

## So much to be thankful for

### Local leaders offer their thoughts

Thanksgiving is a humble holiday. It asks very little of us. No elaborate decorations. No perfect presents. The single essential ingredient is the food, and that's not around long.

Unlike the commercial behemoths it's sandwiched between - Halloween and Christmas - this most unassuming of American holidays has managed to remain pretty much what it started out to be: a time to pause and give thanks for the blessings of home, country, family and harvest.

So in the spirit of pausing and pondering, the *Journal* asked a number of Upstate community leaders to share what comes to mind when they consider the blessings of 2007.

The opportunity and the will to do better resonated.

**Spartanburg Mayor Bill Barnett** said he is grateful "for the momentum and increasing expectations that I sense we are enjoying in our community."

Spartanburg Chamber President **David Cordeau** was equally thankful for the "enlightened leaders who are spearheading significant change in some of our most fundamental institutions."

**Brad Wyche**, executive director of Upstate Forever, expressed gratitude "for the beauty of the Upstate and for the increasing interest in protecting it."

The beauty of small things resonated for his wife, **Diane Smock**, who serves Greenville on the City Council. "Stolen afternoons at the movies, rainy days with a book and my dog in my lap, long hikes in the mountains, time with my family and the opportunity to serve my community" fill her list.

One huge thanks stood out for her council colleague, **Michelle Shain**, who "will be forever grateful to all the friends and strangers who helped" find her husband, Mike, when he went missing in the woods north of Lake Jocassee this summer. "I think about that parking lot full of

volunteers and am just so grateful."

Greenville School Board member **Keith Ray** expressed a similar gratitude for community. "In my particular neighborhood we share life together and lean on each other," he said. "We share eggs and butter and lawn mowers; we also share tears and laughter. I know this is not everyone's experience, so I give thanks for good neighbors, young and old, who enrich my family's life."

That strong sense of place also echoes for **Judy Gilstrap**, Greenville County Council's vice chairman. "I'm a native Greenvillian and I've never been able to imagine living anywhere else," she said. She considers her role on council a privilege, and is "thankful God's given me the opportunity."

**Paul Wickensimer**, Greenville's clerk of court, feels a similar gratitude for the people he works with daily. "The judges, the solicitor, the public defender all go out of the way to do the right thing. I feel so fortunate to work with the group of people I do."

Greenville's altruism was especially meaningful for **Tim Brett**, chairman of the Salvation Army advisory board. He said, referring to the \$15 million raised locally to win a \$52-million match from the late Joan Kroc, "I'm thankful the Greenville community is so generous that we can have a Kroc Center."

All blessings, every one, and they're worth remembering. The year ahead may be a rocky one. We're electing a new president in a country much divided over a long list of issues, policies and choices.

But as **Judge Chuck Simmons**, who presides over the 13th Circuit Drug Court, observed we should be most thankful, perhaps, "for being able to be thankful."

"I suppose, for most of us, it's easy to be impacted by the perceived negatives in our lives and our community," he said. "But I am thankful to be able to realize the gift of life that God has given to us, and the many blessings, small and large, that come our way each and every day."