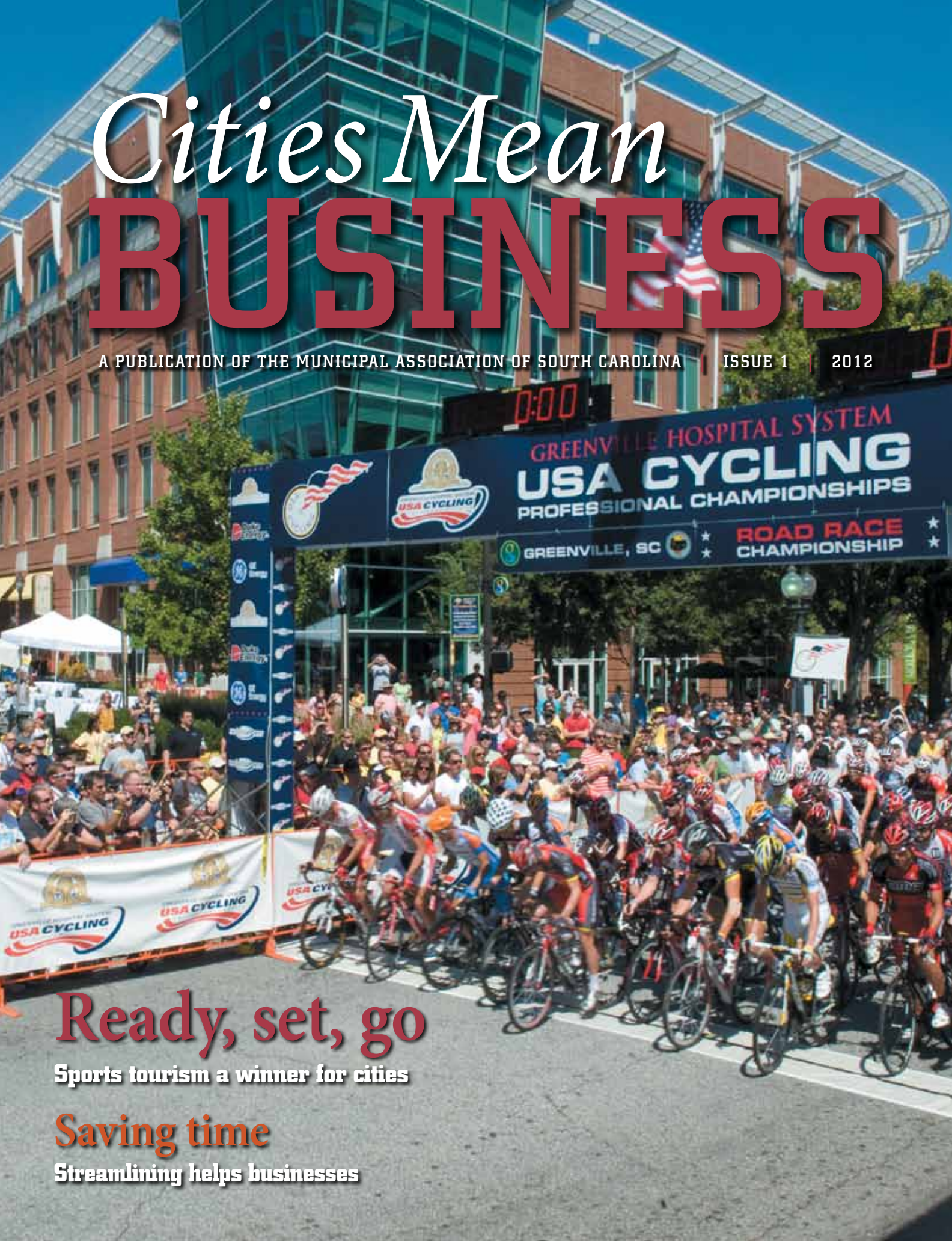# *Cities Mean* BUSINESS

A PUBLICATION OF THE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH CAROLINA | ISSUE 1 | 2012

Ready, set, go
Sports tourism a winner for cities

Saving time
Streamlining helps businesses

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.

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When businesses consider opening in a particular area, many factors influence the decision whether to locate in a certain city or town. This issue of *Cities Mean Business* magazine takes a look at several of these factors that make a difference for companies looking to relocate or expand.

Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt notes in his column that cities and towns play a critical role in "setting the table" for companies to visit, and locate in, South Carolina. He encourages local leaders to think about the inventory such as buildings, water and sewer, that cities and towns need to have ready when companies come calling.

Cities and towns can also be ready for business by streamlining their permitting and licensing processes to be more business-friendly. We focus in this issue on several cities that are cutting down on time-consuming processes for the business owner and the local government.

Quality of life amenities are also critical when companies are making location decisions. Sports tourism is proving to be a big success for cities that have found their niche with ongoing events and tournaments. Also, the Palmetto Trail, running through 26 cities and towns across the state, brings tourism dollars and attention to these communities.

Taken together, quality of life, ease of doing business and necessary inventory will ensure that cities and towns are ready to welcome new business and new jobs to their communities.

Reba Hull Campbell

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Editor

Cities and towns get ready – companies are coming

By Bobby Hitt, S.C. Secretary of Commerce

Bobby Hitt

Traveling South Carolina's highways and roads thousands of miles per month gives me a great perspective on our state's cities and towns. I am excited with what I see. Cities and towns are the center that defines an area. They are the soul of a region and of our state.

For companies wanting to locate or expand in South Carolina, cities and towns should be "setting the table." Economic development is like setting up for the family holiday celebration: Spruce up for the occasion; show your best.

The South Carolina Department of Commerce can help cities and towns set the table by helping improve the product by supporting community development and infrastructure projects. Inventory, such as buildings and sites for economic development, is key. Of the projects we worked last year, more than 70 percent involved companies looking for a structure that was ready and available. Cities and towns must develop property that has water, sewer and transportation access – development parks set aside for industrialization.

South Carolina has a history of one-industry towns, and in some cases we are still digging out from that. It was a good model for a period of time, but it is not a good model going forward. We need diversity. Each community really has to look inside itself and ask what makes it unique, what makes it more than a wide spot in the road?

What assets does your city have? What makes your town special now, not just what you want it to be?

Capitalize on what is naturally great about your community, and how you can put a fresh face on it.

I love to meet up with local folks and hear them brag about what they have been working on in their town. I can tell you businesses are very positive about that. They want to be where there is a feeling of success, not a feeling of desperation.

Often cities and towns focus on downtowns first as the focal point for economic growth, but businesses are trying to locate in an area as good capitalists. They are not interested in revitalizing a city's downtown. They locate to make a profit, and will end up where they can be successful – where there is a strong talent force, low costs of doing business and solid inventory.

I believe a community needs two things to be successful: payroll and retail. I think manufacturing is the real driver of this. Once a facility locates in a community, people get to work and retail emerges; all of which create jobs and build community. An offshoot of a healthy economy is trade. An announcement of 100 jobs in a small town can make a big impact. There is nothing more exciting for the Department of Commerce than when we are able to locate a company – especially one in a small community – and 150 or 200 people go to work. We know it will change that community.

The emotion and energy of the Department of Commerce are toward creating jobs and having an impact, but we can't do it without the cities and towns. Companies want to see successful cities and towns. Give them something you can brag about. ●

Streamlining

BUSINESS PROCESSES

Municipalities minimize time, costs

By Amy Geier Edgar

Developers in Hilton Head Island were frustrated. The town's commercial permitting process was time-consuming, and different departments seemed focused on doing their own thing rather than communicating with each other as a whole.

Town leaders heard the concerns, and they took steps to streamline the process. The Town of Hilton Head Island brought together 60 stakeholders -- including architects, land planners, attorneys and developers -- to ask them about their experience in obtaining needed permits. The result was a six-month effort to simplify the commercial permitting process, said Jill Foster, Hilton Head Island deputy director of community development.

A number of local government leaders have found that they, like Hilton Head Island, can have a hand in job creation by establishing an environment that is conducive to growth. And with Main Street businesses making up a large sector of job growth, the role that local government plays is perhaps now more important than ever.

Hilton Head Island's regulations had been formed to balance preserving a delicate barrier island with the rapid growth of new development in the 1990s. Yet, two decades later and facing a vastly different economic climate, town leaders recognized changes needed to be made to spur redevelopment and minimize time and cost to both property owners and government, Foster said.

The stakeholders suggested the creation of Project Advocates -- one person who would walk the developer through the process from the first day to the end of the process. They also suggested that the town simplify and streamline its forms and make them available online.

Along with those changes, the town also took steps to reduce hand-offs from staff to staff, and to minimize the number of times that developers had to appear before boards, a process that adds time and expense.

The changes go hand-in-hand with the work of another committee that is rewriting zoning and land-use regulations. The work of that committee likely will take another year to complete, Foster said.

Left: The Boeing 787 Dreamliner arrived in North Charleston recently. The city worked to get Boeing's certificate of occupancy in record time. (Photo/Leslie Burden). Above: Mount Pleasant's BIZ INC offers new businesses an array of services, including office space. (Photo/Town of Mount Pleasant)

Meanwhile, the changes to streamline, reduce redundancies and educate developers on the permitting process took effect in October 2011, and feedback has been positive, Foster said. Town officials are hoping the changes will encourage more developers to take a chance and move forward with business plans.

The new environment is more supportive of business, said Todd Theodore, vice president of the landscape architectural firm Wood + Partners.

"Instead of throwing out obstacles, they're helping us to find solutions," Theodore said. "The idea is to be more supportive in the process, knowing that there's an investment being made into the community."

Other municipalities are making their own changes to provide a positive environment for businesses.

The Town of Mount Pleasant has been working to streamline its permitting process. The majority of the changes have been to the commercial review approval and permitting process, according to Town Administrator Eric DeMoura.

The regulations for commercial design were rewritten to provide greater clarification and flexibility, DeMoura said. Architectural

and site photos were added to the ordinance so that a developer can better understand the standards. The town designated one staff member within the planning division and one within the building division as the main point of contact for commercial approvals. These contact people can guide a developer through the process and even follow up with outside departments or agencies to help move a project forward, DeMoura said.

To reduce the number of times developers must go before boards and commissions, the town brings in a design review staff member from the beginning on commercial projects that may also require rezoning or special exception approvals. Although commercial design approvals may not be granted until all other board approvals have been finalized, allowing reviews to occur simultaneously greatly reduces the length of time for approvals prior to issuance of a building permit, DeMoura said.

In addition, the town launched a new website that allows people to apply online for rezonings, variances and even commercial design review. Submittals can be made electronically and fees paid online. The new website also includes a page for the commercial approval process, which explains

the commercial review process; shows the design guidelines for commercial development; provides applications and checklists; and links back to permitting within the building division.

"The goals associated with these changes have been to make the process for approvals more expeditious, more predictable and more business friendly," DeMoura said.

The Beach Company has been working on a large scale mixed-use development in the town for more than a year. The town's efforts to streamline the submittal and review process have helped to reduce the amount of large format paper submittals, resulting in more timely feedback on review items and overall improved efficiency for all parties, according to Daniel Doyle, vice president of development at The Beach Company.

"This enhanced communication has enabled us to implement revisions in response to staff comments within a shorter timeframe, resulting in a faster turnaround and fewer delays," Doyle said.

"We appreciate the town's efforts toward this process improvement."

Officials with the City of Sumter knew they also had to make improvements to their application process as they struggled with

Tidal Design, one of the BIZ INC. companies in Mount Pleasant, creates a triadic color scheme for a current design project using a color wheel. (Photo/Mount Pleasant)

customer wait times averaging 38 days and problems with internal communication, said Sumter Communications, Tourism and Recreation Director Susan Wild.

The Business License Department turned to "Kaizen," a program based on the Japanese word meaning "improvement" or "good change," to eliminate waste. The goals of the program were to reduce process cycle time and improve customer service throughout the department.

The efforts paid off, with the business license office establishing a single contact point for customers, speeding up service times, and improving communications among departments, Wild said.

Customers said they have noticed the changes during recent experiences with the business license department.

"The business license staff was extremely helpful and jumped right on the issues we needed to clear up," said Marty Atkinson, controller at Sumter Transport Co.. "Their office was very busy that day, but their customer service was top notch. They were courteous to everyone in line and took care of each person quickly and professionally. They were a pleasure to deal with."

There are numerous other ways that municipalities support small businesses. Both Rock Hill and Spartanburg, for

instance, perform "feasibility" inspections for new businesses looking to locate in a specific facility. The cities will visit a potential site with the business owner and review zoning considerations and do code evaluations for the proposed use. This prevents small business owners from making costly mistakes by letting them know upfront what they need to move into a new site.

And several cities, including Mount Pleasant, Charleston, Columbia and Greenwood, work hands-on with new companies through business incubator programs. These incubators nurture emerging small businesses by providing a variety of business support services, shared resources and networking opportunities. The goals of incubation programs typically are to create or retain jobs in a community, foster a community's entrepreneurial climate, and grow the local economy.

Mount Pleasant's incubator program, BIZ INC, offers a wide array of business support services and resources such as fully furnished office space and equipment, networking events, educational seminars and marketing assistance.

"We have a vested interest in these businesses succeeding because we want them to graduate from the program and locate in the Mount Pleasant business community," said

Business Development Coordinator Quin Stinchfield.

Katherine Fishburne moved her company, Innovink, into BIZ INC. in August.

"The program has helped me by providing me an affordable, exceptional working environment, where I can bounce creative ideas off of the other tenants, and discuss the learning curves that we're all facing as new entrepreneurs," Fishburne said. "It has also helped with exposure in the local community that I would never have been able to achieve, or afford, at this stage in my company's growth."

A city's assistance in the business process helps not only small, local companies, but also major industry as well.

The City of North Charleston's building inspections department, working in conjunction with the Boeing Company and its facility design and construction teams, was able to provide a certificate of occupancy for its 650,000-square-foot final assembly building seven months ahead of schedule, said Ray Anderson, special assistant to the mayor.

The feat was accomplished because the building inspections department – with support from the zoning, fire and public works departments – administered inspections immediately, at the contractor's request, Anderson said.

North Charleston has proved before that they can assist businesses on a tight timeframe. As with Boeing, the city worked closely with Sam's Club on the completion of a new building to meet a quick relocation deadline. The city responded to inspection and permitting requests around the clock, and even maintains a three-person team from the building, zoning, and code enforcement departments on Saturdays.

"North Charleston understands that private business and industry do not stop at 5 p.m. or on the weekends, and we refuse to be the impedance to any enterprise looking to operate in the city," Anderson said. ●

THE PALMETTO TRAIL

CROSS-STATE PATHWAY ECONOMIC ASSET TO CITIES AND TOWNS

By Amy Geier Edgar

South Carolina's terrain is rich and varied, ranging from mountain ridges to forests, from swampy marshes to pristine coastlines. Linking all of these diverse natural resources with cities and towns along the way is the Palmetto Trail, the state's largest bicycle and pedestrian project. The trail aims to promote conservation and outdoor recreation, all while positively impacting the economic development of cities and towns in its path.

The Palmetto Trail, first conceived in 1994, is the primary project of the Palmetto Conservation Foundation. This federally-designated Millennium Legacy Trail is one of only 16 cross-state trails in the country. It currently is about two-thirds complete with more than 300 miles open to the public, according to Palmetto Conservation Executive Director Natalie Britt. Twenty-two cities and towns in 13 counties lie along the trail.

The trail is being built as a series of passages, each of which is accessible for single- or multi-day trips. It features secluded mountaintop and forest paths, as well as urban bikeways, greenways and rail-to-trail

conversions. It passes through two Revolutionary War battlefields, cemeteries and waterways, all of which are part of the tapestry of the state's history.

Visitors want to experience the trail's story, and that means an economic impact to towns and cities. Both local residents and tourists have taken advantage of the trail's recreational opportunities, and often stayed to check out the surrounding towns, Britt said.

"We have people calling us all the time, from all over the country, wanting to plan trips," Britt said.

Her group puts out a guidebook for places to eat and bed and breakfast spots in the Lowcountry, and Britt said she would like to put out similar guidebooks for other areas of the state.

The trail runs through the Town of Landrum, which has a population of about 2,500 people, in Spartanburg County. This passage of the trail extends from the forest to the city streets of downtown Landrum.

"We do see tourism because people use the trail," said Landrum City Administrator

Steven P. Wolochowicz. "They often stop in our office looking for trail maps."

Wolochowicz said most of those visitors are from other parts of the state, and most are avid outdoors people who have hiked other trails in the state. The trail is a fun recreational opportunity for visitors, but also an important conservation effort, he said.

"It's a pretty area, very natural. It's a great resource," Wolochowicz said. "As we see the county grow, the importance of these resources increases. Once it's lost, it's lost forever."

Spartanburg City Councilwoman Cate Ryba has been very involved with the Palmetto Trail through her work at the Mary Black Foundation, which provided funding for a portion called the Hub City Connector.

The Connector is a 12-mile pathway of greenways, bicycle lanes and sidewalks through downtown Spartanburg. It includes several sections such as the Mary Black Rail Trail, a two-mile rail conversion through downtown; the path through Liberty Garden, which connects Wofford College with the Heart Center at Spartanburg

THE PALMETTO TRAIL

Above, Spartanburg's Croft Passage, open for hiking, biking and equestrian use, runs through the S.C. School for the Deaf and Blind. (Photo courtesy of Palmetto Conservation League) At left, Boy Scouts hike the Fort Jackson Passage near Columbia. (Photo/Matthew Forster)

Regional Healthcare System; and a section near the S.C. School for the Deaf and Blind that features Braille interpretive signs.

The trail connects neighborhoods, Ryba said. Other recreation sites, such as a skate park and a new $10 million YMCA (which is scheduled to open in March), are growing up around it. Restaurants have advertised with signs on the trail. And businesses, including a bike shop and bike-share rental stations, have located along the trail, she said.

Eric Turner moved his business, Bike Worx, to its current location along the trail in 2009. The site is central to town, and offers the unique opportunity for customers to take a bike for a test drive right out the back door and onto a real trail.

"That first test drive outside of the store can sometimes influence people on bicycling," Turner said. "Usually people take a test drive in a parking lot, and they're dodging cars. It's nice for us having the rail trail. It makes a positive impact."

That impact has kept customers coming back, which means an economic boost for the community. Turner said he has people

seeking quality bikes coming from as far away as Columbia, Greenville, and Asheville and Charlotte, N.C.

Turner has done his part to contribute to the growth of the trails and outdoor recreation in Spartanburg. After he was awarded a $25,000 grant from the Mary Black Foundation, he gave half the money to an outdoor leadership school to provide bikes and a transport trailer to help expose kids to biking. He gave the other half to the City of Spartanburg to build more trails in Duncan Park and expand opportunities for people to ride bikes.

The Capital City Passage of the Palmetto Trail is 7.5 miles of hiking and biking trails that run through the City of Columbia. This urban section of the trail takes users from Fort Jackson, past the University of South Carolina and the State House, to the Broad River. Shopping, restaurants and several tourist stops are along the way.

"The three beautiful rivers running through the heart of Columbia give our city an environment that is characteristically urban and natural at the same time. The Palmetto Trail is another way for us to

highlight that unique landscape and distinguish this city as someplace new and exciting," said Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin.

"My understanding is that, on a nice day, the Riverfront Park section can see upwards of 400 to 500 visitors an hour," Benjamin added. "That kind of recreational draw not only brings shoppers into Columbia, but also helps us convince new industries that this is a community they should invest in."

As the trail continues to grow, other leaders in small towns say they would like to see it extend to them, citing the positive economic benefits.

Pacolet is a town of about 2,200 in the Upstate. Mayor Elaine Harris said town leaders have discussed how the trail's intent is a natural fit with their mission to draw economic development through tourism.

"One of our major focuses in Pacolet is to celebrate our natural resources and our heritage," Harris said. "The trail would help us as we promote our community. The tourism would bring economic development. We feel like it would be a great asset to have the Palmetto Trail." ●

N

UPSTATE
approx. completed
102 MILES

MIDLANDS
approx. completed
40 MILES

LOWCOUNTRY
approx. completed
162 MILES

THE PALMETTO TRAIL

Approx 304 miles developed

developed ▬▬▬▬▬

undeveloped ▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪

Map Illustration/Jean Piot

Palmetto Trail by County and Municipality

The following cities and counties have some part of the Palmetto Trail running through them.

Charleston County
- Awendaw

Berkeley County
- Bonneau
- Moncks Corner
- St. Stephen

Orangeburg County
- Santee
- Eutawville
- Vance

Clarendon County

Sumter County
- Sumter
- Pinewood
- Wedgefield

Richland County
- Columbia

Fairfield County

Newberry County
- Prosperity
- Newberry
- Peak
- Whitmire
- Pomaria

Laurens County
- Clinton

Union County

Spartanburg County
- Campobello
- Landrum
- Spartanburg
- Inman

Greenville County

Pickens County

Oconee County
- Walhalla

US Cycling Pro Championship Road Race peloton in downtown Greenville. (Photo/Casey Gibson)

CITIES FIND STRENGTH IN SPORTS TOURISM

By Amy Murray

When RBC and Boeing signed on as sponsors of the Heritage tournament last June, they ensured the continuation of what is arguably South Carolina's most prominent and tradition-laden sports tourism event.

When people think about the intersection of sports and tourism, golf may be the first thing to come to mind for many South Carolinians -- from high-profile events such as the PGA Championships, coming to Kiawah Island in 2012, to the thousands of amateur golfers who descend on the state's 360 championship-caliber courses each year.

But South Carolina's sports tourism industry is more diverse than many people realize, and several cities and towns around the state have established their own strengths within the sector.

Building from the ground up

Many in the state consider Rock Hill a pioneer in sports tourism. Cherry Park hosts state, regional, and national tournaments year-round. The complex is part of an extensive network of sports facilities that have brought nearly 475,000 visitors to Rock Hill during the past six years and had a $59 million direct economic impact on the city.

"These sports tourism facilities . . . act as an important economic development tool to grow our city," says Ed Thompson, director of Rock Hill Parks, Recreation and Tourism.

Thompson says that all kinds of hospitality and retail businesses, from hotels, restaurants and gas stations to department stores, pharmacies and laundromats, get a boost from the tournaments.

"Some new businesses, such as Dick's Sporting Goods, have established themselves near [our] sports facilities," Thompson says.

Greenville was able to capitalize on its natural terrain, rather than a constructed facility, when it was awarded the USA Cycling Professional Championships in 2006, ending a 21-year run for Philadelphia, which had hosted the event since its inception.

"[The event organizers] love the course," says Angie Prosser, director of public information and events for the City of Greenville. She notes that both the time trial and the road race routes for the event are technically

Above: Cherry Park hosts state, national and regional tournaments year-round.

Right: Manchester Meadows is the location for a college tournament.
(Photos/City of Rock Hill)

challenging. "To have a national championship, they want it to be the survival of the fittest. They want the best to come to the top, so having the Paris Mountain course as our course allows that."

Prosser says winning the prestigious event was just another step in a journey Greenville started in the 1990s, when city leaders decided to play to their sporting strengths and make Greenville a hub for cycling.

"We started with a vision, and every year we worked to do a little bit more," Prosser says. "Our parks and recreation department got involved with the [local cyclists and] started sponsoring small amateur races, then some of them became larger, then we got involved with the Tour DuPont, and we saw

that it could help put Greenville on the map in the cycling world."

While no official economic impact study has been done on any of Greenville's cycling activities, Prosser says that anecdotally, "we know we put a lot of heads in beds" once all the cyclists, event volunteers and out-of-town fans are considered. "We hear it from the hotels," Prosser says.

She says that the economy is also stimulated by the excitement that the championships generate throughout the city. "The month after USA cycling, the bike shops, we've heard that their sales increase. That's the true reason that Greenville is interested in this [event]. Not just one weekend and the 'heads in beds,' but it's the spin for

Greenville as a community—being a cycling community," says Prosser. "The number of bike shops has increased in Greenville."

"When you see a pack of professional riders flying by on Paris Mountain, people get excited, and they say, 'You know what? I'm going to go buy a bike.' Not necessarily to race, but it just spurs it on," Prosser says.

Keys to victory

Even with Rock Hill's top-tier facilities, "it's a very competitive process" to attract events, says Thompson. "Rock Hill must compete against other cities from across the country."

The city obviously knows what it takes to win. Rock Hill was awarded the 2012 national championships for U.S. Youth Soccer, which will be held at Manchester Meadows Soccer Complex.

Incidentally, Greenville will host U.S. Youth Soccer's Region III finals, the first time a state has hosted the championship as well as a regional tournament.

Thompson says that attracting events involves "attending various conferences and conventions, building relationships with event holders, nurturing those relationships, and building regional partnerships," such as those Rock Hill's Parks, Recreation and Tourism has established with the local convention and visitors bureau, Chamber of Commerce, YMCA, school district and Winthrop University.

Thompson continues: "We feel strongly, however, that word of mouth is our best method for attracting tournaments."

He says that the experience participants and visitors have in Rock Hill should be top-notch from beginning to end, from the signs that direct visitors to the facilities, to keeping the parks meticulously clean throughout the event, to providing excellent customer service to all attendees.

New sponsors have secured the future for the Heritage Golf Tournament on Hilton Head Island. Golf boosts S.C. tourism, but is by no means the only sport to do so.

Prosser of Greenville also cites partnerships as an essential ingredient for success in attracting events.

"If the cycling community, the city and the county are not at the table, we would not have US Pro," says Prosser. "It absolutely takes the [whole] community to support it, [including] sponsors. If Greenville Hospital System, Duke, GE and TD Bank didn't step up to the table, we wouldn't have US Pro. Without that corporate sponsorship and support, these events wouldn't take place."

Keeping the championships year after year involves teamwork, as well. "Between the City of Greenville, Greenville County and Medalist Sports, we produce a wonderful event," says Prosser. Medalist is a sports event management company based in Atlanta that has been involved with Greenville cycling events for years.

Finding your niche

Thompson and Prosser have advice for other communities that are considering adding a sports-related component to their tourism or economic development efforts.

Thompson brings it back to building strong relationships and trying to gain broad community support. "Support from city council and citizens, with input [from] a parks, recreation and tourism commission, is invaluable." Also: "Be conservative with economic impact projections."

Says Prosser, "I think that every town owes it to themselves to figure out what they can do well, and stick with it. And not try to duplicate what someone else is doing well."

"Rock Hill built Cherry Park, and they were probably the best in the state as far as pushing sports tourism," Prosser says. "Then everybody tried to duplicate what Rock Hill was doing."

Instead Prosser emphasizes, it's really about working with what you have. "[We thought,] we don't have a beach, we don't really have a mountain, what do we have? We have wonderful terrain for cycling,'" she says. "We started looking at cycling events and asking, 'how can we promote this and make sure that we always have a cycling event in our calendar?'

"There are a lot of different sports out there, and [towns] need to figure out what they can do that is different from the next town over—not just to compete and do the same thing, but to find their own niche."

"I think I'm seeing that trend more now," Prosser says, citing the fishing tournaments that have become established across the state as an example. "Now we're really starting to see those communities say, we can do this." ●

This article is reprinted with permission from the SCEDA Voice.

Users of the Mary Black Foundation Rail Trail in downtown Spartanburg enjoy all modes of transportation: walking, biking, and skating. The trail is adjacent to a new YMCA facility, the city's Skate Park, two city neighborhoods, and many businesses. The trail connects to biking routes, both on and off road, and other city parks and playgrounds.

Carroll Foster, Hot Eye Photography

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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