

# Building a Greener Greenville

by Leigh Savage

## Tackling sustainability projects with real-world results

Furman is known for helping students become engaged—in their studies, in their career choices, and in their community. Nowhere is this engagement more evident than in Furman's hometown of Greenville, where students with various majors and interests are helping the city plan for the future while preparing for their own.

Angela Halfacre, an associate professor and director of the David E. Shi Center for Sustainability, says Furman's expertise on environmental issues is a great way to strengthen the bond between the university and the community.

"We have close ties with the city, and that connection can be fostered by having the glue that sustainability provides," Halfacre says. "We are deciding what kind of future we want, and how to best use the resources we have. Students can work on projects that have real-world benefits."



### Brian Edens

Brian Edens '94 is an example of how the connection between Furman students and the Greenville community can continue long after graduation. An economics major and football player at Furman, he worked in technology sales for more than a decade before launching Thurso Power Systems in 2010.

The Greenville-based company provides infrastructure for electric vehicles, and has installed charging stations throughout the region. He started the company because he saw the growing market for electric and hybrid vehicles and thought the next step was building "an available and reliable charging system."

His timing fit perfectly with the city of Greenville's recently announced "Greening of Greenville" initiative, in which the city is collaborating with local industries to become more sustainable. A key aspect of the initiative is reducing the number of gasoline vehicles on the road, in part by creating an electric vehicle ecosystem. More than 40 GE charging stations are being added throughout Greenville County, with Edens's company heading up the installation.

"Like Furman itself, Greenville is a beautiful and special place that needs to be protected and preserved for future generations," Edens says. "My education and experiences at Furman gave me a broader view of our world and made me realize that we need to work toward things that are bigger than ourselves."



### Courtney DeVoe

Senior Courtney DeVoe (Loveland, Ohio) didn't expect to publish a book before graduating, but that's what happened thanks to her summer internship with Johnston Design Group, a Greenville firm that focuses on sustainable architecture.

"It was a great way to learn more about the firm and their ideas," says DeVoe, who learned how Johnston incorporates economy, ecology, and wellness in its designs. She served as editor and graphic designer, choosing photos and quotations and working with Johnston on four essays for *A Blank Canvas*.

Though she originally intended to major in art history, she added an urban studies major after taking Halfacre's environmental policy class. She was inspired by a project on using environmentally sound techniques to restore historic properties, and her summer internship, which was funded by the Furman Advantage program, cemented her desire to ensure that historic structures are preserved using modern technology and sustainable techniques.

"I was impressed with how my summer internship turned out," she says. "I led a project myself and got to be hands-on, and I know it will help me down the road, applying for grad programs and jobs. And it's kind of nice to say I was published as an undergrad."

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### Reece Lyerly

Recent Furman graduate Reece Lyerly '11 (Roswell, Ga.) planted roots in the Greenville community during his Furman years, and that relationship has continued to flourish after graduation. Within a month of finishing at Furman, he was named director of Gardening for Good, a program guided by Greenville Forward, a coalition of local non-profits and businesses.

The goal of Gardening for Good is to boost access to and knowledge about community gardens. Lyerly was an earth and environmental sciences major, and in the spring of his senior year, he did an interdisciplinary project in which he conducted a food store survey and tracked access to fresh food in low-income areas.

“I think that’s one of the best hidden secrets at Furman,” he says. “You can propose an independent project, and it’s a great way to study what you are interested in even if there is no class that addresses the topic.” During his research, he made contacts which led him to Gardening for Good, a job that perfectly suits his interest in how sustainability and public health intersect.

As the sole Gardening for Good staff member, Lyerly is creating a network for the 40 community gardens that already exist in Greenville County while adding gardens in low-income communities. “I’m impressed with what Greenville has in place,” he says. “The city is very progressive about how it’s addressing these issues, and I am loving what I’m doing. I hope I can stay in this community.”

### Catherine Pate

Senior Catherine Pate (Greenville, S.C.), a studio art major with a concentration in poverty studies, spent the summer creating a portfolio documenting life in Greenville’s West side, which will be used in community planning efforts. “I’m interested in photojournalism, creating awareness about people living in impoverished areas,” she says.

Though she almost attended art school, Pate decided she wanted a liberal arts education. A poverty studies class helped her fine-tune a career path that brings her interests and talents together in a way that makes a difference. She wants to pursue the idea of “sustainability for all people, specifically poor people, a population with less access to sustainable materials and products.”

Pate created her portfolio through a livability education fellowship she found through the Shi Center, and was able to customize the project to suit her major and skills. She also assisted the city with a logo design and participated in meetings on housing strategies. “I came away with a lot of knowledge, and I hope I was able to help them with something they didn’t have anyone on staff to do,” she says.



### Andy Wallin

Senior Andy Wallin (Simpsonville, S.C.), a music and earth and environmental sciences major, spent his summer helping the city of Greenville draft a climate action plan thanks to a fellowship funded by the Arthur Vinings Davis Foundation. “My top priority was gathering data, analyzing it, collecting public input, and creating a draft of what the city is currently doing,” he says.

Wallin worked closely with Brian Graham, the city’s greenway and sustainability manager, and was pleased to see the number of initiatives Greenville has taken, including tracking water quality, greenspace, air quality, and installing an electric vehicle ecosystem. He also found room for improvement in areas such as recycling coordination, building codes, and tax incentives for greener building.

He says he came away with practical experience and knowledge that will help tremendously as he heads into the workforce. Beyond that, he was gratified by helping to build the connection between the university and the community. “The city has so much respect for Furman students,” he says, and the growing list of collaborations between the two “really benefits everyone.” 

