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Cedar Falls Park a gem in southern Greenville County

By Durant Ashmore • May 19, 2010

I'm not sure if I'll ever forget the morning of June 26, 1996. I'm an early riser, and I was surprised at 5 a.m. to hear the sounds of heavy equipment coming from the bridge near my house as I sipped my morning coffee. I jumped on the golf cart and scooted down to the Reedy River see what all the commotion was about.

A crew of about 35 men was stringing yellow booms across the water. I was finally able to ask a guy who seemed to be in charge what was going on. He said they were stringing booms in order to "catch the product." That phrase has stuck with me for nigh these 14 years.

The "product" the men were trying to catch was diesel fuel. In the middle of the night a human operator managed to cause a spike in pressure in a huge pipeline that carries diesel fuel up the east coast from Louisiana to New Jersey. The pipe ruptured as it crossed the Reedy on the historic Hopkins Farm, just north of State 418.

By mid-morning the product was evident in all its glory. Fluorescent lime green diesel fuel was floating as a viscous fluid 11-inches thick across the top of the beloved (by some) Reedy River. The nauseating smell of diesel fuel permeated the air.

I must admit that I found the whole ordeal fascinating. The surrealistic lime green ribbon of fluid cut through the natural landscape of the Reedy like an absurd creation from an avant-garde artist attempting to violate the senses. The massive effort at cleanup, which cost \$6 million, was as entertaining as a science fiction movie.

Huge klieg lights created daylight 24 hours a day. At least 100 trucks a night rumbled up the hill past my house on their mission to dump their toxic load. The pulsating rhythm of overhead helicopters provided a steady beat that set the meter for the entire operation. For the next 30 days we set up lawn chairs and watched a spectacle that was more entertaining than anything TV ever had to offer

Colonial Pipeline was fined \$6.5 million to make

sure it never let anything like that happen again. The money from the fine was to be used solely for the betterment of the river, and for no other reason.

The trustees were the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Health and Environmental Control and the Governor's Office. This money could not be spent until all parties agreed on a plan.

Therein was the rub. There were lots of ideas on how to use this money to make the Reedy a better place, but there was not necessarily a lot of agreement on the best approach. In addition, the Friends of the Reedy River and Upstate Forever and other groups and individuals had their input. All of these entities had valid concerns that needed to be sorted out. This sorting process led to years of stalemate.

Fortunately, several of our elected officials were able to maneuver through the maze. Eric Bedingfield was elected in 2002 as the county councilman from the affected area. He became frustrated by inaction in Columbia when he tried to get Reedy River problems solved at the local level.

In 2006, Bedingfield was elected as a state representative so he was able to work on the problem at the state level. Fred Payne succeeded him on County Council and continued to work at the local level.

Bedingfield, Payne and Sen. Mike Pitts from Laurens

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were finally able to create a plan that satisfied all entities, and \$924,458 was allocated for the establishment of Cedar Falls Park, a 95-acre county park on Cedar Falls Road. Work will begin in a month and is expected to be done in 18 months.

Cedar Falls is one of the true gems of southern Greenville County. Everyone is aware of the waterfall in downtown Greenville. Cedar Falls is bigger, better and more attractive.

For about 100 years, Cedar Falls was an integral part of the Fork Shoals community. It was the power source for the mill and town of Fork Shoals. It was famous for fishing, rock sliding and swimming. There have been countless picnics at Cedar Falls, and untold amounts of pitching woo.

Over the past several years, the site has been closed due to all the problems of our modern age: liability issues, vandalism and pollution. Fixing these problems is part of the plan.

An integral part of the new park is to open the Reedy to watercraft activities. Canoeing and kayaking are encouraged, with several access points located upstream. Hiking and biking trails and picnic areas will also be included.

Cedar Falls Park will be an asset to the Reedy and to southern Greenville County. It's a shame that the Reedy was polluted with lime green diesel fuel 11 inches thick. It's a credit that the Reedy and surrounding area will benefit from the establishment of Cedar Falls Park.

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The Reedy River flows through Cedar Falls Park. (GWINN DAVIS/Staff)

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