

# Outside of downtown, Reedy trickles along in anonymity

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Pieces in place to protect river as development boom nears

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Zelma Nevers doesn't realize she crosses over the Reedy River at least twice a day on Sulphur Springs Road.

There's no sign saying the river is there. Dense vegetation blocks the view. There are no trails to the river banks.

"I honestly never knew it was there," Nevers, 28, said.

That, some say, is a problem. The river that is the main waterway through Greenville has suffered for decades. Except for parts of downtown and other choice locations, it can be hard to find and hard to navigate. But it isn't hard for some to

imagine a better future.

The \$55 million RiverPlace condo and retail development downtown; the \$13.2 million Falls Park revitalization; plans for Cleveland Park West along Hudson Street and walking trails through Nicholatown are all planned to enhance the Reedy.

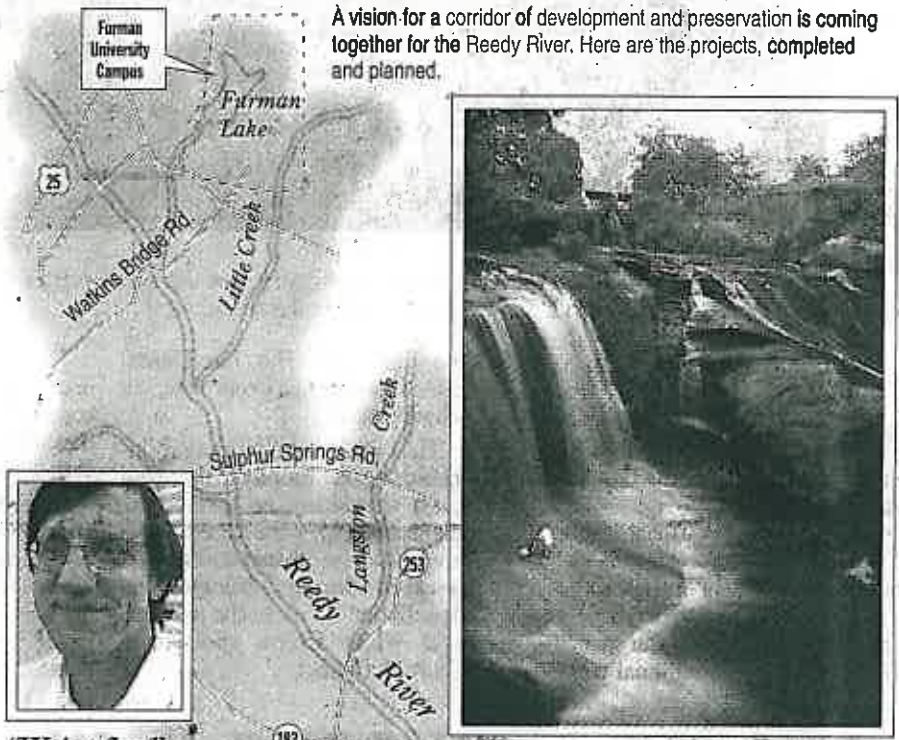
There is a master plan to create walking and bike trails along the 16-mile stretch from Travelers Rest to Lake Coogestee.

It's a process being repeated across the nation, as cities born on rivers are redeveloping and rediscovering their history and heritage, said Grant Cunningham, an associate professor of planning at Clemson

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## Development plans along Reedy River

A vision for a corridor of development and preservation is coming together for the Reedy River. Here are the projects, completed and planned.



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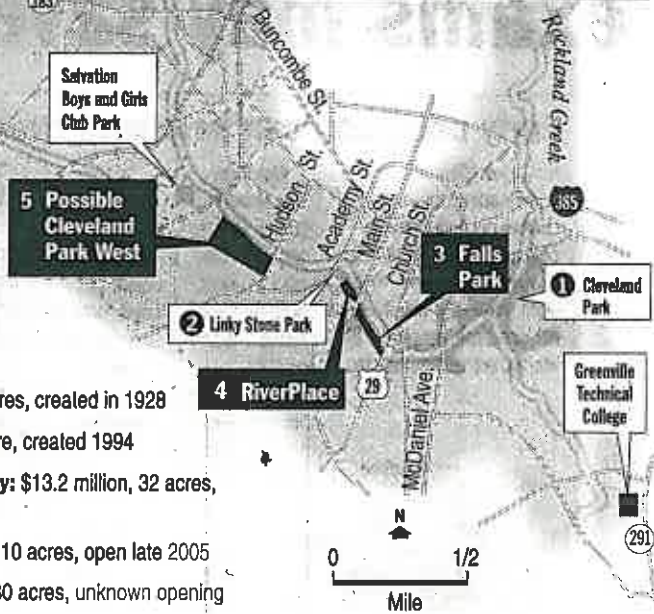
Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever



OWEN RILEY JR. / Staff

**On Reedy Street in City View:** George Rupp sees potential in the Reedy River. If its banks can be made family friendly, it will be a success, he said.

1. **Cleveland Park:** 126 acres, created in 1928
2. **Linky Stone Park:** 1 acre, created 1994
3. **Falls Park on the Reedy:** \$13.2 million, 32 acres, opening Spring, 2004
4. **RiverPlace:** \$55 million, 10 acres, open late 2005
5. **Cleveland Park West:** 80 acres, unknown opening



# RIVER

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**University.**

"These projects are breathing life into cities that were dead themselves," he said. "It recreates a sense of community. Sure there are developers that see the opportunity for turning a dollar, but it's the centerpiece of a city."

The Reedy redevelopment is also important because it is centrally located to the areas the city wants to revitalize such as West Greenville, said Nancy Whitworth, city economic development director.

"We can take it back and elevate that part of the city," she said. "That is where everything was let into the river and all the byproducts of industry. It just took us a while to realize there is a real value of a natural beauty of a place."

However, there is a lot of work to be done before the Reedy starts to resemble riverfronts in Chattanooga, Tenn., Indianapolis and San Antonio, consultants say.

But the pieces are in place, said Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever. The planned developments and parks connect the now-protected Lake Conestee, the Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities and the county's abandoned rail line that runs to Slater-Marietta.

"We can have it both ways," he said. "We can protect the environment and enhance the river. It will be the centerpiece of major economic development."

And if the dreams of city planners and developers come true, Greenville may look like Chattanooga. In the past 10 years, the city of Chattanooga and private developers have invested \$1.4 billion along its waterfront, which is more than twice as long as Greenville's, said Ken Hays, president of the River City Company, which has coordinated much of the Chattanooga development.

After putting an aquarium, a baseball stadium, apartments and parks along the river, downtown population grew by 30 percent. Property values have increased 49 percent. Employment increased 38 percent. And the city became younger, according to census and research by Hays' company.

These projects seem to be win-win scenarios, but they don't please everyone, said Will Graf, a University of South Carolina professor who studies river systems.

"But if you have a cohesive city culture like Greenville, you can negotiate through the tough spots," he said.

While Chattanooga leaders say that city's redevelopment has been a success, the environmental record has been mixed, warns Sandra Kurtz, co-chairman of the South Chickamauga Creek Greenway Alliance. She said Greenville environmental groups like Friends of the Reedy River and Upstate Forever need to have a strong voice in planning.

### Forgotten waterway

The Reedy runs the length of the county through nature preserves, golf courses, the tree-lined Cleveland Park, the highly urbanized Nicholatown community and large areas of vacant land. Black sewer and water pipes cross it. Discarded plastic bags, beer bottles and fast-food wrappers are common sights.

Many people confuse its tribu-

aries for the actual river. Anyone who tries to walk it will get caught in a tangle of briars, kudzu and other overgrown brush.

Reedy Street, which is in the City View area, doesn't even cross it. The road ends about a quarter mile away.

"Of all the roads in Greenville, they named this Reedy," said George Rupp, who lives on the street.

The way to the river is mostly overgrown with weeds, so he doesn't go there much.

But Rupp sees potential. He grew up in Baltimore, where harbor restoration in the 1980s and 1990s rejuvenated the city. He believes if the Reedy's banks can be made family friendly, it will be a success.

"I've seen miracles happen before," he said.

The real miracle would be in pushing downtown development past Linky Stone Park and toward City View, Wyche said.

"We've finally rediscovered the Reedy downtown," he said. "Now we need to rediscover the rest."

### Checked history

It was at the base of the Reedy Falls where Richard Pearns became the first white settler around 1770. Mills, and later downtown Greenville, sprung up around the falls in the 100 years following. Historians have written about baptisms and marriage proposals on the banks.

But by the 1940s, the river banks were a solid mass of industrial complexes, said Barry Nocks, a Clemson University professor who guided the city's redevelopment project.

Redevelopment and coming

back to rivers bring Greenville, and America, full-circle. Graf said. Greenville is just a microcosm of the country's attitude toward America as a water-rich place.

"Rivers played an enormously important role in American history," Graf said. "And for a long time we just used them as disposal sites. Now, we're recognizing that these are real resources."

Falls Park is set to reopen this spring. The \$13.2 million revitalization includes a new pedestrian bridge over the falls, walking trails, gardens and outdoor cafes. City officials hope it becomes a major tourist attraction in the years to come.

RiverPlace includes a Hampton Inn, condos, apartments, restaurants and a series of water fountains in the middle of the 10-

acre park. A group of investors has plans for more housing along 30 acres on the river that could be announced soon.

But for some residents, a road map to the river may still be needed. Nevers said she enjoys going to downtown to see the falls, but would never have

guessed the Reedy ran through her neighborhood.

"Everyone is always talking about how great the Reedy is and what needs to be done," she said. "I guess they're right."

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