

# *Cities Mean* **BUSINESS**

A PUBLICATION OF THE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH CAROLINA

ISSUE 1 | 2018

## The journey and the destination

**Cities and towns are  
finding new ways to make  
transportation more fun.**

# 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 Carolina<sup>SM</sup>

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By Megan Sexton

**Cover Photo:**  
One of the several  
bike share stations  
on the peninsula  
of Charleston.

Photo: Andrew Sprague



## Cities Mean BUSINESS

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## Letter from the **EDITOR**



**Reba Hull Campbell**  
*Editor and Deputy  
Executive Director,  
Municipal  
Association of SC*

**While safe neighborhoods, clean water and timely trash pickup may be what people think of first when asked about city services, there's a lot more to that story.** Cities also provide many amenities that support a positive quality of life that attracts residents and businesses alike. Cultural and recreational amenities are what help make our 271 cities and towns unique. This issue of Cities Means Business takes a look at how cities of all sizes are leveraging their distinctive assets to benefit residents and tourists.

Several cities are seeing an uptick in unique downtown transportation to move people to fun or bring the fun to people. Find out how rickshaws, pedal-powered trolleys and unique biking activities are seeing success in Charleston, Columbia, Moncks Corner and James Island.

Opera houses were common in Southern cities and towns in the late 1800s and early 1900s as performers found welcoming audiences on their treks down the eastern seaboard. Today, many cities have restored their opera houses to meet diverse local needs from community gathering places to year-round performance venues. Learn how city officials in Clio, Sumter and Newberry are making the most of these historical gems to promote economic development, tourism and community spirit.

Every city has a story to tell, and local museums create hometown pride while also providing an economic boost to help share cities' history and culture. Read about how Greenwood, Seneca and Williston use their unique assets to tell a story that appeals to locals and visitors alike.

Cities all over the world have long built commerce around waterfront amenities. That's increasingly true in South Carolina as cities are taking advantage of what public access to nearby rivers and lakes means to the local economy. Learn about what North Augusta, Ware Shoals, Pacolet and Calhoun Falls are doing to expand residents' and visitors' access to their rivers and lakes.

We have a wealth of cultural and natural assets in cities of all sizes. Enjoy reading more about them!

*Reba Hull Campbell*

**Reba Hull Campbell**

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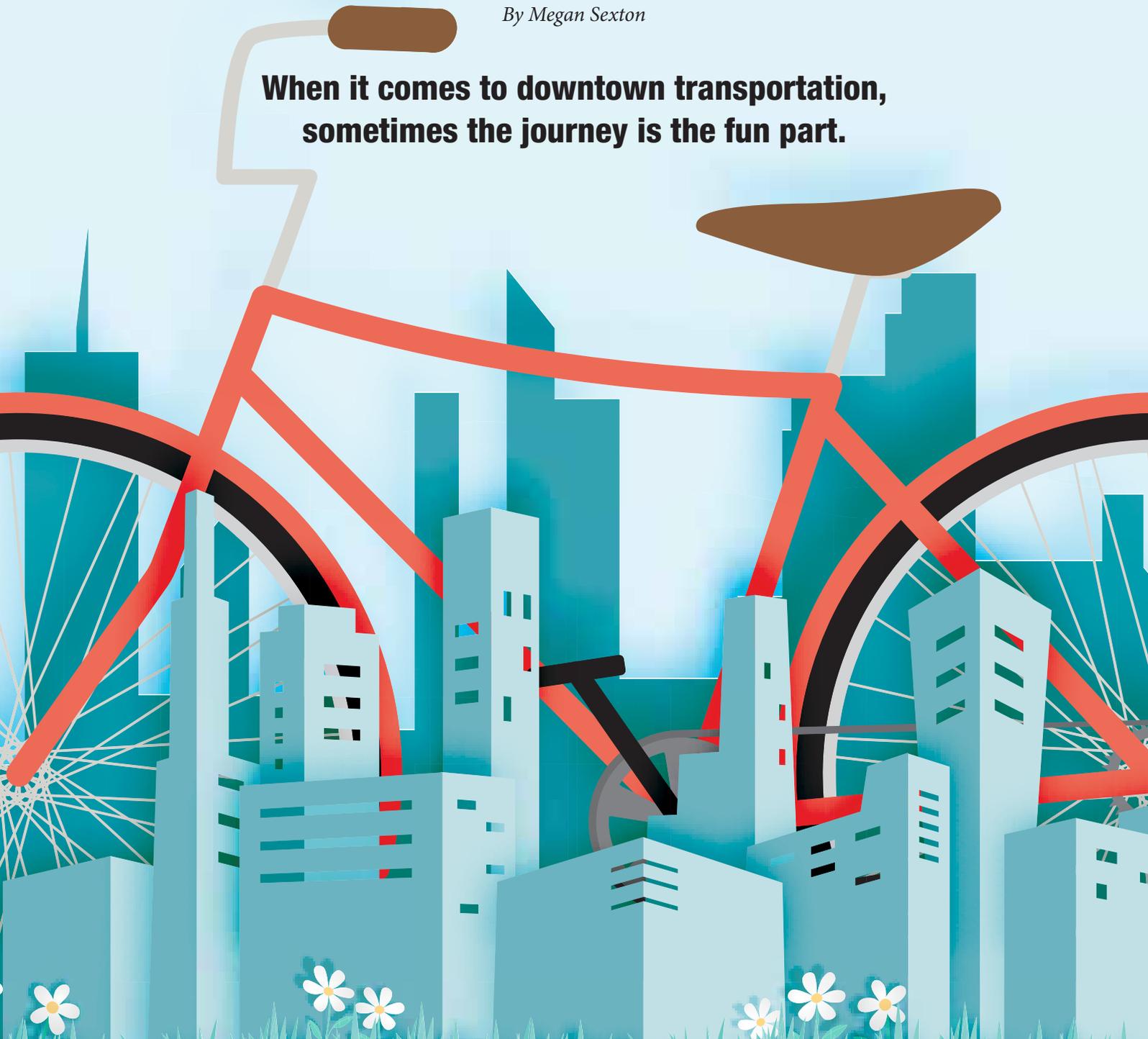
*Editor*

# FUN TRIPS

# REV UP DOWNTOWNS

*By Megan Sexton*

**When it comes to downtown transportation,  
sometimes the journey is the fun part.**





**A**s several South Carolina cities have shown, fun ways of getting around can also boost downtown business.

Rickshaws pulled by bikes, horse-drawn carriages, electric scooters or pedal-powered trolleys all offer visitors a chance to get from place to place while experiencing downtown from a different perspective.

“When we can get people out of their cars, it’s helpful for everyone,” said J. Perrin Lawson, vice president for business development at the Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

“The more options, the better.”

In the City of Charleston, visitors can hop into a pedicab — a rickshaw pulled by a three-wheeled bike — or climb into a horse-drawn carriage, offering the quintessential way to tour the historic district.

“An association or corporate group may be in town, and they want a ride to a hotel or restaurant or some other venue. The carriages are a unique and atmospheric way to get from Point A to Point B, and people absolutely love it,” Lawson said. The pedicabs hold only a couple of people but appeal to

visitors who get tired of walking and want to cruise around the city instead.

Lawson said the five carriage companies run year-round and employ 138 people with an annual economic impact of \$19 million. The carriage industry has long been regulated, while the city got involved with regulating pedicabs more recently, as more companies moved into the market.

“Many alternative modes of transportation are beneficial for any community. But transportation infrastructure is going to be different, depending on the community,” he said. “What works in Charleston may not make sense in Columbia or Bennettsville or someplace else in the state.”

### ‘They’re always smiling’

Columbia is home to the SC Pedal Parlor, a “bike” that looks more like a bar powered by up to 16 people who pedal it.

Columbia’s pub-crawl-on-wheels tours the Main Street and Vista districts, stopping at two to four restaurants and bars, making it popular for birthday parties, corporate events or just a night on the town.

“It’s a fun, unique and eco-friendly way to ride around downtown,” said Matthew Koleske, co-owner of the SC Pedal Parlor. “It’s a different way to do a pub crawl — a different way rather than a party bus.”

While the party-on-wheels moves by the power of its riders — there is no drinking allowed onboard — a driver is provided who steers and leads the tour.

“It’s something new, cool and different to do. It’s something fun to see, and it puts a smile on people’s faces when we go by. There are dozens of people taking pictures of us, and they’re always smiling. It’s also stimulating the economy and spreading money around to local businesses,” Koleske said.

Koleske said the restaurant managers love when the riders stop in for a drink and a snack before they hop back on the Pedal Parlor, with some bars offering specials for customers. He estimates the Pedal Parlor has generated \$100,000 in local revenue in the last 18 months or so.

In a city with distinct downtown entertainment districts, finding fun ways to get to all of them is easier with bright, colorful buses like the Soda Cap Connector



*SC Pedal Parlor in Columbia lets participants power their vehicle to bars and restaurants downtown. Photo: SC Pedal Parlor.*

and bright green, three-wheeled scooters, known as Zapps. The electric cycles are rented through an app on smart phones and can be picked up and dropped off at dozens of locations around Columbia.

“The scooters are an innovative way (to move people around), and Columbia was one of the first cities in the country to embrace that, and city staff worked hard to establish areas to park the scooters,” said Matt Kennell, president and CEO of the Center City Partnership in Columbia.

“It makes getting there half the fun,” said Kennell.

The “fun factor” is a big part of the strategy.

“The Soda Cap Connector is a brightly decaled vehicle. There’s free wifi. Inside, it’s like going back to an old Beatles album; that goes to the fun factor,” Kennell said. “It’s a way to enjoy getting around downtown and the different districts around Columbia.”

### Local vibrancy

While pedaling a trolley to a bar in downtown Columbia may draw surprised glances from the automobile-driving public, the Town of Moncks Corner has also found

a way to give residents and visitors a taste of the unexpected. It, too, involves pedaling and generating local vibrancy.

Moncks Corner partnered with Santee Cooper to open a highly technical, five-mile mountain biking trail. The town put up signage and trail markers and works with volunteers to maintain the course. Mountain biking is not something you find a lot of in the Lowcountry, so it attracts a lot of people from the area.

“Tourism-related economic development is all about finding what makes you unique,” said Jeff Lord, town administrator of Moncks Corner.

“What do you have that others do not? For a community in the Lowcountry, having a large greenspace with a 50-foot elevation change is just one of many things that makes Moncks Corner unique. It is something we can offer closer to home for the many outdoor adventure enthusiasts who live in the Charleston metro area that enjoy mountain biking.”

He said the town sees visitors from farther away who come for a bike ride as part of their trip to the Charleston area.

“And when they come to Moncks Corner for a day of trail riding, they are certainly going to stop at our local restaurants to refuel or refresh with a cold drink,” said Lord.

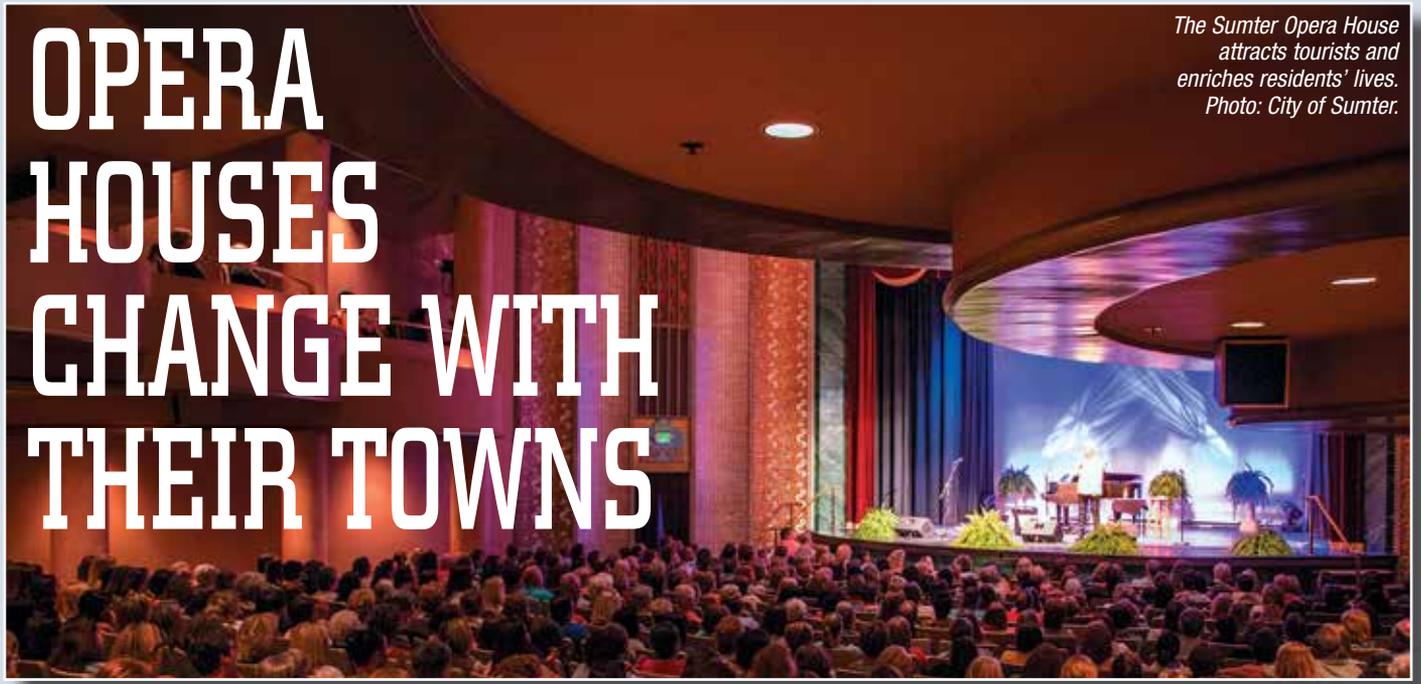
Sometimes the fun starts when the vehicle rumbles to a stop.

On James Island, the nonprofit Smalls Music Lab, a bus filled with musical instruments, spreads the love of music throughout the area. Much like a bookmobile but stocked with keyboards, guitars and percussion instruments, the mobile musical classroom is a regular at community events, said Ashley R. Kellahan, the town administrator.

“It’s a very engaging mobile unit that really makes the atmosphere at events more lively. Anytime you add music to an event you draw a larger crowd. When it’s music that kids can help create, it adds another level of community and spirit,” Kellahan said. “It’s definitely a draw. Our town hall is in a shopping center with two restaurants. When we have events in the evening, it draws people and they can go to the restaurants. And we’re increasing our hospitality tax revenue.” ●

# OPERA HOUSES CHANGE WITH THEIR TOWNS

*The Sumter Opera House attracts tourists and enriches residents' lives. Photo: City of Sumter.*



*By Amy Edgar*

**T**heater companies traveling between New York City and Miami used to stop at the Town of Clio's opera house to give performances, attracting crowds from neighboring South Carolina towns. Today, many decades later, the Edens Opera House now draws in the town's residents, serving as an unofficial community center.

When Jefferson D. Edens Sr. built the Opera House in about 1910, it contained stores, offices and an auditorium, according to its 1979 National Register of Historic Places nomination form.

While it's no longer drawing performers from both ends of the East Coast, Edens Opera House today has stayed true to its mixed-use identity. It houses an auto parts retailer, a variety market supply store, a low-power community radio station, a Medicaid services provider for children, a church and two youth organizations.

A nonprofit called Clio O.P.E.R.A owns the building, said Clio Mayor Joe Kinney, the nonprofit board's immediate past chairman, who said the organization provides community service projects and special pro-

gramming to enrich the lives of the residents of Clio and surrounding areas. O.P.E.R.A. stands for Organizing, People, Empowering Resourceful Achievers.

"The history behind the ownership is significant," said Kinney, explaining that a former resident of the town, Sally Calhoun, donated the building to the organization in 2013. She took a special interest in a first-grade class from Clio Elementary School and provided educational and program support for 12 years. She also sought to pay for the college education after the students completed high school, said Kinney.

Opera houses have had a presence in American cities and towns for more than 200 years.

In the 1800s, small towns began building their own opera houses as a way to attract visitors and entertainers. Over the years, cultural changes and the advent of movies led to the decline of many opera houses. A few, such as Clio's Edens Opera House, still grace small towns in South Carolina, where local leaders have embraced their storied buildings and fit them into their downtown visions.

## Changes over the decades

The Newberry Opera House was built in 1881. It hosted touring companies of New York plays, minstrel and variety shows, singers and speakers, magicians, mind readers, and boxing matches.

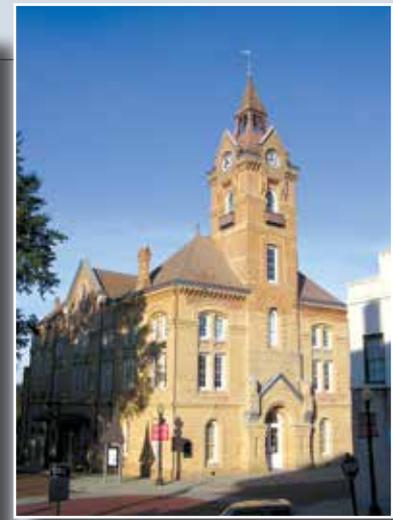
When it didn't offer shows, the auditorium became a community gathering space for meetings, dances or commencements. When silent movies and then traditional movies became popular, the Opera House became a movie theater in the 1920s. It closed in 1952, and a few years later, there was talk of tearing the building down. The Newberry Historical Society stepped in to preserve the Opera House, and it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970.

The Opera House was renovated in the 1990s, adding 10,000 square feet to the original building to create a modern theatrical production facility. Today, the opera house seats 426 and boasts state of the art lighting and sound systems.

City Manager Matt DeWitt said the restored opera house has been a catalyst for an economic and artistic revitalization in



The Edens Opera House in Clio houses youth development groups, a church and an auto parts store. Photo: Town of Clio.



The Newberry Opera House has driven cultural and economic development for decades. Photo: City of Newberry.

Newberry. The Opera House attracts private investment through sustained quality entertainment and community engagement. It also has an engaged board of directors who have a passion for the city and talk directly with investors, DeWitt said.

“The organization strives to fulfill the mission of cultural and economic development through the window of the arts,” he said. “This is done by attracting quality arts programming that includes all the community and demonstrating its commitment time and time again.”

DeWitt said the Opera House brings roughly 100,000 people to downtown Newberry each year for performances, tours, educational seminars and meetings. It also supports tourism in the Midlands.

“By quality entertainment and tours, the Opera House supports the city with extra dollars not only to the city, but also local businesses through increased revenue,” DeWitt said.

These efforts pay off. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a 2009 study found that 78 percent of all U.S. leisure travelers participate in cultural or heritage activities.

### Economic contributions

With cultural and heritage travelers spending an average of \$994 per trip, they contribute more than \$192 billion annually to the na-

tional economy. (The study was conducted by Mandala Research for the U.S. Cultural and Heritage Tourism Marketing Council, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Commerce. Heritage Travel Inc., a subsidiary of The National Trust for Historic Preservation, was the lead sponsor of the study.)

The Sumter Opera House is another site with a colorful history. Built in 1895, the building has served not only as an opera house, but also as a music academy, movie theater, city offices, barber shop, jail and even a meat market. In 1982, the Opera House closed its doors after 46 years as a movie theater.

The City of Sumter purchased the building in 1984 with an eye toward gaining office space and attracting visitors downtown. Careful renovations to restore the Opera House to its former beauty, including the art deco gold leaf by French restoration artists, were completed in 1987. These renovations were the first steps in an ongoing movement toward downtown revitalization and historic preservation in the City of Sumter.

Today, the Opera House still houses Sumter City Hall and City Council’s chambers. The 550-seat theater hosts a variety of local, regional and national talent, free performances by local groups, and many graduation ceremonies.

The Sumter Opera House attracts private investment through collaboration with educa-

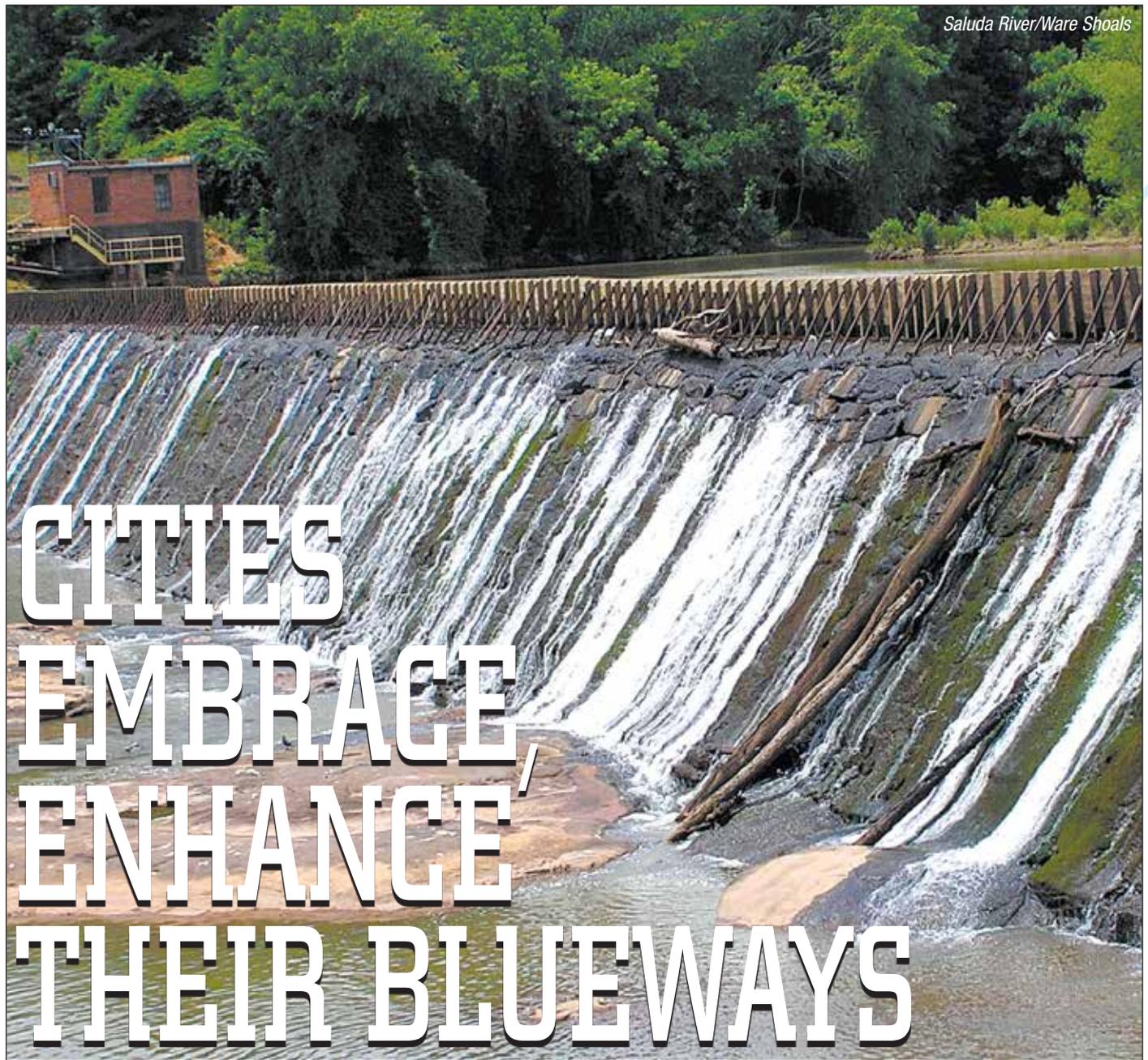
tional systems, civic organizations, corporate sponsors and individual renters, said Seth Reimer, cultural manager for the City of Sumter.

“We are creating a vibrant community that assists investors with getting their message out in an engaging way,” Reimer said. “The Sumter Opera House, now presenting local, regional and national acts, builds a powerful presence and allows investors another ‘stage’ in which to reach customers and entertain prospective and current clients. There is evidence that it helps increase name recognition and offer networking opportunities to develop new business.”

By presenting 14 acts in the 2016-2017 season, the Sumter Opera House had an economic impact of as much as \$750,000, considering its 70 total events and more than 21,000 attendees, Reimer said. Patrons at the Opera House spend money on meals, refreshments, souvenirs, gifts, transportation, lodging and other miscellaneous items.

The City of Sumter strives to be a destination worthy of travel and visitation, and the Opera House supports that goal, Reimer said.

“The Sumter Opera House is spearheading that vision by stimulating economic development and tourism growth while enriching the cultural lives of Sumter residents,” he said. “The Sumter Opera House is creating an environment that blends backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures.” ●



# CITIES EMBRACE, ENHANCE, THEIR BLUEWAYS

By Amy Edgar

**F**rom moving sewer lines to adding trails, South Carolina cities and towns are recognizing — and maximizing — the appeal of their rivers.

That means taking any number of steps, such as adding a boat launch, rerouting infrastructure, or securing an easement to open up public access and attract residents and visitors.

The City of North Augusta has worked for years to take advantage of the Savannah

River. In the 1990s, the city did a study on riverfront development and adopted the tag line “South Carolina’s Riverfront,” according to Lark Jones, who recently retired as the city’s mayor.

In the mid-1990s, a private developer built a golf club and riverfront homes, which sold for up to \$1 million. This was the catalyst that began to bring people into North Augusta and cultivate an identity for the city as something other than a bedroom commu-

nity of Augusta, Georgia, which sits across the river, Jones said.

As developments grew, the city retained access to the riverfront because city leaders believed public access would be key for future successful development.

“The philosophy of the city has always been to provide public access to the river,” Jones said. “It’s part of the public realm that our residents own. When we develop these things, we want the residents to feel ownership.”

The city had a greenway from a rails-to-trails project and then added a 1-mile spur to the riverfront. The spur circles the Brick Pond Park, which is a 40-acre restored wetland, water treatment system and public nature park.

Significant developments continue at the riverfront. Project Jackson is a mixed-used development that includes a new minor-league ballpark for the Augusta GreenJackets. A hotel, restaurants, shops, homes and condominiums all are underway near the riverfront.

Other towns are investing in their riverfronts, as well. The Town of Ware Shoals succeeded in having its project to reroute a 40-year-old sewer line along the Saluda River included on the Greenwood County Penny Sales Tax Commission's list of projects funded by the penny sales tax, which voters approved in 2016.

This project addresses the dangers of possible pollution and contamination that come from having waste running through sewage pipes along the river, said Town Administrator Heather Fields.

In addition, the town is working to improve Pitts Park, which lies along the shoals and offers access to the river. Fields said the town would like to clean up the park, add trash cans and restrooms, and make it handicapped accessible.

The river is part of the Heritage Corridor, and signage there points to the kayak launch and access to fishing, Fields said. The park is a true gem of the community, she said.

"On any given day, we have hundreds of people in the park," she said.

### Reaching an agreement

Scores of people visit the Pacolet River Paddling Trail, and the Town of Pacolet has been working on other improvements to draw visitors to the riverfront area, according to Mayor Michael Meissner.



*Significant developments continue along the Savannah River in North Augusta.*

"Providing public access to the river gives community members and individuals something to do," Meissner said.

For years, there was no public access to the Pacolet River, due in part to industrial sites located there. The town reached an easement agreement with Lockhart Power, which provides hydropower along the river, to create trails and allow public access to the water, Meissner said.

The town has other projects in the works, including a new traffic circle in front of Pacolet Town Hall, and improvements, such as benches, to the park area and river walk. An old building known as the Cloth Room, which is a remnant of the textile mill, is undergoing renovations to become a community events center that will spur revitalization efforts by the river. Eventually, Meissner said, they hope to expand the trails, add a bridge, increase signage and expand a fishing pier.

### 'Get connected to nature'

The Town of Calhoun Falls, located in the Savannah River Basin, provides numerous recreational activities for residents and visitors. Calhoun Falls State Park and the

Blue Hole Recreation Area offer boat ramps, playgrounds, picnic areas, and canoeing and kayak areas.

The West Carolina Pavilion on Lake Russell hosts musical and outdoor events, said David Garner, Calhoun Falls town administrator. The town works closely with the Calhoun Falls Chamber of Commerce and the Lake Russell Recreation and Tourism Coalition to plan and organize events and draw people to the area, he said.

In the future, Garner said they hope to establish a rails-to-trails project accessible from downtown Calhoun Falls, which would be a regional recreational trail linking the two counties of Abbeville and McCormick.

The activities around Lake Russell and the Savannah River Basin offer an oasis from the fast pace of daily life. When cities embrace and enhance the rivers and waterways that make them unique, they can increase economic development while providing healthy spaces for citizens to enjoy the outdoors.

"We want to get people disconnected from technology for a while and get connected to nature," Garner said. ●



# CITY MUSEUMS DRAW VISITORS, STIR PRIDE

By Megan Sexton

The “Carolina” executive car is part of the Greenwood Historic Railroad Center collection. The restoration budget is a public-private partnership that includes grants from the S.C. National Heritage Corridor, City of Greenwood and private contributions. Photo: City of Greenwood.



**E**very town has a story to tell. And whether that story is one of history, science, agriculture, transportation or any other topic, there may be no better way to tell it — to both residents and tourists — than with a local museum.

Scores of museums dot South Carolina’s cities and towns, with exhibits that preserve, honor and explain local history and culture. Museums provide everything from a source of hometown pride for a community to an event venue that can mean an economic boost to a downtown. These museums can improve quality of life and support the long-term goals of cities, while local governments, in many instances, play a role in helping start, staff or fund the museums.

## A ‘must stop’

One such museum is the Greenwood Museum and its nonprofit subsidiary, the Railroad Historical Center. The museum features three floors awith 20,000 square feet of hands-on exhibits.

Permanent displays include a 1900s replica of Main Street with interactive exhibits such as a cinema, general store, blacksmith shop, classrooms and railroad depot. It also displays gems, rocks and minerals and native wildlife, along with annual summer exhibits.

“The museum plays a critical role in Greenwood’s history preservation and (telling) Greenwood’s story,” said City Manager Charlie Barrineau. “Economic development

is critical. Both museums were ‘must stops’ for the Aug. 21 solar eclipse.”

The Greenwood Museum, like many in towns around the state, started out small.

Opening in 1970 with one room in the old armory, it eventually took over the entire building. In 1982, it moved to its own location on Main Street. In 2007, the museum closed for renovations that were paid for with nearly \$600,000 from the city’s hospitality tax and a \$396,000 federal grant.

The city has no day-to-day role in the museum’s staffing, but it does provide operations support, Barrineau said. Greenwood County owns the building and covers the monthly utility costs, while the City of Greenwood’s hospitality tax funds are used to help pay for



Visitors tour the Bertha Lee Strickland Cultural Museum, which preserves African-American history. Photo: City of Seneca.



the museum – including making sure the museum can provide free admission. The city also provides annual operations and maintenance support, budgeted at \$66,667 in 2017. The museum must provide copies of its expenditures to receive reimbursements from hospitality tax funds.

Nearby, the railroad center is home to a locomotive and a collection of restored train cars. It is committed to collecting, preserving and interpreting the railroad history of Greenwood and the surrounding communities.

The city has leveraged hospitality tax dollars to receive three grants for the railroad museum, totaling \$250,000 from the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor. Greenwood also provides operation and

maintenance support, with about \$35,511 spent through August of this year. The railroad center has plans for a new replica depot, modeled after the old Greenwood Main Street Union Station, to sit next to the seven historic rail cars.

Both the museum and the railroad center are rented for events.

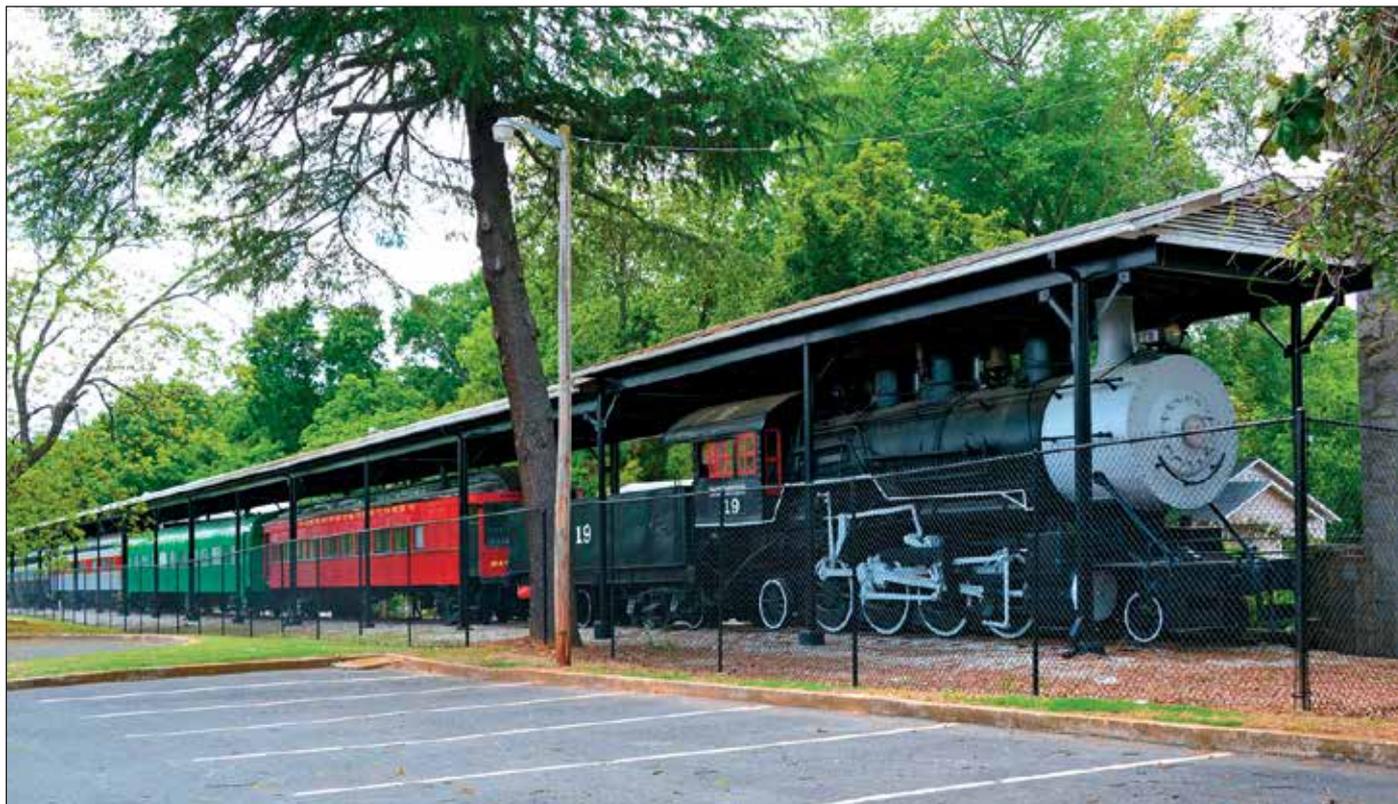
### **‘We have a wonderful story to tell’**

In the City of Seneca, the idea for a museum celebrating African-American history was born after City Administrator Greg Dieterick learned about the often untold story of Oconee County’s black history, including the story of Seneca Junior College, an African-American school from 1899 to 1939.

“He was fascinated by that. He felt that if this small black community in Oconee County could achieve that, there must be a lot more to tell,” said Shelby Henderson, the manager of what became the Bertha Lee Strickland Cultural Museum.

The city eventually purchased land for the museum, established a preservation group and hired Henderson to coordinate the Strickland project.

“The city didn’t have specific plans; they just knew they wanted to preserve the black community’s history. They left it in my hands. I asked for permission to have a board of directors and the council approved that. It’s an amazing board of directors — all volunteers, all grassroots,” Henderson said.



*Trains of the Greenwood Historic Railroad Center collection. Photo: City of Greenwood.*



The museum shares a back yard with the city’s Lunney House Museum, and bears the name of the late Bertha Lee Strickland, a Seneca resident who worked for the Lunney family for 47 years, starting as a laundress at about the age of 13.

“We have a wonderful story to tell. Strickland is giving us a voice that will live well beyond any of us. And generations to come will have that piece of the town’s history,” Henderson said. “For a small museum to be owned by a city that embraces it the way Seneca does is rare.”

The museum is guided by the board of directors which city council appointed. The city fully funds the museum through its annual city budget and hospitality tax funds. Money from the hospitality tax was used to construct the building and supports free public museum events and programming. The city’s annual budget includes items for operational expenses and staff professional development.

Henderson said the museum is committed to improving education, preservation and quality of life. But it also plays an economic development role for the city and the county.

**How to draw people in**

“No city in this country enjoys economic development without diversity. It’s one of the things that draws people in,” Henderson said. “To educate everyone about black culture and black history is to show the value and the worth. Once you understand people, you accept more.”

In the Town of Williston, the town owns the former school building that houses both the museum and the library. The museum uses the building at no cost, and the town pays for maintenance and utilities for both the museum and the library, said Kenny Cook, Williston’s town administrator. The museum is run by a volunteer board. And while the town doesn’t get directly involved with the day-to-day operations, it does assist with long-term plans.

“The museum is a source of pride for the community and is impressive for such a small town. It has very limited normal operation hours due to lack of funding and full-time employees. However, people can schedule it for private viewing and parties and often do,” Cook said. “The board also tries to have an annual event to showcase the museum. They have done this each of the last two years, and it has been quite successful.”

One of those volunteers, Julia Ravenscroft, said the museum is home to everything from collections of photographs of military veterans to a replica of a country store to old farming tools, a nod to Williston’s history as one of the world’s largest growers of asparagus.

“The people in this town are proud of their town, and they like to see things displayed. There’s a great admiration for it,” she said. “I think every town, if they can afford it, should have a museum.” ●

# HOMETOWN SNAPSHOT



Photo/Licia Jackson

The Soda Cap Connector bus launched Sept. 1 in downtown Columbia to offer a new way to get around. The COMET Soda Cap Connector is a simple system of dedicated routes that connects people to major Columbia destinations, including the Main Street District, the Vista and Five Points. This service is running Tuesday-Saturday from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. During the first six months, rides are free.

# 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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