

Farewell to heroes

THIS YEAR THE UPSTATE

LOST two giants – Max Heller and Roger Milliken. “Extraordinary” is an overused term, but it truly describes the lives and careers of these two men and their contributions to our region.

A native of Austria, Heller fled the country in 1938 to escape the horrors of Nazism and came to Greenville, not knowing a word of English and with barely a dime in his pocket.

He went to work sweeping floors at the Piedmont Shirt Company and five years later was managing the company. In 1971, Heller was elected mayor of Greenville and faced a downtown that was in serious trouble as businesses and residents were fleeing for the malls and suburbs. While most had given up any hope, Heller had the vision for a beautiful, vibrant and thriving downtown focused on people rather than cars.

He then made that vision a reality through courageous and unwavering leadership of the City over the next eight years. Greenville is now widely recognized as having one of the best downtowns in the country. It never would have happened without Heller. Heller and his wonderful wife, Trude, were among the very first people to become members of Upstate Forever, and he immediately and enthusiastically agreed to serve on our Advisory Council.

I talk about Heller and what he did for Greenville all the time. I also point out that the vision, plans and policies that were responsible for Greenville’s rebirth are not limited to downtown areas. They can be applied anywhere – to suburbs, rural communities, counties, and entire regions. Let’s work together and make that another legacy of this remarkable man.

Beginning in 1971, long before

IN MY OWN WORDS

BY BRAD WYCHE

it was cool to be green and sustainable, Milliken implemented at his company stringent policies on energy efficiency, water conservation and recycling.

He did this for two basic reasons: He sincerely cared about the environment, and he realized that these policies would greatly reduce costs and improve the bottom line. Milliken was among the very first leaders in the corporate sector to understand and take full advantage of the economic/ environmental win-win.

His personal commitment to the environment was reflected in an unbridled passion for trees. No one loved trees more than Milliken.

The Noble Trees Foundation that he established and funded was the catalyst for the planting of countless thousands of trees throughout the world – at every Milliken plant, at the Greenville-Spartanburg airport (widely acclaimed as one of the country’s most beautiful because of the trees), on high school and college campuses, and along roads and highways.

He was in awe of the beauty of trees and also knew they boosted the morale of his employees and the values of his properties.

Politically, the two men could not have been more different – Heller the staunch Democrat, Milliken the conservative Republican. But they shared a common passion for making the Upstate a better, more beautiful, and more prosperous region, and all of us and generations to come are the beneficiaries.

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director of Upstate
Forever.



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