

THE Vision's Voice
A CENTER FOR THE ARTS

presented by The Cliffs Communities
by Becky Mann

Vision 2025, the plan for Greenville's future unveiled last year, calls for the area to become an internationally recognized center for the arts in the next twenty years. This, planners say, is an entirely possible goal and one that we're making tangible progress toward.

"I think Greenville has started on the right track," said Don Koonce, president of Envision, Inc. and chair of the Vision 2025 Arts Committee. Koonce cites an effort to create affordable workspace downtown for artists spearheaded by attorney Tommy Wyche; a federal grant-funded arts integration program at two local schools; the West Greenville arts cooperative, Art Bomb; and Artisphere, the April 21-23 festival featuring the work of 100 artists, as evidence of his belief that positive steps are being taken.

Alan Ethridge, executive director of the Metropolitan Arts Council, sees the potential, too. "Greenville is so fortunate to have the cultural offerings it does – the Greenville County Museum of Art, the Peace Center, the Greenville Symphony Orchestra, and wonderful theatre and dance groups, not to mention some amazingly talented visual artists," he said.

Where do we go from here? A critical next step, Koonce said, is for the business community to adopt the goal of improving the arts in the community in order to enhance quality of life and thus increase economic development potential. Financial issues stand between Greenville and its goals, according to Koonce. "That relates to getting the business community committed to the idea that the arts can be a major factor in economic development," he said. "That's a major challenge. It's certainly not an obstacle. I think we're getting better at it, but I think that's where we need to focus."

Ethridge agrees that money is key, and said money will only come when we as a community voice our support. "Greater funding will only come with greater demand from the public," he said. "For Greenville to evolve into a major arts center, significant increases in funding from the public and private sectors are imperative, as well as greater public awareness and participation."

One opportunity that we're presently missing is retaining some of the talent that passes through. The Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities and the Fine Arts Center do an excellent job of developing the next generation of artists, but when those talented young people graduate, they usually leave town and don't look back. Koonce said it's up to the community to retain them with an arts institute, something other cities such as Pittsburgh have done with success. Having the training ground for young artists as a starting point, he says, puts Greenville in a unique position to attract these students back to the area once they have developed into professional artists and performers.

Programs like the arts integration initiative being tested at Grove Elementary School and Tanglewood Middle School need to be expand-

ed based on favorable results they are creating with academic performance. "Arts education programs have proven that the arts enhance academic performance while reducing behavioral problems," Ethridge said. "It is ironic that arts programs are generally the first to fall by the wayside when school budgets are cut because the arts are a primary and integral part of learning."

Seeing that the Vision for the arts becomes more than just words on paper is something Koonce said is within reach but up to us. "Green-

ville really needs to step up to the plate and take a responsibility for what we have created as a vision," he said. "If we truly want to make that vision happen, we have to all be willing to support it."

Koonce and others are stepping up and moving ahead through Greenville Forward, an organization intended to make sure that the Vision becomes a reality. For more information, go to www.greenvillevision2025.com or call Russell Stall, executive director of Greenville Forward, at (864) 233-8443. ■

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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