



April 22, 2008

Upstate Forever is planning for the long haul

By Ben Szobody
STAFF WRITER

Environmental group Upstate Forever laid out months' worth of 10th anniversary field trips, eating and running under light Earth Day cloud cover today with praise from civic leaders and repeated reminders of the group's apolitical role.

Alongside the proliferation of corkscrew lightbulbs and shoebox Priuses -- even in the conservative South -- executive director Brad Wyche said Upstate Forever's membership has rocketed to 3,300, its staff to 18 and its offices to two.

In another 10 years, he said he's aiming for 10,000 members, two more offices -- and a pace of land development that merely doubles the rate of population growth.

A recent Clemson University study pegged the current ratio of land development to population growth at 5 to 1, with gridlock to come if governmental growth policies don't change.

"No elected leader is more committed to those goals than Butch Kirven," said Wyche, recognizing the County Council chairman in attendance.

Kirven highlighted the group's "nonpolitical" approach of energizing the public and policy makers to preserve Greenville's natural assets, and longtime partner Carlton Owen said environmental stewardship boils down to local decisions that are inherently pro-business, nonpartisan and pro-children.

Officials noted Upstate Forever's 10,000 acres of protected land through private conservation easements, its energy efficient Upstate House built with the homebuilders association and its role in saving Stumphouse Mountain and converting the former Swamp Rabbit rail line into a walking and biking trail.

Bill Bridges, of the supporting Graham Foundation, called Wyche a "rational, moderate and intelligent voice," and Bob Morris of the donating Community Foundation highlighted the group's leadership, collaboration, planning ability and leverage, among other assets.

Throughout the year, Upstate Forever will visit 10 conservation easement properties, produce a 10-course meal of locally grown food, host a 10K run on the Swamp Rabbit trail and hold a 10th anniversary party.
