. Crumble the feta cheese.
3. Place the cucumbers, tomatoes, bell pepper, red onion, parsley and feta in a large bowl.
4. Pour the red wine vinaigrette dressing over top and toss to combine.
5. Serve immediately or refrigerate until ready to eat. This salad holds up well over a few days in the refrigerator. Be sure to stir briefly to redistribute the flavors before serving.

### INGREDIENTS

#### Salad

- 2 cucumbers
- 4 Roma tomatoes
- 1/2 small red onion
- 1 green bell pepper
- 1/4 bunch parsley
- 2 oz feta cheese

#### Red wine vinaigrette

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp salt
- Freshly cracked pepper



Link to recipe: [www.budgetbytes.com/super-fresh-cucumber-salad/](http://www.budgetbytes.com/super-fresh-cucumber-salad/)

**DONATE**  
*today*



SCAN QR Code



### HELPFUL TAX TIPS!

Your financial contribution can be documented as a charitable tax deduction.

## Your support matters

### Strengthening communities and advancing research

We are deeply grateful for our readers, volunteers and generous supporters who help us enrich the lives of older adults in meaningful ways. Your time, donations and encouragement fuel everything we do at the IEA.

While our research is primarily funded through grants, it is your generosity that sustains the majority of our educational and outreach programs, like our caregiver support group. These vital efforts would not be possible without you.

**Want to do more?** There are many

ways to give, whether by sharing our mission, volunteering your time or donating. Your generosity makes a difference. All funds directly support the IEA and the communities we serve.

#### Mail checks to:

Clemson University Foundation  
P.O. Box 1889, Clemson, S.C.  
29633-1889

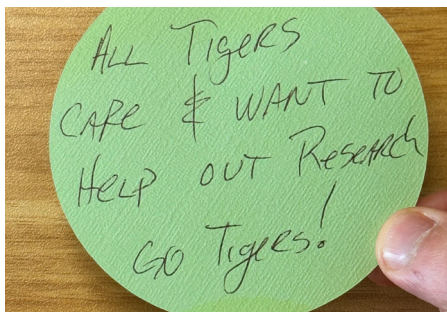
Be sure to include "Institute for Engaged Aging" in the memo line for your gift.

**Online donations** can be made at: [clemson.edu/centers-institutes/aging](http://clemson.edu/centers-institutes/aging)

Please check that the designation field on the website lists: "Institute for Engaged Aging."

## Why I participate We all have a reason!

We are thrilled that more people are joining our studies!



Your enthusiasm and participation are truly making a difference and we are excited to see how the IEA continues to grow and impact the community.

## Word search puzzle answers

J M L K I N G T E W E H I M  
R E A T H E A L T H Y A G L  
M D U S C L E S E M R V Y I  
G I L O V E Y O U R S E L F  
N T B R E V B L O J L F T E  
O A D R I N K W A T E R W S  
I T P H E J L A H Y E I O T  
T I G W Q A E L G W P E R Y  
A O S I R K T K S Y E N K L  
X N E B P G C H R D I D O E  
A M O T I V A T I O N S U S  
L D A O Z E N V W N S I T E  
E Y Z A L S T R E N G T H Y  
R H A V O I D A L C O H O L

## Contact us!

Have questions, feedback or just want to say hello?

Our team is here and ready to assist you. Your input helps us grow and serve you better. Please reach out using the contact info below. We would love to hear from you!



(864) 916-6220



IEA@clemson.edu



**PRISMA Health  
Oconee Memorial Hospital**  
298 Memorial Drive,  
Seneca, S.C.  
29672



**University Center of Greenville**  
225 S Pleasantburg Dr., Suite E-3,  
Greenville, S.C.  
29607



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