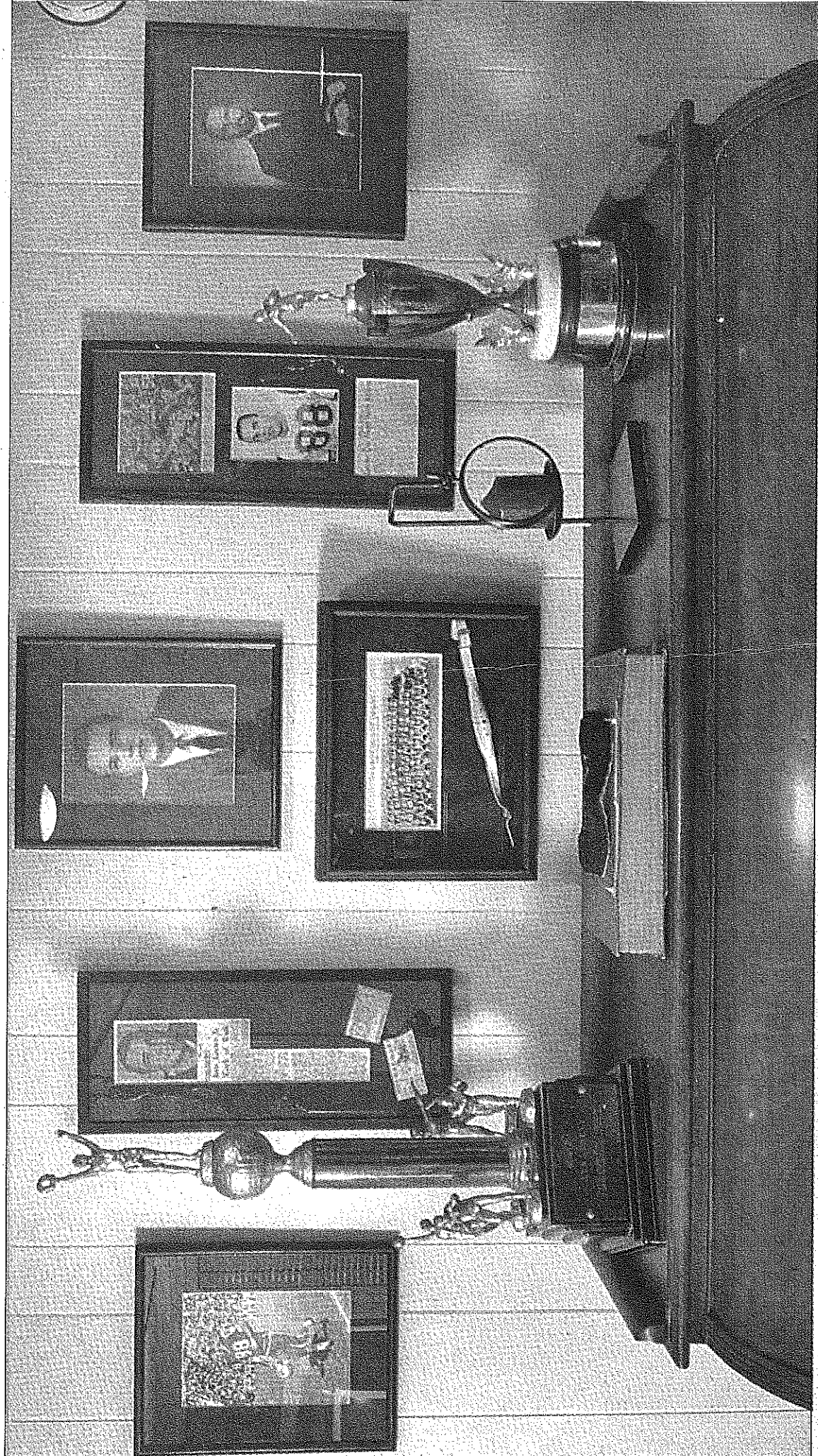


REAL HOME

SUNDAY, JANUARY 11, 2004 • SECTION G



As an anniversary present for her husband, Nell Lester decided to redo their basement with a Gamecock theme. Designer Tiffany Sowards decorated the room with old Gamecock clippings, jerseys and photographs of Nell's husband, Ken, who played football at USC from 1960-'63.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KIM KIM FOSTER-TOBIN/THE STATE

The TOUCHDOWN ROOM

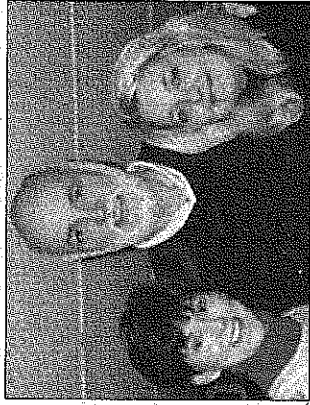
Gamecock seasons are again in an Irmo couple's basement

By MEGAN SEXTON
Staff Writer

WHEN NELL LESTER met husband Ken 39 years ago, she had no idea he was a former USC football star.

He was a counselor working at Play-Mor in North Myrtle Beach when Lester arrived with then-USC coach Marvin Bass, who directed football at the summer sports camp. She was there working with the cheerleaders, and they were saying, "Don't know who he is? I had no idea," she said.

The day before Ken Lester left North Myrtle Beach to return to USC Law School, Bass' wife set them up on a date. It was August. They married in November.



From left: Nell and Ken Lester with designer Tiffany Sowards

Today, when you walk down the stairs to the basement of the couple's Irmo home, it's obvious that through the decades, Nell Lester has learned all about her husband's athletic accomplishments.

As a surprise anniversary gift, she converted the couple's little-used basement into "a room for Ken. From there it materialized into a Gamecock room, or a room of his life."

She accessorized the room with mementos that were saved by her mother-

in-law when Lester was a three-sport high school standout in Florence and a football player at USC from 1960-63.

Newspaper clippings from the 1950s and early '60s, baseballs with dates and scores of games, team pictures, notes from coaches, trophies — Lester's mom kept it all.

"My mother kept scrapbooks from the time I started playing through college. She was my biggest fan — she never missed a game," Lester said. "And she cut everything out. Of course I didn't know it at the time..."

Through the years, Lester's mother turned over the items to his wife.

Just after Christmas 2002, when Nell Lester was putting away the decorations in the basement, she found a bunch of baseballs from her husband's playing days. Each was marked with the date and the score of the game. Those pieces

of memorabilia started her thinking about the room.

She had been working with interior designer Tiffany Sowards of Irmo to redecorate several rooms in the home where the Lesters have lived since it was built in 1970.

She knew her husband had long wanted a big-screen TV, and she eventually wanted to turn the basement into a room for him.

As she kept pulling out clippings and other mementos from her husband's playing days, the inspiration started to click.

The basement had been used as a

Nell Lester complemented the burgandy leather sofa by covering and painting old chairs and furniture black.

playroom when their children were younger, with one child setting up model airplanes and trains there. It also had been used as a computer room and storage room.

But with its low ceilings, old carpet and gray paneled walls, it certainly wasn't a gathering spot for the family.

Sowards said the first step was to replace the carpeting with Berber carpet and paint the walls, trim and ceiling light colors to make the room look bigger.

Can lights also were added, to give

SEE **GAMECOCKS** PAGE G2