

THE Vision's Voice THE TIES THAT BIND

presented by The Cliffs Communities
by Becky Mann

If you build it, they will come. Or maybe they'll come back. That's the idea behind efforts to increase opportunities for young professionals so that they'll want to move to Greenville and stay in Greenville, a priority that emerged from Vision 2025 discussions.

One such effort began in October 2005 and just eight months later, is going strong. The idea behind Professionals United for Leadership and Social Enrichment (PULSE) came out of focus groups conducted after the Vision process. Participants thought that a group designed specifically for young professionals would be of interest.

PULSE members meet at least monthly, with one meeting centering around social interaction and the next, professional development. Already there are 300 members ages 22 to 39 (and a few who are 22 to 39 at heart) who gather regularly, some with memberships paid for by their employers and others with individual memberships.

"When we kicked off, we definitely thought there was interest," says Nicole Pascoe, a driving force behind the group. "We just weren't sure how quickly it would take off, and we have been very pleasantly surprised." Another surprise is the amount of community interest with organizations and businesses approaching PULSE with offers of discounts and opportunities to get their members involved.

Now that a gathering place for young professionals has been established, Pascoe says, it's time for the next step: involving them in boards, commissions, non-profits, and elected offices. "I think providing the outlet is great, but if young people don't get involved, I still don't think they're going to feel as tied to the community when it's time to make a decision about where they're going to live," she says.

Leadership Greenville is one way young professionals can take that step. Geared toward leaders in business and in the community, the program, run by the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce, attracts people of nearly every age, with some participants in their twenties. Those selected for the program learn about a wide range of issues from education to criminal justice, local government and state government in order to discuss what has made Greenville successful and what needs to happen next.

Younger professionals are encouraged to apply. "It's so important for the class to be diverse – not only in age, but in what they do and the experiences that they've had, because we can all learn from each other," says Sandy Coan, the chamber's executive director for leadership development. "We have to see it from the eyes of someone who doesn't have the age or the experience but still has the desire to make things better," she says. "They will ultimately have a lot longer to be involved."

The Chamber is seeking to take that involvement to even greater lengths. This fall, working with Greenville County Schools and Greenville Tech, the Chamber will implement a leadership develop-

ment program for rising high school juniors. Two students will be selected from each high school for the year-long program, in which they'll learn about the community and those who guide it.

The idea is that leadership skills learned can be exercised during the senior year. Ultimately, the goal is to help high school students form ties to the community early, so participants who leave for college decide to return.

"The development in Greenville is such that there's a lot of excitement here, and we want kids to develop that feeling so that they can be excited about coming back after college and using the skills they've learned to really get involved at an earlier age," Coan says.

Programs designed to help Greenville attract and retain bright, talented, young professionals are moving from Vision 2025 discussion topics to community priorities with the help of Greenville Forward, an organization intended to make sure that the Vision becomes a reality. For more information, go to www.greenvilleforward.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.



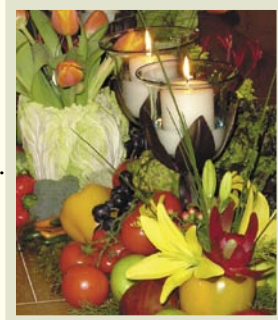
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