



# Forward Motion

Greenville Forward quickens its pace

/ by April A. Morris

If you stroll Greenville's tree-lined Main Street or cycle down the Swamp Rabbit Trail, you know these benefits are not the result of serendipity, but of methodical planning. Greenville dreams big, and that's where Greenville Forward comes in.

Following the announcement of Vision 2025 in 2004, a blueprint to improve Greenville's quality of life, Russell Stall, a Greenville native who left the area to return nearly 20 years later, says he had to get involved. With a seed grant from the Community Foundation, Stall launched Greenville Forward in 2006 as its executive director. "Greenville has always thought big, and we think bigger than a lot of communities our size because we've been so successful at it," says Stall. "Part of our goal is to make us continuously think big."

Greenville Forward connects individuals and organizations that can help implement the Vision 2025 plan, which picks up where "Vision 2005: Greenville, the Journey Forward" left off, after it helped to bring about the Peace Center, the Governor's School for the Arts, and the transformation of Falls Park.

Greenville Forward's mission is to build collaborations and recruit volunteers to work toward a creative, educated, healthy, eco-conscious, and interconnected community. And you can see its fingerprints on the University Center, Viola Street redevelopment, Activate Greenville, and the revamped TD Convention Center (formerly the Carolina First Center). "We are not the experts on any of it, but we know who the experts are," says Stall. "We facilitate connectedness. I like to think that we're one degree away from any issue."

And to stir up new brainstorm, Greenville Forward seeds the clouds with focus groups, films, and talks. Its monthly Momentum discussion—open to 35 people per lunchtime meeting, reservation required—offers the chance to hash out everything from retaining local talent to public transportation. And, à la Twitter, the new Web-based initiative "What If Greenville?" lets users answer (in 100 characters or less), "What is next for our community?"

Another just-launched effort is Gardening for Good, tapping into the blossoming community-garden movement. It proposes to build a network of gardens, as well as offer gardening education and a tool bank for low-income families who may not have all of the necessary supplies.

Stall admits that it's unusual for a nonprofit to be devoted to a plan rather than a specific need (there are only a handful of similar nonprofits in the nation), but it is succeeding, not to mention drawing the attention of other cities who wish to learn from its success. A membership campaign kicks off this month, followed by the Heroes Next Door volunteer awards in November.

Reflecting on the organization's progress, Stall says, "There's not a bridge or building we've done, but I feel we've had an influence in Greenville. Because of Greenville Forward, I like to think that some projects have happened sooner with less duplication, and new relationships were formed. The relationships are what's important—we're great because we're willing to dream together."

(Above) Greenville Forward founder and executive director Russell Stall. To the left, a portrait of a man with the name 'OLSEN' written on it.

greenvilleforward.org