

Cities Mean **BUSINESS**

A PUBLICATION OF THE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH CAROLINA

ISSUE 2 | 2015

Finding the right place

Cities help businesses feel at home

You see a police car...



We see a police officer who works closely with fire departments and EMS, who knows every business owner downtown, who can name every city street and who buys 12 snow cones on Saturdays even though his T-ball team has never won a game.

CITIES MEAN BUSINESS

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MASC Municipal Association
of South CarolinaSM

CONTENTS

6 This is where we need to be

By Reba Hull Campbell



Cover Photo: Downtown Bluffton is a destination for locals, businesses and visitors.
Photo/Town of Bluffton

Cities Mean BUSINESS

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SC BIZ NEWS
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8 Apart from the crowd

By Megan Sexton

11 Toolkit helps Upstate cities become more entrepreneur friendly

By Mary Brantner



13 Young professionals are making their mark on city policy

By Amy Geier Edgar

DEPARTMENTS

4 Letter from the Editor

By Reba Hull Campbell

5 85 years of helping cities

By Miriam Hair

FEATURES

Letter from the **EDITOR**

This issue of Cities Mean Business magazine focuses on what cities of all sizes are doing to attract businesses ... particularly to their downtown corridors. We look at several shining examples of how cities are involving young professionals, “home-grown” entrepreneurs and innovative local business owners to leverage their strengths.

Entrepreneurs in Hartsville, Bluffton and Travelers Rest discuss what drew them to locate in their particular city. From a kayak manufacturer looking to locate somewhere along the Atlantic seaboard to a high tech entrepreneur looking for a well-trained workforce, these business owners knew what they needed and found the right niche in these cities.

Young professionals in Columbia, Greenville and Charleston are getting involved with local policy development and paying particular attention to what this generation of workers wants — especially when it comes to living and working downtown.

Finding the right formula to ignite the excitement of local residents and business owners while also attracting visitors to a downtown area requires city leadership to understand its community’s strengths and exploit its niche. Hartsville, Anderson and Lake City have all found ways to meet both of these goals while, at the same time, encourage the growth of existing businesses.

The City of Pickens has taken advantage of a pilot program through the Appalachian Council of Governments to develop an “entrepreneur friendly toolkit” to give cities a template for making them more entrepreneur friendly. In the year since the city released its business resource guide and held its first resource fair, 18 new businesses have been recruited with six more in the pipeline.

Good things are happening in cities of all sizes all over South Carolina!



Reba Hull Campbell

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Editor

The Municipal Association celebrates 85 years of serving cities and towns

By Miriam Hair



Miriam Hair

*Executive Director,
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of SC*

The Municipal Association of South Carolina is

celebrating a milestone of 85 years serving the state's cities and towns. South Carolina's evolution from a largely rural and agricultural state to one with strong, vibrant cities and towns goes hand in hand with the evolution of the Municipal Association's work for almost nine decades.

From the late 1920s through today, the Association has played a key role to connect local elected leaders as they work toward meeting their own cities' challenges. Even back in the 1920s, South Carolina mayors were meeting to pool resources, advocate for issues and share ideas.

Today, local officials remain committed to that same spirit of collaboration. And while many of the specific issues and challenges may have changed over the years, the Municipal Association's role in supporting cities and their elected leaders has remained constant by providing them with knowledge, skills and tools they need to effectively govern and build strong cities.

The success stories you can read about in this issue of *Cities Mean Business* represent dozens of similar successes taking place in our cities and towns every day. And an important role the Association plays in facilitating these successes is helping city leaders make

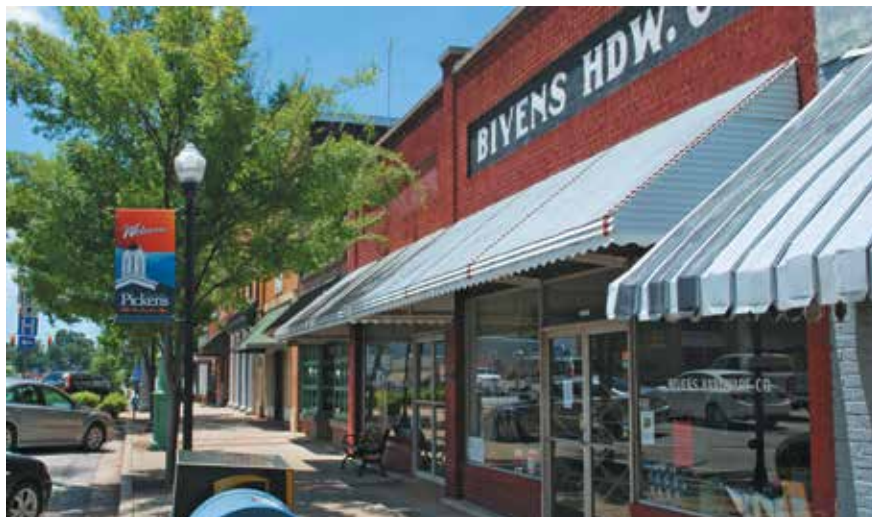
connections to successful programs and ideas in other cities.

While private sector leaders often may have to go it alone and closely guard their work from competitors, municipal government leaders view collaboration with colleagues as a gift to help strengthen all cities and towns.

For example, this spring, the Association of South Carolina Mayors, an affiliate organization of the Municipal Association, hosted a mobile tour of Lake City. In this issue, you can read about some of the innovative strategies these mayors experienced as they learned about the transformation of this rural Pee Dee community into an arts center for the region.

Also, you can read in this issue about how the Municipal Association's Main Street South Carolina program is providing the City of Pickens and the City of Hartsville with resources to revitalize their downtowns. This program is one of the dozens of training and information sharing opportunities the Association offers to elected officials and city staff throughout the year.

The history of this organization is a history of collaboration to help make all cities and towns engines of economic growth that power our state's economy. The articles in this issue of *Cities Mean Business* magazine share that story. ●



*Pickens has spruced up its downtown.
(Photo/Pickens
Revitalization
Association)*

THIS IS WHERE WE NEED TO BE

By Reba Hull Campbell

The reasons entrepreneurs choose to locate their businesses in a particular place are as diverse as the businesses themselves. Human capital, access to transportation, quality of life or just the human touch from local officials could all be determinants on where someone decides to locate his business.

To attract these entrepreneurs, local leaders need to be tuned in to their city's niche and need then to be able to match them to an entrepreneur's goal for his company.

In Travelers Rest, Andy O'Mara is the owner of Merrimack Canoe Co., which builds custom canoes. He was looking for a place on the East Coast to expand his Tennessee-based business.

Mayor Wayne McCall recalls hearing about someone who built first-class canoes and was considering Travelers Rest as a place



Top-notch canoes made in Travelers Rest by Merrimack Canoe Co. (Photo/Austin Grebenc)

to locate his business. "I heard he had been through the area and liked it," McCall said. "So I just Googled him and called him."

McCall stresses that in a small town, when there's any hint of economic development, you listen.

O'Mara noted that out of all the places he had looked to locate his business, no one had made the kind of personal contact he got from the mayor.

"When I got to Travelers Rest, the mayor spent a lot of time just taking me around town. We had the opportunity to get to know each other," O'Mara said. "That's what grabbed me. The people of the city—businesses, residents and government—gave me the feeling this is where we need to be. That's why we located here and why we've opened up a pizza place too."

In Bluffton, entrepreneur Jared Jester said it was the town's pro-business attitude that made him realize he had found the place to locate his high tech company, Jester



Bluffton's "The Store" offers artsy, fun décor items.



Downtown Bluffton offers a variety of shops and galleries. (Photo/Town of Bluffton)

Communications, which builds complex websites. “I was drawn to Bluffton because the town seemed primed to support high tech and growth jobs.”

This high-tech focus, coupled with an attractive downtown and coastal location, is what Bluffton Mayor Lisa Sulka says is the town’s niche.

Jester says the biggest challenge for a high tech company like his is finding skilled local workers. He praises the work of Bluffton town officials who introduced him to a variety of educational institutions that could help him identify and vet workers. In turn, Jester was able to coach the institutions on the skill set his company needed.

Plus it’s the quality of life in this small coastal community that helps draw the type of workers his company is looking for. “We will be looking to grow to 40 people next year,” Jester said. “Once we bring them to Bluffton, it’s not hard to pull them in to want to live and work here.”

Sulka agrees that quality of life is clearly important as the town seeks to build its niche with a fun and walkable downtown. “We put a lot of money into our Old Town master plan before the recession hit,” she says. “Today, the town has witnessed \$56 million of private investment from the original \$6 million in government investment.”

In Hartsville, a local entrepreneur who owns a robotic company saw his hometown’s downtown as a good place to build a new business. Bob Brown, owner of Integrated Systems Inc., joined with a group of investors who wanted to see a boutique hotel downtown.

Managing lots of growth over the past four years, the council has been trying to come up with ways to attract people downtown, noted Natalie Zeigler, Hartsville’s city manager, who pointed out there are only two empty storefronts in the downtown area that have yet to be revitalized.

The dream of the boutique hotel became a reality because the city had passed an incen-



At home in Travelers Rest, canoe maker Andy O’Mara is now opening a pizza restaurant too. (Photo/Austin Grebenc)

tive ordinance to support growth in the downtown area.

One of the incentives the city offers includes providing some reimbursements of certain fees and taxes for a limited time, which increase Hartsville’s attractiveness to private developers. The program is available to developers who want to invest in new commercial construction as well as renovate existing buildings in Hartsville’s historic downtown.

“We have really focused on being business friendly in our downtown,” says Zeigler. “A boutique hotel fits nicely with our vision.” ●



APART

FROM THE CROWD

By Megan Sexton



Downtown Anderson has donated pianos tucked into out-of-the-way alcoves.

City leaders are always looking for ways to draw locals and visitors to their downtown. Looking closely at what makes each city special and listening to what unique aspects outsiders notice when they visit is key, local leaders say.

That's what the City of Anderson did.

Through support of elected officials and the city's arts community, Anderson has embraced public art — from 6-foot-long fiberglass fish to donated pianos placed in downtown alcoves to a century-old generator on display, a nod to the city's history as South Carolina's first electric city.

There are bronze Carolina wrens all over downtown and a children's book explaining how the state bird belongs to Anderson. There is even a park that pulls it all together.

"One of the drivers for us is the fact that we are not a typical tourist location. We have to think and do things a little differently to engage residents and make us interesting to visitors," said Linda McConnell, Anderson's assistant city manager. "This is the fun part of the job — figuring out what things would make us attractive to others."

These projects are strong examples of this quote that Beth Batson, Anderson's marketing and communications manager, likes to repeat: "A city's vibrancy lies in its ability to promote what makes it unique."

"If you think you don't have anything unique, ask somebody from outside to help you talk about it," Batson said. "We took for granted how much art we have in downtown. We hosted a woman from Southern Living a few years ago whose jaw dropped when she saw how much art we have. That made us feel good. Listen to what others say about you."

Batson is also the author of a children's book about the Carolina wren used to promote Anderson around the state and beyond. The city had an art installation of 20 bronze wrens around downtown, but local officials didn't feel like it was properly marketed to get the word out. Leaders decided on an illustrated book telling the story of the state bird visiting parts of the state as it tries to make its way home to Anderson. The book is available in the Upstate and in locations around South Carolina.

"The goal," Batson said, "was to instill local pride, which it has done, and promote Anderson to visitors and others, which it also has done."

Anderson is not alone. Throughout South Carolina, towns and cities are focusing on what makes their corner of the state special.

In Hartsville, rejoining the Main Street South Carolina program resulted in a renewed focus downtown.

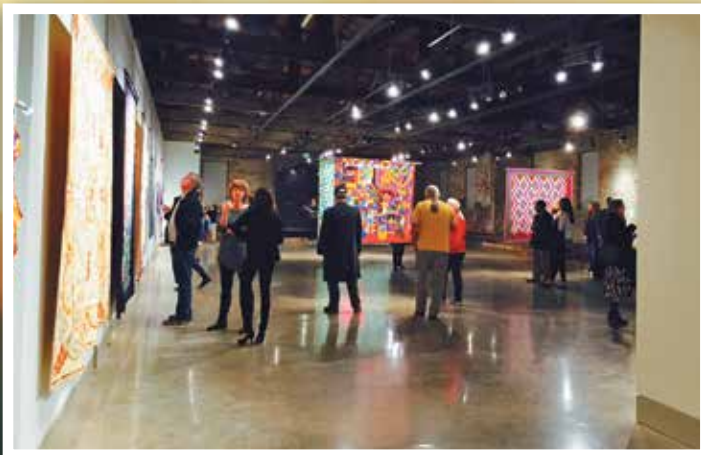
A music video of merchants, business people and city officials dancing to Taylor Swift's "Shake it Off" was a huge hit with businesses and residents — and has gotten plenty of attention on YouTube and through other social media outlets, too.

City Manager Natalie Zeigler said that people in Hartsville got excited about the Main Street program and city leaders were looking for a fun way to get them involved.

"It shows the new energy our downtown has," Zeigler said. "Some of the businesses in the video have been around a long time, but people maybe had not thought about them. They said, 'I bought shoes there as a kid and now I want to go down there to take my kids.'"



Jones-Carter Gallery hosts major art exhibits in Lake City.



A quilt exhibit at Artfields. (Photos/Jones-Carter Gallery)



Moving the farmers market to its primary street has brought new energy to Hartsville. (Photo/City of Hartsville)

Once downtown, visitors will see two new hotels under construction — a 90-room Hampton Inn and Suites and a boutique hotel, the Mantissa Executive Suites and Spa that will feature 17 rooms and fine dining. During the construction process, the city built a “construction wall” offering the opportunity for residents to show community pride. Coker College students painted the wall with a primer, and people from all parts of the community added comments.

“And every time it rained, the wall was washed clean, and we created new messages,” Zeigler said.

Hartsville leaders also point to another example of new energy downtown with a revamped farmers market that opened in the spring. This project of Main Street Hartsville moved to a new location on the city’s primary downtown street from the side street where it had been before.

“This has been a huge hit to bring people downtown every second Saturday of the month,” Zeigler said.

In Lake City, a chalk board in a visible downtown location gave residents a unique way to communicate with city leaders about how the community could improve. Once the ideas were collected and the opportunities narrowed down, town leaders began work on the possibilities. A five-acre water feature is now under construction, Mayor Lovith Anderson Jr. said.

City leaders have also put an emphasis on promoting Lake City as a center for the arts in the Pee Dee. Lake City is home to

Artfields, an annual 10-day art event, spurred by Lake City native and businesswoman Darla Moore. Over the past two years, \$5 million has circulated in the community, Anderson said, with more than 10,000 visitors coming into Lake City for the event.

The artwork is displayed in local businesses ranging from barber shops to shoe stores to galleries. “It really is a diverse clientele and climate for the art,” Anderson said.

In, addition downtown Lake City boasts the historic Bean Market, a 10,000 square foot warehouse that once was the world’s largest truck auction facility for green beans. Today it serves as a popular seasonal farmers market and a meeting space for local and regional arts, social and charitable organizations.

The Bean Market sits next to the Jones-Carter Gallery owned and operated by the Community Museum Society in Lake City. This facility is in a 1920s-era building, once a feed and seed store and machine shop.

The gallery is approved by the Smithsonian to host high security museum exhibitions by meeting stringent standards such as high security, advanced HVAC and humidity controls, a backup generator system and fire suppression systems.

“Only a small number of galleries or museums in the state meet these stringent Smithsonian requirements for hosting its exhibits,” said Hannah Davis, the gallery’s manager.

She noted the gallery has developed a reputation of bringing museum-quality traveling art exhibitions from all over the world to Lake City.

“The Smithsonian really took a chance on the little town of Lake City,” Davis said. “It is very unusual to have a space of this type in a town of 6,500 people, but that’s what Lake City does. It surprises people with its boldness and can-do attitude.” ●



The Mantissa is a boutique hotel under construction in Hartsville. (Photo: City of Hartsville)

Toolkit helps Upstate cities become more entrepreneur friendly



By Mary Brantner

Two Upstate cities have taken advantage of a pilot project to support their efforts in attracting entrepreneurs to their area. The Appalachian Council of Governments created the “Entrepreneur Friendly Toolkit” to give cities a template for making them more entrepreneur friendly.

The toolkit evolved from an idea generated by the Ten at the Top task force for economic and entrepreneurial vitality. Ten at the Top fosters a spirit of cooperation and collaboration among public, private and nonprofit leaders from across the 10-county Upstate region.

David Shellhorse, ACOG’s economic development services manager and member of the Ten at the Top subcommittee, brought the idea of an online toolkit back to the COG. Embracing the idea, ACOG applied and received a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to develop the toolkit and make it available to local governments in ACOG’s six-county region.

“Entrepreneurship and business development is a key area of interest for the Regional Commission,” explained Shellhorse.

The toolkit is similar to the Small Business Administration’s online “Build Your Business Plan” tool. Communities can use the toolkit to develop their own “Entrepreneur Friendly Action Plan” for becoming more business friendly.

Using a series of questions and required tasks, the toolkit guides users as they input required information in seven areas, such as market research and business planning, business capital, regulatory compliance, and marketing to and promoting entrepreneurs.

“While the steps of the online toolkit are easy to understand, it takes hard work and



Pickens has attracted 18 new businesses. (Photo/Pickens Revitalization Association)

time to pull together the required information. The key is appointing a task force that is ready to work and is committed to making it work,” Shellhorse said.

In addition to the action plans, the toolkit provides guidance on developing a custom, local business assistance guide, a local six-to-nine month recommended business startup timeline and a local/regional capital matrix explaining available funding sources. Communities also receive guidance on hosting an annual small business resource fair and creating small business web content.

“You have all these deliverables, but more importantly you have a platform to take the community’s economic development effort to the next level,” explained Shellhorse. “That could take the form of creating a downtown

master plan, joining the Main Street South Carolina program, adding a local economic development position to staff, establishing design overlay districts, developing incentive programs or undertaking a local incubator initiative.”

According to Shellhorse, Pickens is a model for other communities and has set the bar very high. “They are doing all the right things by engaging potential and existing small businesses in every possible way they can and aggressively promoting downtown through its Main Street program,” he said.

The Pickens Revitalization Association, funded in part by the City of Pickens and a member of the Municipal Association’s Main Street SC program, took the lead on the initiative and created an entrepreneur-friendly task force to work on the project.

“We were thrilled to be a part of this pilot program, as it helped us develop tools and resources for our local businesses to grow and thrive here in Pickens,” said Allison Fowler, executive director of the Pickens Revitalization Association.

“By design, the process allowed us to organize a plan for supporting and attracting local entrepreneurs and small businesses,” Fowler said. “Since completing the program, all of the information we accumulated during the process has been organized on the City of Pickens’ website for easy access.”

Pickens released its small business resource guide in May 2014. To date, officials have used it to recruit 18 new businesses, with a half dozen more in the pipeline. The guide is a one-stop-shop for essential business planning and compliance information,

See **TOOLKIT**, Page 14 ▶

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

ARE MAKING THEIR MARK ON CITY POLICY

By Amy Geier Edgar

Many young professionals today are proving that years of experience are not required to be an effective leader and advocate in shaping the city where they live and work. In fact, many understand that involvement in their city is more than just good for business, it's their responsibility.

Elliott Smith is a Charleston attorney who has been practicing law since 2012. He's also an artist and musician, playing in bands, solo and in some local Gullah churches since about 2004. With his sister, he runs a nautical artwork and apparel business called FishSmith Co., which provides artwork for several local businesses.

Smith, 33, attended law school in Florida. He worked as legal staff for the Florida Legislature for about a year, then practiced



Elliott Smith, Charleston (Photo/Ashley Loveless Photography)

law in that state for a year and a half before moving back to Charleston in 2013.

That background in law, policy and legislation, art, music and business has led Smith to another new role — legal counsel and spokesman of the BACE (Business, Art, Culture, Entertainment) League of Charleston Inc.—and a deeper involvement with his local government.

Smith's involvement began after Charleston city officials first proposed a permanent rezoning that would require midnight closing times for downtown bars. Smith attended a public discussion with about 20 local artists, musicians, food and beverage employees and managers, and business owners. They all were concerned about how the change would affect Charleston's nighttime

Planning committee for the 2014 LeadSC Young Professionals Conference (Photo/Penny Delaney Cothran, SC Chamber of Commerce)





Above: Late Night Activity Public Listening Session held by the Late Night Activity Review Committee (Photo/Ashley Hefferman, Charleston Regional Business Journal)

Right: Elizabeth Nkwo Johnson, Columbia

economy and the culture that attracted the young professional and creative class. Smith offered insight into how they could organize and get more involved with local politics, and BACE was born.

Since then, the group has become significantly involved in local policymaking. After speaking at a public hearing regarding the Midnight Zoning Ordinance last summer, Smith was invited to serve as a member of an advisory group to discuss issues concerning the ordinance. After the group met a few times, the ordinance was withdrawn, and city officials proposed a three-year downtown bar moratorium instead.

After numerous hearings, city council ultimately passed a one-year moratorium, and by the same ordinance, established the Late Night Activity Review Committee. The committee studied the local nighttime economy and recently made policy and regulatory recommendations to city council. Smith serves on that committee.

The issue is important to Smith because he believes the future of any community lies in the talent of its young creative professionals. BACE was organized, he said, to promote the idea of keeping and attracting young creative professionals and better aligning policy with culture by engaging these young professionals in local politics.

Young professionals have a responsibility to get involved in their local government because politics are corollary to their contributions to culture and the economy, Smith said.

“At a basic level, local policy and regulation are meant to reflect and support our community’s interests and value judgments. Therefore, if young creative professionals expend energy in creating culture and developing ideas but do not get involved in local politics, then culture and policy can become misaligned, and frustration sets in,” he said. “That is when young professionals become unmotivated and either stop creating or move somewhere else.”



John Boyanoski is president of Complete Public Relations in Greenville. After spending many years working for newspapers and a governmental affairs company, Boyanoski decided to start his own company three years ago.

“The reasons were many, but a driving factor was being involved in the Greenville Chamber of Commerce’s young professionals group, PULSE. There were a lot of YPs doing some amazing things so I got inspired to strike out on my own,” he said.

See **YOUNG PROFESSIONALS**, Page 14 ▶

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS, from page 13 ▶

Boyanoski, 37, is committed to service to his community. He was the 2013 chair for the Greenville Chamber's PULSE Advisory Council, which represents more than 1,000 young professionals in the Upstate. He also was named the Chamber's 2014 Young Professional of the Year.

On the state level, he sits on the executive committee for LeadSC, a year-old program that is an initiative of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce. LeadSC unites young professionals with top leadership throughout South Carolina with the aim of encouraging personal, professional and community development.

"Service to the community makes a community better. A community or a city is more than just buildings, roads and parks. They are about people. A good community or city has good people helping to make it better," he said.

Young professionals have a responsibility to make their voices heard in local government, Boyanoski said.

"We are a large part of many growing cities. We are the next generation of leaders," he said. "The question becomes, how do



John Boyanoski, Greenville

we want to lead? Do we simply keep up the status quo or do we learn from the mistakes of the past and push new avenues? If young professionals aren't involved, they are going to have a hard time making that choice in the future."

Elizabeth Nkuo Johnson is community relations manager for BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina. She also is on the state committee for LeadSC. After completing her undergraduate degree at a small college in

Indiana, Johnson worked for the Kellogg Co. in Battle Creek, Mich. She moved to South Carolina and worked for DHEC and then the Girl Scouts, while completing her master's degree in journalism.

Johnson, too, is committed to community service. She is past president of the Columbia Design League, an affiliate membership group of the Columbia Museum of Art; and secretary on the Palmetto Center for Women board, a YMCA membership branch.

Johnson recently joined the board of Healing Icons, a nonprofit organization focused on using art and creative workshops as a source of healing for adult cancer survivors. She also plans to serve on the LeadSC committee for this year's program.

Young professionals have a civic duty to their community and their local government, Johnson said.

"We all have a duty to stay informed and engaged. To be good citizens and good neighbors. To pay attention to local issues so we can make informed decisions when it comes to voting," Johnson said.

"That way the elected officials who are in charge are guided by educated and clear voices," she said. ●

TOOLKIT, from page 11 ▶

such as planning/zoning/signage regulations and business license requirements.

Pickens' involvement in the pilot program also included a resource fair. Attendees received copies of the guide plus they visited area resources such as the Small Business Development Center, and local bankers, insurance agents and lawyers. The resource fair also offered presentations, such as how to compete with big box stores, and provided networking opportunities for the attendees.

Pickens officials felt the event was very successful. It allowed business owners to gain insight from multiple sources at one time

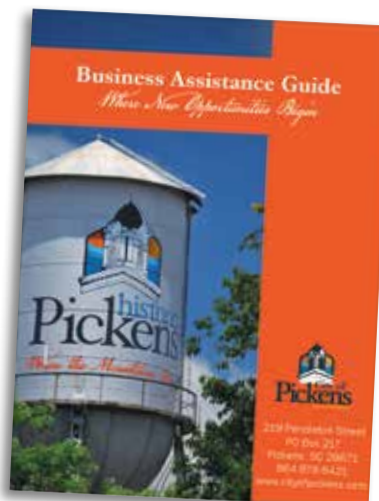
and make connections with other professionals to assist in their ventures. Pickens plans to make it an annual event. As well, the Pickens Revitalization Association won a 2015 Main Street South Carolina Inspiration Award for its small business resource guide.

The Appalachian COG more recently began working with Simpsonville as the final pilot for the toolkit.

"They are doing a good job with the survey

of existing small business and are preparing a very dynamic small business guide," said Shellhorse. The local chamber is heading up the Simpsonville initiative.

"The 'Entrepreneur Friendly Toolkit' will be available to local governments within the Appalachian COG's territory," concluded Shellhorse. "We hope at a later date, we can offer it to entities outside our region." ●



HOMETOWN SNAPSHOT



Photo/Jeff Blake

Lake City has transformed itself into a center for the arts in the Pee Dee region. Included in this vision is the annual 10-day event known as Artfields, which brings 10,000 visitors to the small city. Here, children watch a choir perform as part of Artfields.

You see a street...



We see a lifeline that is a hometown with planned traffic flow, fire stations, thousands of visitors each year, city parks and community centers for children of all ages. Our streets take us to our jobs, our churches, our fun places and even to grandma's house.

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