

# Wyche tries leading on new playing field

## Ex-NFL player, coach takes his position on Pickens County Council

By John C. Stevenson

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You can't sit down and talk with Sam Wyche without talking football.

After all, the 64-year-old has been a part of the sport since he was growing up in his native Atlanta. He quarterbacked at Furman University and went on to an NFL career that included trips to the Super Bowl as a player, assistant coach and head coach.

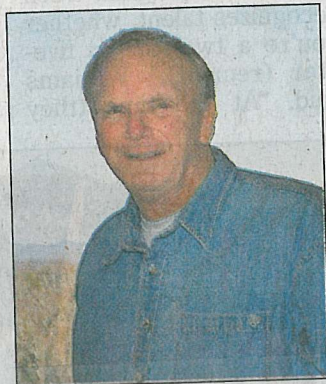
Now Wyche and Jane, his wife of 43 years, live on a 26-acre farm outside Pickens complete with horses, cats and several rescued dogs. And while the lifestyle might sound relaxing, Wyche still has plenty to keep him busy. He has speaking engagements around the country, he substitute teaches and has been a position coach at Pickens High, on a voluntary basis.

Wyche also serves on the board for Pickens County Meals on Wheels and is very active with Special Olympics.

The Wyches have come home, in a way. Sam met Jane, a Pickens County native, when the two were at Furman. The house they live in previously belonged to the family of their daughter Kerry's husband.

And in January, Wyche took a seat on Pickens County Council representing District 3, after defeating Democrat Wesley Burbage in the November general election.

While Wyche is a political freshman, he said there are a lot of similarities between coaching and politics.



Wyche

"There's a great deal of responsibility in both spots," he said. "Fans are counting on you to somehow find a way to win a game, and the voting public — or every citizen, whether they vote or not — is hoping that you find a way to keep the quality of life high and taxes low."

Now that he's on council, Wyche said he wants to work to preserve the "delicate blend" in Pickens County between transplants and natives, between the area's natural beauty and the march of progress.

The county needs the tax dollars that come with upscale, gated communities, Wyche said, but the families that have lived in the area for generations should not be ignored.

"It's a growing community, and that's not going to

stop," he said. "But you've got other people who have lived here for generations ... and they don't want to lose that old hunting trail they go to every April to kill a turkey, or that fishing spot out on Lake Keowee or Jocassee that they've always gone to. So my goals are to promote the former and preserve the latter. Basically, both groups are needed from a practical standpoint."

Wyche was a somewhat reluctant political candidate, in that running for office was not his idea, initially.

"I had people literally knock on my door and call me on the phone and say 'would you consider running?'"

But once he decided to get into the race, the competitive juices started flowing.

"It doesn't mean someone has to be a winner and a loser anymore," he said. "It just means you compete to make sure that everybody improves."

When it comes to winning, Wyche stressed the value of having a good education, and said Pickens County needs the school improvements that are coming through the county school district's \$315 million facilities plan.

"I substitute (teach) in Pickens County, and I can tell you the schools — all the schools — are tired," he said. "The physical plants are tired. It is not a good learning environment when the student walks into that classroom or walks down that hallway."

It's not surprising that, given Wyche's passion about the value of education, he said of all his interests, he has the "most fun" substitute teaching. He said he's also enjoyed the time he's spent on the sidelines with the Blue Flame football team.

"It's just a blast for me," he said. "High-school kids, they're fun because from day-to-day you can see progress. They are like sponges — they want to soak it all up."