



Audrey Dodson
photo by David Poleski

THE Vision's Voice DIVERSITY

by Becky Mann
presented by The Cliffs Communities

In this column, we take a look at Vision 2025, a plan for Greenville's future that covers the arts, coolness, diversity, economy, education, environment, families and social services, government, health care, international issues, parks and open spaces, public safety, planning and infrastructure, sense of place, transportation and taxpayers. This month, the topic is diversity, with questions answered by Audrey Dodson, assistant director of Furman University's Richard W. Riley Institute of Government, Politics, and Public Leadership, which has developed the Diversity Leadership Academy of Upstate South Carolina.

Becky Mann: What does the Diversity Leadership Academy do?

Audrey Dodson: The Upstate Diversity Leadership Academy (DLA) is a comprehensive leadership development program with a curriculum focused on diversity management for corporate, non-profit and community leaders. Members of each class are encouraged to consider the challenges and opportunities presented by the many facets of diversity found both within their own organizations as well as in the greater community and how to best manage this diversity. Throughout the five full-day class sessions, spread over five months, the members of the

class are divided into capstone groups and research a specific diversity management issue in the community and present it on the final class day.

BM: What are some of the challenges and opportunities your program addresses?

AD: The primary challenge that our program addresses is how leaders (both corporate and non-profit) can recognize the diversity that exists within their organizations and how that diversity can be utilized as an asset instead of being seen as primarily a challenge. The curriculum explains that the differences members bring to an organization can effectively be managed to benefit both the individuals and the organization as a whole.

The most significant opportunity we have is to offer community leaders these tools of diversity management who, in turn, significantly impact their own communities and organizations. We have seen capstone projects turn in to major taskforces. In addition, alumni from the program have established or encouraged existing diversity programs that are making huge differences in their organizations and communities.

BM: How many people have completed the Diversity Leadership program?

AD: Including the participants in the Fall 2005 class, who are graduating December 8, there are 125 leaders who have completed the program. In addition, we are currently receiving applications for the Spring 2006 Upstate DLA class that will also contain 40 participants.

BM: Where does Greenville stand with regard to diversity?

AD: Both the city of Greenville and Greenville County are continuing to grow into very diverse communities. A project of a group within the first DLA class, the website www.greenvillediversity.org, reveals the significant diversity in this area. The leaders of the Greenville community are working very hard to highlight this diversity and continue to recognize diversity as a valuable element of this area.

BM: What is your involvement with Vision 2025?

AD: Personally, I served on the Economic Development and Coolness Committees.

BM: What are the principal goals for diversity issues presented in Vision 2025?

AD: The primary goal for diversity in the Vision 2025 report is that all members of the Greenville community “welcome and integrate all its residents into a unified community whose diverse members and populations have full equality.” Through the leadership of Greenville non-profit and business leaders and educators, the residents of Greenville County are given the opportunity to build the necessary skills needed to work, interact and engage with residents of other cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, political and other differing backgrounds.

BM: How will we reach those goals?

AD: The leaders of the Greenville community are the primary instruments in providing the learning opportunities for diversity management and awareness to the at-large community. Programs like the Diversity Leadership Academy and the Greenville Chamber’s Diversity Conference (in partnership with the Spartanburg and Anderson Chambers) are good starts in this direction.

BM: How will these efforts impact the community?

AD? The impact of a more diversity-aware community is immeasurable. When every citizen of this community is recognized as having value and is integrated into the community as much as any other, the community benefits from having members who both give back and take part in the community. In addition, the community becomes a place in which others want to be a part.



As Vision 2005 paved the way in the 1980s for the incredible quality of life Greenville enjoys today, Vision 2025 spearheads projects that will further elevate our city, culturally and commercially. The Vision’s Voice is one of the many ways that The Cliffs is committed to promoting growth in Greenville.

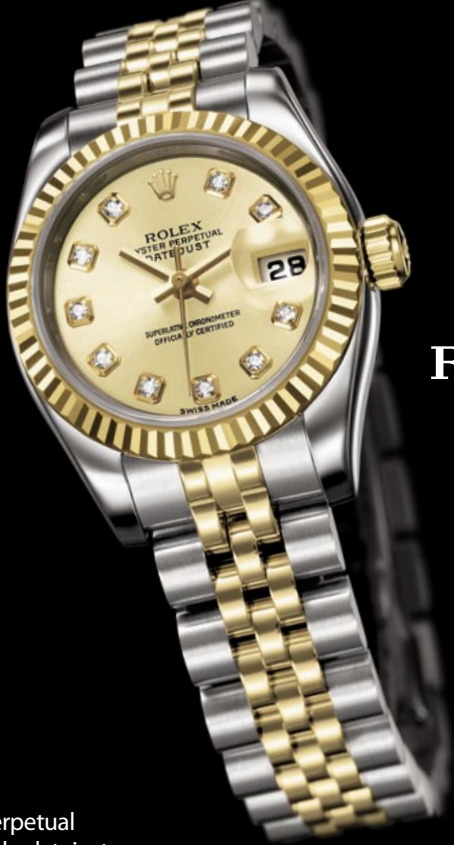



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