

# Staying Power

Talented individuals keep spinning through the Upstate — and often don't want to leave.

Photo courtesy of VisitGreenvilleSC/ Dread Keppelin Aerial/JJ Adams

**A**mble through downtown Greenville and you'd think its 100-plus restaurants, Swamp Rabbit trail along the Reedy River, Fluor Field ballpark and iconic pedestrian bridge had come out of nowhere, like some theme park version of an ideal city. But Greenville's buzz has been a half-century in the making.

As the City of Greenville's "Downtown Reborn" website explains, revival of a struggling downtown was the impetus behind a 1968 Downtown Development Plan. Today the buzz is palpable in downtown Greenville, and more than one interview subject will independently volunteer that it even has a European feel, notwithstanding the fact that many structures are shiny and new instead of hundreds of years old.

"We can get to the mountains in 30 to 45 minutes, there are nice national parks and a lot of outdoor activities to do, which we absolutely adore," says Vincent Nijzink, CEO of EAS Change Systems, who moved to the area last year from the Netherlands with his wife, and has since welcomed the birth of a child. "It's a nice, livable region. You can stroll downtown. There is live

music. Adapting to American life as a European is quite easy. And we've found quite a few Dutch people as well — there are a lot of small to medium Dutch, Belgian and German firms in this region. It's part of what gives downtown Greenville more of a European feel than most American cities."

Global companies and engineering firms such as Fluor that have churned talent in and out of Greenville for decades — even spawning a cluster of site selection experts who have spun off but never spun away from the Upstate.

"I'm spinoff of a spinoff," laughs Sarah White, formerly a site consultant with legendary firm McCallum Sweeney and now doing similar work as director of Quest Site Solutions, housed in the HQ of global engineering and construction firm O'Neal. "I didn't think I would move back here, honestly, but I'm very glad I did." She's also an economic development spinoff, as she's the daughter of longtime economic developer Carter Smith of Spartanburg Economic Futures Group: "It's in my blood," she says. "When I was little, my nightgowns were BMW groundbreaking t-shirts. My Mom tells one story about a tax parcel map

that he would color in as they got parcels. I would ask him, 'Do we get to color today?'"

Beth Land, another McCallum Sweeney spinoff, is vice president within the Industrial and Economic Development Division of Dallas-based Site Selection Group, establishing the firm's first Southeastern office in downtown Greenville. The Clemson grad says the site consulting cluster is a cottage industry all its own.

"It used to be that economic developers went to Atlanta or Charlotte and would give us a courtesy visit if they had time," she says. "Now it makes sense to sometimes just do a Greenville visit."

One thing both consultants know for sure is the state's ReadySC training program and technical college network is rock solid. White always highlights the Greenwood Promise, whereby funds from public and private donations are awarded to offset the remaining balance of post-secondary tuition and fees for local high school graduates. She says she had a great experience attending public schools in Lyman, a mill town between Spartanburg and Greenville. Now she's the mother of a kindergartner in Greenville County. "Generally, I think the Upstate is pretty strong in public schools," she says, including the showcase A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School of Engineering in downtown Greenville, named for a civil rights pioneer best known for his stand on the integration of Greenville County Schools.

Sage Automotive has a career exposure program

with Fisher Middle School. ZF Transmissions in Laurens County has a manufacturing employment program for educators during the summer months. A STEAM festival called iMAGINE Upstate, where industries showcase STEM careers, shuts down Main Street every year.

South Carolina has always stuck out for training, White says, and also for quality of life for those trainees. "I loved it as a single person, and now I love it as a place to raise my family." When she gets to retirement, she may still love it, as so many empty nesters and retirees already seem to. "It's nice to see the range of ages."

White says the Upstate profile also is strengthened by Greenville Technical College, as well as six colleges in Spartanburg, Furman University on the outskirts of downtown Greenville and Lander College in Greenwood.

Helping homegrown talent stay and people from away never want to leave is part of the motivation behind a new talent attraction initiative launched by the Upstate SC Alliance called "Move Up," which profiles a number of talented "Upstarters" in the 10-county region at MoveUpstateSC.com. "Our region has the right ingredients not only to meet business needs, but also to provide fulfilling careers and a rich lifestyle," says Upstate SC Alliance President and CEO John Lummus. "Move Up is here to help employers and our communities tell that story."



Sarah White, Director, Quest Site Solutions

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