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Work in Progress

Greenville Forward founder Russell Stall keeps the community on the right path

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Russell Stall unabashedly refers to himself as a passionate cheerleader.

Though he's told his story often (without the aid of a bullhorn), he never tires of using the tale of his "sixteen-year sabbatical" from Greenville to illustrate that he means what he says.

Despite deep family roots—settlers came in the 1700s—Stall took off in 1978. “I thought there was no way I would come back. Greenville wasn’t progressive. It was boring,” he laughs.

However, years in D.C. and Atlanta afforded him the perspective to change his mind about his growing hometown. So much so that in 1997, with his wife and two small children in tow, he returned and set up his own marketing research firm.

Relationships built with clients and colleagues built a network of enthusiastic supporters for when he founded Greenville Forward in 2006, which champions the community’s Vision 2025 plan. While he didn’t have a hand in crafting this roadmap for the community’s future, it is the inspiration for everything he does (something he could really “sink his teeth into”), and he’s dedicated to bringing it to fruition.

As such, he’s galvanized a small staff, a board, and an extended group of task force volunteers to address improvements in healthcare, the arts, education, and the environment, among others. And he’s out there every day trying to engage more people to help improve the quality of life in Greenville County. “I want to make sure that everyone knows they can make a difference,” he says.

Four years later, Stall pronounces there is still work to be done. That means holding monthly dialogues about the most important issues facing Greenvillians—from how to reinvigorate some of the city’s more dilapidated neighborhoods and businesses to creating a more walkable community where cars are less necessary. And it means surveying residents about their attitudes, wishes, and needs on everything from healthcare to race relations.

“We’re interested in building collaboration and camaraderie,” Stall offers. “It is important to understand our differences so we can make our community stronger.”

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