



Chris Stone



Irv Welling

## THE Vision's Voice BRANDING GREENVILLE

presented by The Cliffs Communities  
by Becky Mann

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, we talk to two people involved in the planning stages of the Vision and in the implementation of Vision initiatives. The topic is the branding of Greenville and the Upstate region. Chris Stone is president of the Greenville Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). Irv Welling is chairman of the board of the CVB, chairman emeritus of Elliott Davis, a member of the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, and one of the founders of the Upstate Alliance.

**Becky Mann:** Recently, you were part of a group that traveled to Austin, Texas, to learn about branding efforts there. What observations did you make on that trip?

**Chris Stone:** The music scene has taken on such depth in the community, that Austin now brands itself as the live music capital of the world. They're able to do that because the music piece is a genuine, real, integrated part of the fabric of the community, and the music allows them to attract tourists. It is a selling component to quality of life that helps attract business there. It is, for the residents, integral to their quality of life to have not only live music, but a variety of it.

**BM:** What are some of the strengths that you think should be incorporated into a brand identity for Greenville?

**CS:** You hear a number of descriptors. Those include green (and I would kind of lump green and outdoors together), international, and family-friendly. Those are what you hear people talking about. You'd have to pull together a consortium of individuals who could study this and come up with suggestions.

**BM:** How can Greenville continue to develop its identity and brand through Vision 2025?

**CS:** Branding allows you to really focus in on who you are and what you are and how you go about selling your product. It helps define you. Certainly there are many things that make Greenville a great place. Eventually, we should want to hone in on some of those specifics. Otherwise, people have a difficult time differentiating you from anyone else.

**BM:** What would you describe as the three key drivers that Greenville shares with Austin?

**Irv Welling:** An aspiration to be a very high quality place to live with an economy based on innovation, creativity and high tech; an effusive love of or civic pride in the community; and a location in the middle of an exciting area with over 20 mil-

lion population (within a 200-mile radius) and many innovative/high tech assets.

**BM:** How is branding incorporated into Vision 2025?

**IW:** We've developed a vision for tourism in Greenville that we're now trying to get rolled out and get embraced at the city and county levels so we can take it to the next level. We think we have a lot of opportunity here to really boost what's already a pretty strong tourism base from business travel, to boost it up to begin marketing Greenville to new markets.

I think as we move this vision for tourism forward, that vision is not about changing what Greenville is, it's about capitalizing on what we already are. I think we have a need in that regard to develop a brand idea. The Chamber, the city and the county are currently working on an economic development strategy for Greenville. They've come together and are doing this collectively. I think it's entirely possible that we'll see a call for going through a branding process out of that.

So, there are two angles to it. And I don't think these will be different brands. I think they'll be somewhat the same. Hopefully, out of these two processes we'll see some work in that area soon. If not, we'll need to come at it from another angle. But the tag line of what we kind of see, what we're suggesting from a tourism standpoint, is if we're successful doing what we're trying to do, which is a 10-year goal, we think we can emerge as a premier international destination. ■



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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