



High-tech startups grow at the NEXT Innovation Center.

# Putting the Green in Greenville

The Textile Capital of the World finds an **international** edge.

BY LYDIA DISHMAN

**C**reating a vibrant business community, especially during challenging economic times, takes more than just hard work — it takes international flair. As the center of economic development in the South Carolina Upstate region, Greenville once relied heavily on textiles. But now the city is home to major corporate denizens Michelin, BMW, GE, Mitsubishi Polyester Film, and

ERIC PEGEMAN

Fluor (engineering, procurement and construction). Add a bustling downtown and major universities ensuring a well-educated workforce, and you've got a solid business community that's adapting to the new economic landscape.

"We are doing as well, or better, than 90 percent of the cities around the country," declares city manager James Bourey. He points to corporations such as Fluor and GE that have held steady despite the downturn. (GE Energy's Engineering Division world headquarters is here, and the Greenville plant is the world's largest gas turbine manufacturing plant.)

The support of local government, public/private partnerships, and a community-wide effort to advance education are behind the business community's success, according to Ben Haskew, president and CEO of the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce. "I believe this community has a can-do spirit that can tackle any challenge or opportunity," Haskew says.

*Forbes* recently named Greenville one of the top five cities to weather the economic downturn, and for good reason. According to the South Carolina Department of Commerce, the entire Upstate has more foreign investment per capita than any other region in the country, and more than 200 international companies from 20 different countries have operations or headquarters here, including BMW and its suppliers. Stroll down Main Street and you'll find 20 restaurants serving international cuisine,

The Children's Museum of the Upstate is a place of possibility where children and their grown-ups can explore, discover, imagine, pretend and **BE ANYTHING!**



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*Greenville's white-hot international action attracts small-business entrepreneurs.*

and it's not uncommon to hear multiple languages, though German is prevalent thanks to BMW.

Being globally connected is a must in today's economy, and the city's white-hot international action attracts small-business entrepreneurs. Take Steven Wagner, one of the newbies. Based in Seattle, the former Ford marketing manager was responsible for the Pacific Northwest. When he began his own Internet software company, Dealer Ignition, the Chicago native chose to relocate to Greenville — not Silicon Valley. A competitive cyclist, Wagner was encouraged by his teammates to explore Greenville. "They all talked about the great downtown and mountains nearby," Wagner says.

After a single visit, he was sold, and set up business in downtown's historic Liberty Building. "My notion that Greenville was a simple little Southern city was quickly quashed by all the Europeans mingling downtown," Wagner says. "There was an air of momentum and progress."

**Spirit and Talent**

What impressed Wagner most was the collaborative spirit. Citing the support of the NEXT Innovation Center (a cutting-edge building that's home to small, high-tech businesses) and the Greenville Spartanburg Anderson (GSA) Technology Council, Wagner adds, "Here you have the opportunity to get in front of so many

people. It's the right place in the country for growth."

Bob Hughes, developer of the NEXT Innovation Center, is fueling that growth. "It's all about re-making Greenville," Hughes says. "We want to be the place where everyone else wants to be."

It's also the place to find talent. Local businesses engage the county school district and higher education to glean a well-educated workforce. Universities such as Furman, Clemson, Bob Jones, and University of South Carolina Upstate offer quality higher education. "I have been able to recruit some great young minds from Furman and Bob Jones University," Wagner says.

While Greenville is histori-



Furman University's LEED-certified Cliffs Cottage, home to the school's Center for Sustainability (left); Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF FURMAN UNIVERSITY, CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

# Kartikeya Singh '07 furman graduate

Designed his own major in ecology and sustainable development

Founder and first executive director of the Indian Youth Climate Network

Member of Environmental Action Group

Morris K. Udall Scholarship award winner

Attended U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009

Pursuing a master's degree in environmental management at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies at Yale



**Sarafina Robinson '10**

Communication Studies major  
Member of Heller Service Corps  
Director of Ladies of Distinction (Mentor program for at-risk female high school students)  
Bridges to a Brighter Future Summer Counselor  
Communication Studies student department assistant  
Will study away in South Africa, Spring 2010



**Ashley Brown '10**

Biology major  
Greenville Memorial Hospital emergency room volunteer  
President of Furman University Medical Mission Organization (FUMMO)  
Organizer of FUMMO medical relief trip to Costa Rica and Nicaragua (May 2010)  
Member of Alpha Epsilon Delta and Phi Beta Kappa  
Will attend the University of Alabama School of Medicine



**Corey Gheesling '10**

Sociology and history double major  
Southeastern Lacrosse Conference Rookie of the Year  
C. Wright Mills Society member  
Student teacher at Greenville High School  
Resident assistant for freshman Engaged Living residence hall  
Greenville High JV Lacrosse coach  
Member of champion Daniel McBrayer United Intramural team

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The recently renovated Carolina First Convention Center

**MEETING HUB**

**B**usiness travelers come in droves for meetings and events in Greenville. The city is strategically located on the Interstate 85 corridor known as “Charlanta,” half-way between Charlotte and Atlanta, and it has its own airport, Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport.

The city is well-equipped to host meetings and conventions for major companies. Its 400,000-square-foot Carolina First Convention Center (one of the largest in the U.S.) recently underwent a \$22 million renovation, and most of the city’s 8,000-plus hotel rooms are within a 15-minute drive of the center.

“For a destination of our size, our convention center offers an abnormal amount of convention and meeting space,” says Todd Bertka, vice president of sales for the Greenville Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Another boost for the city’s meetings industry: This spring, a new Courtyard by Marriott opens downtown at the corner of Main and Broad streets, next to The Peace Center for the Performing Arts. The hotel complex will feature a high-end seafood grill by local restaurateur Rick Erwin. Just one more of the myriad reasons for corporate planners to choose Greenville.

cally the “Textile Capital of the World,” today there’s a shift from manufacturing to automotive and industrial engineering, according to John Warner, founder of Inno-Venture, a Greenville conference connecting global thought leaders, entrepreneurs, and major corporations and universities. “We need to stop saying our labor is cheap and start understanding that there are areas where we are among the best in the world,” Warner says.

Laid-off textile workers can find a bridge to a brighter future at Greenville Technical College. When Aaron Knecht lost his textile job in 2004, he enrolled in Tech’s HVAC program. “It was a great stepping stone; the teachers really challenged me,” Knecht says. Now a refrigeration and air-conditioning technician at Bon Secours St. Francis Hospital,

COURTESY OF GREENVILLE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Knecht is continuing his coursework to earn a certificate in industrial electronics.

Clemson’s International Center for Automotive Research brings education and economic development together through global corporate partnerships. Greenville’s international diversity and entrepreneurial spirit inspire companies to locate here, according to the center’s executive director Bob Geolas. “That is necessary to be globally competitive,” Geolas says.

**Going Downtown**

Claude Lilly, dean of Clemson’s College of Business and Behavioral Science, agrees. The university moved its MBA program downtown to a spacious building in Falls Park last January. The new location, Clemson at the Falls, has an enrollment of more than 200 MBA

students who find inspiration from the city’s cultural offerings, some of which are within walking distance, such as The Peace Center for the Performing Arts.

“People often say we are the

deciding factor to move here,” says Megan Riegel, Peace Center president, citing its annual economic impact at \$18.7 million. The center is one of the most successful in the country because of its quality and variety of programming, from ballet theater to rock concerts.

Craig Brown, president and principal owner of the Greenville Drive minor-league baseball team, compliments the city for having the vision to develop the downtown’s West End for more than just the ballpark. “It’s become a place to live, work, and play,” says Brown, who lives in one of the 40 condominiums in the adjacent Field House, a mixed-use development. The city spent more than \$6 million on new streetscaping and infrastructure adjacent to the stadium. Since opening in 2006, almost 50 new businesses have

**TOP JOBS**

The 10 largest employers in Greenville:

1. Greenville County Schools
2. Greenville Hospital System
3. Michelin North America Inc.
4. General Electric Co.
5. Fluor Corporation
6. S.C. State Government
7. Bon Secours St. Francis Health System
8. Bob Jones University
9. Greenville County Government
10. Greenville Technical College

Source: Greenville Area Development Corporation

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sprung up around the stadium, generating over \$12.5 million in sales last year.

Launched in 2008, Downtown Greenville Development Initiative (DGDI) attracts businesses to downtown's office spaces. DGDI is a public/private partnership between the city, chamber, and Downtown Owners' Group (a group of office property owners) to support the economy in the urban core. It's one of the only economic development efforts of its kind in the U.S.

As executive vice president of DGDI, Kym Petrie is no stranger to the effects of these visionary developments. Bringing in a steady stream of executives to recruit new businesses, Petrie concludes, "They come here and see good planning, green building, a thriving economy, and great quality of life. I almost don't have to sell it."

**FROM BURBS TO LINKS**

**W**hat if you could live where you play? Three residential areas in Greenville offer just that.

About 1,000 people call downtown Greenville home, says Brad Halter, president of real-estate firm Coldwell Banker Caine. The area's first residential units came in 2002 with 100 E. Court. Proof of downtown's broad appeal: A new elementary school is set to open there this fall.

If you want to live on the links, check out The Cliffs. Ranked among the United States' top 10 golf communities by *Travel and Leisure*, this collection of developments throughout the Blue Ridge Mountains features championship-level courses. Take on Ben Wright's only U.S. course at The Cliffs Valley or experience a

Clubhouse at The Cliffs

Gary Player course at The Cliffs at Mountain Park. Off the greens, hike the communities' private trails or take a quick drive into town – both are within 30 minutes of Greenville.

Play close to home in Verdae, a planned community with a green twist. Only five minutes from downtown, this development offers single-family homes and a retirement village built around a town center that includes shops, restaurants, and medical and office space. The highlight: 20-acre Legacy Park, with trails, green spaces, and plans for a dog park and shaded amphitheater.

—Marian Cowhig

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The international award-winning Liberty Bridge in downtown Greenville—designed by architect, Miguel Rosales.  
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