



Brand-new West End Field in Greenville is the splitting image of Fenway for the Sox' Class A team. (Fred Rollison/Getty Images for The Boston Globe)

[Greenville Drive baseball park](#)

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SOUTH CAROLINA

## Put some South in your new Sox

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By Matthew Selby, Globe Correspondent | April 2, 2006

GREENVILLE, S.C. -- On the banks of the Reedy River, a renaissance is taking place. A once vacant downtown has been given a new lease on life, and the joie de vivre is contagious. Brick by brick, block by block, this small Southern city is being born again. And soon, game by game, new Red Sox fans will be created in a most unlikely place.

On Thursday, the Greenville Drive, the new Class A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox in the South Atlantic League, are scheduled to play their first home game in a replica of Fenway Park called West End Field. The ballpark follows the exact same field configuration as the original, complete with a Green Monster, manual scoreboard, and a "Pesky Pole" 302 feet down the right-field line. This \$15 million mini-Fenway is part of a mixed-use development perched on the site of a former lumberyard in the red-bricked historic West End, and is a critical piece in the remodeling of the city.

Overlooking the Green Monster, construction is underway on offices and condominiums that will have the same historic feel as the ballpark; the structures share 500,000 bricks reclaimed from a nearby former textile mill. Anchoring the site is the second oldest firehouse in South Carolina, which will function as the team's ticket office and team store when renovations are complete. The Drive nickname is meant to reflect the area's entrepreneurial spirit, according to team co-owner and president Craig Brown, along with the proximity of several automotive R and D facilities.

"Fenway Park is the greatest ballpark in the country, and to build a park like this provides players with a sense of what it would be like to play in the real Fenway," said Brown, 54. "The playing dimensions are precisely the same and it's a very intimate park: The farthest seat is only 13 rows from the field of play."

**THE STADIUM AND MORE** See a photo gallery of Greenville at [boston.com/travel](http://boston.com/travel).

The 5,700-seat West End Field is the latest jewel to be set in the re-crowning of this city of 60,000, and is a big part of a decades-long revitalization that has breathed new life into a dying downtown. Greenville is a textbook example of urban renewal. When suburban shopping malls had lured retailers and consumers away, the city's core became a ghost town. But after a 25-year redevelopment process, Greenville is thriving, and exudes the energy and exuberance of a young urban workforce.

One of the keys to reviving the city was transforming Main Street from a four-lane vehicular thoroughfare to a two-lane, tree-lined, pedestrian-friendly cityscape. Today, the 1 1/2-mile-long street is lined with shops, galleries, hotels, more than 80 restaurants, and now, a replica of Fenway Park.

Sit for an hour in a cafe in Greenville's free Wi-Fi zone, and the diversity and vibrancy of the place becomes apparent. Some

upwardly mobile professionals in slick suits fill their coffee cups for the third time. A retired couple sips decaf as they work on a crossword puzzle. At the next table a student surfs the Internet over a latte. You hear Southern accents, to be sure, but behind the counter a woman from New Zealand serves a pair of Scandinavians, perhaps here on business with one of the multinational manufacturers in the area.

On your way to the ballpark, take a stroll down Main Street toward the Reedy River, do some window shopping, perhaps get lost for a while in the Mast General Store, where you can find everything from greeting cards to camping gear. Once at the Reedy, you quickly realize why this little Southern city has such an otherworldly appeal. The path leads you to the breathtaking Liberty Bridge and Falls Park, with a 60-foot waterfall as the centerpiece.

Falls Park is a \$70 million world-class public garden with a one-of-a-kind pedestrian bridge designed by Miguel Rosales, the Boston architect whose work includes Boston's Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge. The Liberty Bridge, with angled supports reminiscent of a circus tent, curves around the falls and provides an unobstructed view of the river because the suspension cables are only on one side.

"I always wanted to build a very light bridge that floats over the landscape," Rosales said of his award-winning \$4.5-million structure. "A bridge of this shape has never been built before, and the city of Greenville was willing to take a risk on a unique design."

The paths of Falls Park literally spring to life before you, with tens of thousands of flowers planted each year, mixing with perennials and flowering trees. The park is popular, particularly on a warm day, and creates the backdrop for arts festivals and summertime Shakespeare performances.

A 1907 report to Greenville's leaders by Boston-based landscape architects Kelsey and Guild called the Reedy River "with its falls and gorge . . . the most important single feature to be considered in the development and beautifying of the city." The river was polluted then, and the city continued to abuse it for decades. A four-lane highway bridge was built over the falls, completely obscuring it from public view for more than 40 years. Before it was finally cleaned up, the color of the river was determined by whatever chemicals the textile mills upstream were dumping that day.

"I don't think people realized the value of the river to the downtown area," said Jim Bourey, the city manager. Bourey is a New Hampshire native, lifelong Red Sox fan, and the man who brokered the Sox-Drive affiliation. "Leaders saw business, not the river, as contributing to the city. It took almost 100 years to free the falls, and recognize there needed to be a redevelopment and enhancement of the river."

With textile manufacturing now gone overseas and more stringent environmental laws in place, the Reedy is no longer an industrial sewer but is the city's greatest asset.

Unless, of course, you're a baseball nut. Then you might consider the mini-Fenway, and the team managed by Luis Alicea (who spent a year of his major league career at second base for Boston in 1995) the two best things the city has to offer.

Greenville welcomed its first professional baseball team, the Eskimos, in 1907. It was here that the legendary Shoeless Joe Jackson removed his spikes, ran the bases in his stocking feet, and earned his nickname. There is a bronze statue of him just a major-league throw from the stadium.

If you're feeling peckish after the game, you can choose from hundreds of restaurants, offering everything from sushi and Buffalo wings to Dutch fare. After dinner, you can head to the theater, check out a live band, or hit a dance club. Watching a crowd spill out of a bar at closing time, you sense the energy you feel in places 10 times the size of Greenville. In the crowd, you see a Red Sox hat.

"There are a lot of Red Sox fans around, they're everywhere," Brown said. "That passion extends well beyond New England."

Contact Matthew Selby, a freelance writer in Upton, at [words@verizon.net](mailto:words@verizon.net). ■