

## Our Town: Agents of Change

*Great cities don't make progress by accident.*

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**Photographs by: Patrick Cavan Brown**



If you ask Max Heller, it takes leaders. Leaders who always seek the next big idea, who act boldly. Leaders who don't take past success for granted. Leaders who strive mightily to create "a place of beauty and safety—a people place."

Heller is the man who started it all. But let us also introduce you to nine more visionary leaders who, each in their own way, have effected change in our community—some through their influence, others through their innovation. All are actively working to make sure Greenville's future is bright, bold, and, most important, an improvement upon the past.



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## Preservation Professional

*Upstate Forever's Brad Wyche works to safeguard the area's wild places and encourage smart growth*

**Brad Wyche** Founder and executive director, Upstate Forever

**Field of impact** Preservation and responsible development

**Where You'll Find Him** [www.upstateforever.org](http://www.upstateforever.org)

Natural winter sunlight—rather than florescent tubes—illuminates Brad Wyche's office in Upstate Forever's downtown Greenville headquarters, a 1916 house that has undergone a complete green retrofit. On this day he's talking about his organization's beginnings back in 1998 and recalling his vision for preserving precious places throughout the Upstate—its rolling hills, dense forests, clear flowing streams, and other wild land.

A Greenville native, Wyche developed a connection to the natural world during childhood trips—hiking, backpacking, and canoeing with his father,

Tommy. After training in natural resources management at Yale University and in law at the University of Virginia, he returned to the area to practice law. He helped form the Friends of the Reedy River in the early 1990s, but Wyche wanted to go one step further.

“I thought, ‘Why can’t we create a nonprofit, member-based organization for the entire Upstate?’” He left full-time practice in pursuit of a group that would preserve land and promote sustainable communities in ten Upstate counties, Upstate Forever. “I am inspired by the stunning beauty and diversity of the Upstate—from the spectacular waterfalls and rugged peaks of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the fast-flowing rivers and rolling hills of the Piedmont,” says Wyche.

What began as an effort from a home office evolved into the nonprofit that now has two Upstate offices, twenty-one staffers, and is supported by nearly 4,000 members. In addition to advocating for smart growth, Upstate Forever works to educate landowners about leaving a lasting land legacy. “Ideally, we’d like every landowner in the area to know that creating a land trust is an option.” The nonprofit also works to partner with developers to prevent Greenville from growing into the next Atlanta.

Upstate Forever board chair Erwin Maddrey says, “Today, Upstate Forever is recognized as a sensible voice in land use, preservation, and sustainability matters. The organization has also been recognized nationally for its leadership—and that leader is Brad Wyche.”

Brad has continued the land preservation tradition started by his father—Tommy Wyche was instrumental in protecting Greenville County’s Mountain Bridge Wilderness. “If I could accomplish 10 percent of what he’s done, I would be very pleased,” says Wyche. He is well on his way. To date, Upstate

**Forever has perpetually preserved 12,600 acres of farms, fields, and forests.**

**In the next ten years, with Wyche at the helm, Upstate Forever plans to preserve an additional 100,000 acres and recruit 7,000 more members.**

**Because there is much more work to be done.**

**—April A. Morris**