

Greenville's skyline
against the Blue Ridge
Mountains; free trolley
on Main Street

Downtown Rising

The transformation continues

BY LYNN SELDON



PHOTO: FRANCES LUMANN SZ

Expect world-class culture, superb shopping, and a flavorful dining scene on Main Street in downtown Greenville, South Carolina. How happenin' is it? The American Planning Association named it one of the Top 10 Great Streets in America last year — a real coup when you consider that it's gone from downtrodden to distinguished in just 25 years.

The transformation began with a strategic plan to create anchors and fill in the spaces between. The opening of the Hyatt Regency in 1982 established a northern Main Street anchor, and the 1990 opening of The Peace Center for the

Performing Arts brought people farther south. When local restaurateur Carl Sobocinski opened Soby's restaurant on Main in the late '90s, and the renovated Westin Poinsett opened across the street in 2000, downtown Greenville became the place to see and be seen. In the past decade, locally owned shops, bars, and restaurants have filled in the gaps. Downtown's diminutive size (about 15 blocks) makes it easy to walk to most hot spots, or take the free trolley running along Main Street.

The Westin's arrival (see p. 70) sparked a flurry of development in the city's West End district at the southern end of Main Street.



You have time to ponder many things while sitting in Atlanta traffic. Things like, "What do Michelin North America, Milliken, General Electric, BMW and the other 120 Fortune 500

companies doing business in Greenville know that I don't?" To learn what Greenville, South Carolina can do for the future of your business, visit www.ThriveDowntown.com or call 864.239.3735.

What's the difference between Greenville and Atlanta? We'll give you a couple of hours to think about it.



Read this city profile, along with others, at usairwaysmag.com.



Local artists open their studios to the public during the weekend-long Greenville Open Studios (left); outdoor dining on Main Street

Falls Park on the Reedy is the centerpiece of development here, with two amphitheatres featuring plenty of event space (and a full calendar) amid some 30 acres flanking the Reedy River. A curved pedestrian span called Liberty Bridge provides views of the park and waterfalls, and a minor league baseball team, the Greenville Drive (a nod to local automotive companies like BMW and Michelin), plays at Fluor Field at the West End. A few blocks away lies RiverPlace, a cluster of sleek condos, trendy shops (Plaza Suite), hip restaurants (The Lazy Goat and High Cotton), artists' galleries and studios, and a recently opened Hampton Inn.

"Our secret is attention to the pedestrian experience — the scale of the buildings, the mix of residential and retail, and surprising art features," says Greenville Mayor Knox White. "Place a beautiful park with a dramatic waterfall and pedestrian suspension bridge in the middle of it all and you have an urban space like none other."

"It never ceases to amaze me how downtown has become a real destination." TYLER FLORENCE, *Greenville native and Food Network star*

The downtown transformation continues: Clemson University moved its MBA program downtown last January into a building overlooking the Reedy, Michelin has a downtown storefront and a development office, and BMW is known for its community participation and event sponsorship, such as the BMW Charity Pro-Am (May 13–16). The celebrity golf tournament brings big names like Darius Rucker and Kevin Costner to town and contributes to Upstate charities. It's this high level of corporate support that allows downtown Greenville to thrive.

"My family chose to move to Greenville two years ago, and the clincher was downtown," says Kym Petrie, executive vice presi-

dent of Downtown Greenville Development Initiative, an organization that works to bring businesses downtown. "When you first set foot in the area, it's shocking. You wonder why you haven't heard of this amazing place before. So cosmopolitan and chic."

The Arts

A variety of cultural attractions add to downtown's chic vibe.

"One of the major factors in the revitalization of downtown Greenville is the diversity and depth of the city's outstanding arts community," says Alan Ethridge, executive director of the Metropolitan Arts Council, which estimates that the arts have an annual economic impact of nearly \$200 million.

COURTESY OF METROPOLITAN ARTS COUNCIL, DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Four museums make up the campus at Heritage Green, an arts complex: The Greenville County Museum of Art (home to the South's most important collection of works by Andrew Wyeth); The Museum and Gallery at Heritage Green (an outpost of Bob Jones University's renowned collection of Italian paintings); The Upcountry History Museum (check out the impressive oral history program); and the recently opened Children's Museum of the Upstate, where an innovative multistory climbing structure draws rave reviews from kids (and parents, too).

Greenville is also home to four of the region's seven theaters: Greenville Little Theatre, Centre Stage, the Warehouse Theatre, and South Carolina Children's Theatre. Big-name acts like Brad Paisley and Nickelback fill seats at the Bi-Lo Center on the northern edge of downtown.

Perhaps the No. 1 arts venue, the Peace Center hosts first-run

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The Peace Center for the Performing Arts

Broadway shows (*Wicked* just left town, and *Spring Awakening* plays this month), top musicians (Chris Botti, John Legend, and Yo-Yo Ma have performed here), and other groups including the South Carolina Children's Theatre, two ballet companies, and the Greenville Symphony Orchestra, whose conductor and music director Edvard Tchivzhel first came to Greenville from Russia in 1991. "This community enthusiastically embraces the arts," Tchivzhel says. "There are so many creative people here."

Emerging artists find a home at

The South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities. This public residential high school overlooks Falls Park, and attracts artists from across the state to study in one of five disciplines (including creative writing and visual arts).

The Scene

An increase in downtown living in the late '90s meant an increase in foot traffic — gone are the days when Main Street turned into a ghost town after 5 p.m. Taryn Scher, a local public-

SHOPPING SPREE

Stick close to Main Street to find downtown's coolest shops. For baubles and beads, make your own necklaces at The Beaded Frog (beadedfrog.com); check out Ilyn strong for one-of-a-kind jewelry (Ilynstrong.com). Mast General Store, an old-fashioned emporium, stocks everything from cast iron pans to camping gear (mastgeneralstore.com). Across the street, The Barkery Bistro welcomes four-legged shoppers with tail-wagging treats (thebarkerybistro.com). Purchase original artwork in the studios at Art Crossing at RiverPlace, where you can also chat with the artists (artcrossing.org). For the kid in you — and the ones with you — The Lollipop Shop satisfies sweet desires with retro candy and



The Barkery Bistro

toys (thelollipopshop.net). Need new jeans? At Plaza Suite, check out locally designed Beija Flor jeans, made with curve-friendly Brazilian stretch denim (shopplazasuite.com). Then drop those bags at Luna Rosa and refuel with a cone of homemade hazelnut gelato. — M. Linda Lee

OWEN RILEY, COURTESY OF THE BARKERY BISTRO

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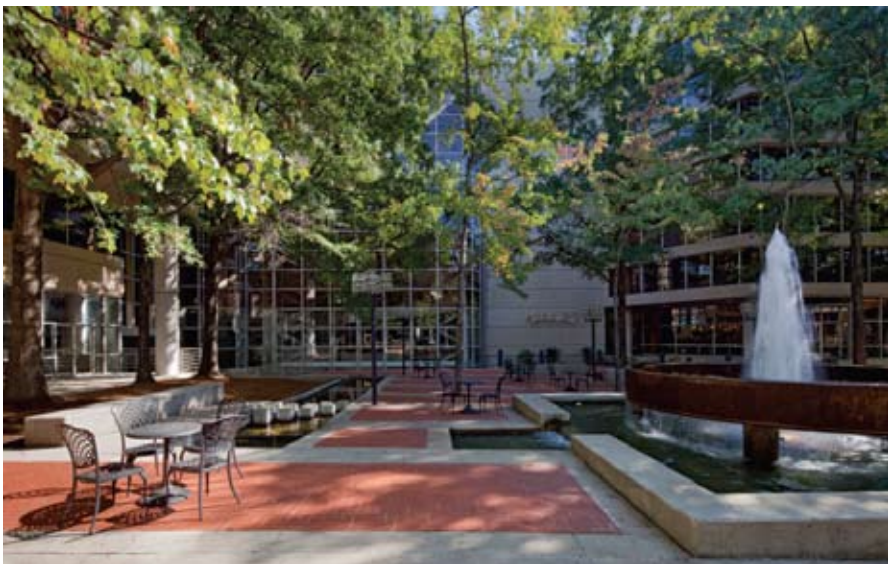
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{ From downtown living to
lake & mountain property }

relations expert, moved to Greenville from New York three years ago. "This city has all the wonderful offerings of a major metropolitan region and none of the downsides that usually come with a major city," Scher says.

These offerings include a hip live-music scene. Head to the Brown Street Club for live jazz and blues nearly every night of the week. At The Handlebar, a variety of musicians take the stage from Grammy winners to local favorites. Enjoy dinner and a show at Smiley's Acoustic Cafe, which hosts live music every night except Sunday.

Downtown is also the setting for about 150 events every year, including the Downtown Alive concert series and the Moon-

light Movie series. If you love to eat — and who doesn't? — there's an extra helping of food and wine events, such as January's fine-wine auction An Affair with Flair; Share Our Strength's Taste of the Nation (May 2); food/wine/music fest Euphoria (Sept. 24–26); and St. Francis Fall for Greenville — A Taste of Our Town (Oct. 8–10).

The dining scene is more than just impressive foodie fests. Downtown's culinary options have boomed in recent years, a complete shift from fast-food fixes to a large number of diverse restaurants and chefs that rival those in major cities. This tasty transformation can be traced to the 1997 opening of Soby's, housed in a century-old building on Main Street. Following Soby's success, other restau-

rants landed on the downtown menu. Notable eateries include Larkin's on the River (steak and seafood); Devereaux's (contemporary American cuisine); American Grocery Restaurant (using local and organic ingredients); and Liberty Tap Room and Grill (adjacent to the baseball stadium).

"The culinary history of the area is invariably rich, and a few pioneering restaurateurs have turned Greenville into a true culinary destination," says Food Network star and Greenville native Tyler Florence. "It never ceases to amaze me how downtown has become a real destination."

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The USA Cycling Professional Championships return to Greenville this September.

BIKER TOWN

The League of American Bicyclists awarded Greenville its prestigious Bicycle Friendly Community award last fall, and the city will hosts the annual USA Cycling Professional Championships (Sept. 18–19).

Greenville Hospital System counts itself among the "bicycle friendly." The healthcare system is the title sponsor for the championships and backed the development

of the upcoming Swamp Rabbit Trail, a 13-mile bike trail that follows along the Reedy River.

A manufacturer of performance cyclist clothing, Hincapie Sportswear actively supports the cycling community. The company chose Greenville for its headquarters, and Hincapie Sports LLC manages cycling races throughout the Southeast, including the Greenville Downtown Cycling Classic and the Greenville Spring Training Series.

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