

Cities Mean **BUSINESS**

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Creating growth

**Innovation helps cities
attract entrepreneurs**



You see a police car...



We see a police officer who works closely with fire departments and EMS, who knows every business owner downtown, who can name every city street and who buys 12 snow cones on Saturdays even though his T-ball team has never won a game.

CITIES MEAN BUSINESS

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MASC Municipal Association
of South CarolinaSM

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By Amy Geier Edgar



Cover and table of contents photo: Charleston Digital Corridor

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Cities Mean BUSINESS

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Letter from the **EDITOR**

We hear frequently that small businesses are the backbone

of our economy here in South Carolina. That reality is so evident in the growth of the number of entrepreneurs who are deciding to start, build and grow their businesses in our state. Many of these creative entrepreneurs could decide to locate anywhere in the world, and they are choosing cities in the Palmetto state.

Read about what business owners in this “entrepreneurial movement” are looking for when they decide where to locate. Also find out about how the S.C. Department of Commerce is supporting this effort with its new Innovation Division.

Something companies of all sizes look for is a business-friendly environment. The Municipal Association recently rolled out a new tool to help streamline the process of business licensing, especially for companies that do work in multiple cities and towns. Learn how a standardized business license application is helping businesses cut down on paperwork.

Cities as large as North Charleston and as small as Woodford are making strides to be more energy efficient. Find out what they are doing in areas such as solar and wind energy to prove that clean energy can make a difference.

One important function of cities and towns is providing safe and clean water and wastewater services. While these jobs aren’t glamorous or visible daily to residents, they are critically important to the safety and the quality of life in our cities and towns. Read about what a day in the life of a wastewater operator is like.



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Editor

Innovating South Carolina's Economy

By Amy Love



Amy Love

Director of Innovation
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Commerce

South Carolina has seen firsthand how

startups can grow from innovative concepts into major employers in the state. Companies like Benefitfocus and PeopleMatter in Charleston have seen exponential growth with no signs of stopping; both companies have major expansions under way.

In addition, efforts aimed at boosting technology skills and entrepreneurial support are thriving across South Carolina and in our cities and towns. In the Upstate, the Iron Yard has created a successful coding program – where students are guaranteed employment after completion – in addition to a business accelerator program, which is expanding nationwide and receiving accolades.

Major corporations in our state's strongest industries like aerospace and automotive are leading innovation efforts to keep their industries on the cutting edge, while providing opportunities for companies to spin out of their efforts and grow in South Carolina.

South Carolina cities and towns are putting resources in place to make their communities “entrepreneur ready” so that aspiring companies can easily open, plant roots and grow.

Universities are turning research into products and technologies that will become successful businesses that can change the world. Higher education is training the teachers of the future with new models of education that incorporate technology and experiential learning, and help students start a business before they've even graduated. Our technical colleges are partnering with regional efforts to draw more students into code training and enhanced technology programs.

Workforce development and education initiatives like CoursePower are preparing the talent pool for the jobs of the future. CoursePower offers a minor in applied computing to students of any major in four colleges and universities, including the technical college,

in the Midlands. The pilot in this region is expected to grow statewide with demonstrated successes.

In June 2013, South Carolina legislators passed the High Growth Small Business Job Creation Act of 2013, which provides state tax credits for angel investors. The tax credit equals 35 percent of the amount invested, up to \$100,000 annually for investors in early stage, high-growth startup companies in South Carolina.

South Carolina has mighty momentum around innovation efforts.

To continue this forward movement, the Department of Commerce launched the state's first Office of Innovation to position South Carolina as a top state to start and build a high-growth business. Our roadmap is the S.C. Innovation Plan, which offers recommendations on leveraging the state's resources around supporting home grown, high-growth companies, connecting the innovation community, providing access to capital for companies and fostering homegrown talent for the jobs of the future.

In the first-ever South Carolina Innovation Challenge, organizations from across the state were invited to apply for state grants aimed at meeting one or more of the Innovation Plan's goals. Organizations submitted more than \$6.8 million in requests for \$2.5 million in initial grants. Projects at 14 organizations in Anderson, Beaufort, Charleston, Darlington, Florence, Greenville, Horry, Pickens, Richland, Spartanburg and York counties were selected to receive \$2.4 million in funding. These diverse projects focus on IT training, entrepreneur support, fostering startup companies and agribusiness apprenticeships.

By supporting programs and projects that are boosting opportunities for home-grown firms and expanding the state's entrepreneurial and innovative capacity, South Carolina will continue to prove that it is just right for business and just right for innovation. ●



The Flagship 2 provides offices for startup and growing companies in the Charleston Digital Corridor. (Photo/Charleston Digital Corridor)

Innovative programs

across the state fuel entrepreneurs

By Amy Geier Edgar

Innovation and entrepreneurial activity are key to the successful growth of South Carolina's economy. To support those efforts, there is a growing focus across the state to make cities and towns "entrepreneur ready" so that businesses can easily open, plant roots and expand.

The S.C. Department of Commerce opened its Office of Innovation in October 2013 with a goal of making South Carolina a top state to start and build a high-growth business. The initiative's goal is to enable entrepreneurship and technology-based economic development successes in the state, foster commercialization of technologies, support increasing capital to home-grown companies and raise the profile of the state's innovation assets.

For the first round of its South Carolina Innovation Challenge, the department in May awarded \$2.4 million in grants to 14 organizations across the state to boost high-tech and entrepreneurial economic development. The diverse projects included IT training, entrepreneur support, startup company support and agribusiness.

"It's been exciting to see the energy and impact that South Carolina's startup community has already created," Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt said. "Through a dedicated, statewide innovation effort, we



"It is incredibly important for entrepreneurs to create new startup companies which is what I call 'the foundational fuel' for a tech ecosystem."

Nate DaPore
president and chief executive officer, PeopleMatter

want to continue their momentum and create a business environment in South Carolina that is ideal for high-growth companies to thrive. It is my hope that this reinforces all the ways that South Carolina is 'just right' for innovation."

The Charleston Digital Corridor Foundation was awarded \$247,000 and the Harbor Entrepreneur Center in Mount Pleasant was awarded \$250,000. The



Digital Corridor's CODEcamp is a software education initiative focused on developing new talent and providing students with the skills they need — including hands-on training, mentorship and networking — to enter the workplace and develop high-tech software skills. The Harbor Entrepreneur Center provides programs such as Accelerator and Forum that are designed to create intersections among



The new farmers of Dirt Works Incubator Farm, Johns Island, S.C. Dirt Works Incubator Farm is a project of Lowcountry Local First's Growing New Farmers program, and the first of its kind in the state. Growing New Farmers is a three-phase program that includes apprenticeship, incubation and farm land-match. (Photo/Lowcountry Local First)

high-impact entrepreneurs, founders and investors.

Nate DaPore, president and chief executive officer of PeopleMatter, sits on the Board of Directors of the Charleston Digital Corridor and serves as a mentor for the 500 Startups group.

“It is incredibly important for entrepreneurs to create new startup companies which is what I call ‘the foundational fuel’ for a tech ecosystem,” DaPore said. “It’s where new innovations, tech jobs, discoveries and larger tech companies are created. By creating startup companies, entrepreneurs create an ecosystem that begins to feed itself and spawn more and more startups and faster innovation. It’s the flywheel effect.”

Igniting that flywheel effect of creating more startups is enabled by initiatives like the Charleston Digital Corridor and the Harbor Accelerator, DaPore said. Facilities, support and training offered by these incubators and accelerators are critical to nurturing and



The Knowledge Park incubator offers help to high-tech entrepreneurs. (Photo/Knowledge Park, Rock Hill)

growing the tech startup ecosystem. They play a vital role in helping early-stage entrepreneurs get their companies up and running by providing inexpensive office space, access to peers, guidance from mentors, key business and recruiting connections, low cost training such as the CODEcamp, and creating a “network” effect, DaPore said.

The quality of life in the Charleston area also is a major draw for talent to support the growth of startups and to lure new startups or existing software companies to the area, DaPore said.

“Charleston over the next decade will emerge as a major tech hub on the East Coast rivaling Raleigh, Atlanta, the Northern Virginia area and Boston if we as community continue to embrace the momentum in the tech ecosystem,” DaPore said.

Two city-supported business programs, the Duke Energy Center for Innovation in Hartsville and the Knowledge Park Innovation Center in Rock Hill, also were awarded grants. The Hartsville program received \$100,000 and the Rock Hill program, \$250,000.

The Community Foundation for a Better Hartsville opened the Duke Energy Center for Innovation in July 2013. The center started off with six entrepreneurs and the first just recently graduated, said Director Ben Chastain. This program is part of the Clemson Technology Villages that are being built across the state through a pilot program of the Clemson Institute of Economic and Community Development.

The center helps entrepreneurs with market analysis, patent research, business planning and product development. The staff guides entrepreneurs through the process of finding angel investors or getting traditional loans through a bank, and helps to connect them with a network of support and community resources, such as Clemson University and industry executives.

The foundation also is engaged in a master planning initiative to expand and update the city's current plan, Hartsville 2020 Vision. All of these efforts go hand-in-hand to guide the city's development into the future and make it a dynamic place to work, play, dine and shop, Chastain said.

The Rock Hill Knowledge Park Incubator currently has nine companies involved in its program with several of those set to graduate in the coming months. A few of those companies have even relocated from other states in order to launch in Rock Hill, according to Director David Warner.

"We advocate for their success," Warner said. "We're trying to build an entrepreneur culture here."

The incubator is part of the larger Knowledge Park Initiative that is part of the efforts to revitalize the downtown and the city center core by creating an urban village where people can live, work and play. People in knowledge-worker jobs are looking for cities that offer art, music and entertainment as well as a walkable downtown that offers the options of bicycling and public transportation, he said.

"We've been successful at recruiting, but we also want to grow our own jobs," Warner said.

A key to attracting the high-tech knowledge jobs is having the infrastructure available to support them. Technology and communications company Comporium is rolling out Zipstream, its Gigabit per second service, in Knowledge Park. This ultra-fast Internet service will be a boon for high-tech and



Ben Chastain, director of the Duke Energy Center for Innovation in Hartsville, congratulates the first graduates of the program, Catrina and J. Houston Penny of FME Nuclear Solutions. (Photo/Duke Energy Center for Innovation)

information technology businesses transmitting very large files like graphics or videos. Rock Hill will be among the first cities in the Southeast to have that service, Warner said.

"That technology opens up the door to new companies," Warner said.

But it's not just high tech companies that are attracting creative entrepreneurs in South Carolina.

Agri-business is attracting an increasing number of entrepreneurs. All over the state in cities large and small demand is growing for sustainable agriculture and locally produced food, and a Charleston program is helping to support new farmers and offer business assistance.

Lowcountry Local First was awarded \$100,000 from the Department of Commerce for its entrepreneurship and innovation efforts through small business and agriculture. LLF's Growing New Farmers Incubator Program utilizes a three-phase strategy of apprenticeship, farm incubation and land-linking services to cultivate future farmers, according to Nikki Seibert, director of sustainable agriculture.

The apprenticeship component of the program provides hands-on mentorship, structured curriculum, coursework and field days, and access to networking through Growers Group meetings. The program has 12 current participants and has graduated 95 apprentices.

The Dirt Works Incubator Farm was launched as the second phase of the program to provide farm business incubation, infrastructure and mentorship for apprentice program graduates. Dirt Works is the first farm incubator in South Carolina and is currently home to six new farmers, Seibert said.

Participating farmers lease an acre of land for \$2,000 a year and are provided access to a tractor, packing shed, walk-in cooler, tool storage, irrigation and a mentor farmer. They are given three years in the program to refine their business, build their market and save capital to launch their businesses off the Dirt Works site.

In addition to the acreage leased to new farmers, an acre of Dirt Works is reserved as a teaching plot where apprentices, community members, and students can learn core farming concepts and innovative techniques, Seibert said.

Since the Growing New Farmers program began in 2010, and the incubator farm launched in 2012, the program has created eight farm jobs, three agriculture support jobs, and six part-time jobs, Seibert said.

"This really is about job creation," she said. "Agribusiness is the largest industry in South Carolina. We need to continue to grow it in a way that supports local economies, especially in and around our rural communities." •

Business friendly cities

By Reba Hull Campbell



For a business owner, few things can be more frustrating than paperwork. And sometimes government paperwork can become an impediment to getting a job done, especially in the arena of business licensing.

For companies that conduct business in multiple cities and counties, different zoning ordinances, permit regulations and business licensing requirements can sometimes be confusing and make compliance with local laws difficult.

While variations in some zoning and permitting processes are necessary among jurisdictions, there are some processes that can be streamlined so companies that do business in multiple cities and counties can cut down on paperwork.

Contractors, caterers and landscapers are among the types of businesses particularly hit by the variety of paperwork they often had to deal with when working across multiple jurisdictions.

In response to these concerns, representatives of the Municipal Association of South Carolina and its affiliate organization, the S.C. Business Licensing Officials Association, have created a single standard business license application that a business can use in any jurisdiction that chooses to accept it. The S.C. Chamber of Commerce and a variety of local chambers of commerce and business organizations provided input on developing the application.

“This is a huge step forward for regional growth and development in our community,” said Carl Blackstone, president and CEO, Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce. “Simplifying this process and adopting it statewide will bring greater ease to economic

development opportunities and prosperity for our region. We support this effort and hope this is the beginning of more positive change for our local business community.”

The one-page application contains all of the information most cities need to issue a license. Originally developed with contractors in mind, cities can use the standard application for any type of business working in multiple jurisdictions.

“Adopting the application is a local decision for each city to make,” stressed Scott Slatton, legislative and public policy advocate for the Municipal Association. Slatton also serves as the staff liaison for the Business Licensing Officials Association. “We are working closely with all cities in the state to encourage them to consider accepting this standard form.”

Three months after its introduction, the application had been endorsed by more than 50 cities and three counties (updated list at www.masc.sc, keyword: BL application).

Lexington’s business license official Sonya Lee says, “Hopefully this new standardized application will show that business license ordinances are not there to be a hindrance or an extremely time consuming process to the business community. We want the process to be as painless as it can be for all contractors or businesses that may do business in multiple jurisdictions considering the differences in our ordinances and rates.”

Similar to the Municipal Association’s model business license ordinance and *Business License Handbook*, the standard business license application provides cities with another “best practices” approach while maintaining local flexibility.

Instead of gathering and filling out a business license application for each city in which he does work, a contractor (or other transient business owner who does work in multiple locations) can complete the standard application’s business information section one time. He will submit copies of the application to participating cities along with job-specific information.

The standard application does not relieve the business from complying with each city’s zoning or building requirements.

“While using the application is strictly voluntary, we encourage cities to accept it as a way to help reduce paperwork, thereby making cities more business friendly,” added Slatton.

City business licensing staff members have been trained on what they need to do to accept the new application through the S.C. Business Licensing Officials Association run by the Municipal Association. “Business licensing is a complex profession involving knowledge of the law, finance and a good dose of customer service,” says Slatton. “The Business Licensing Officials Association is a great resource for these professionals to get training on best practices like this new standardized application.”

There are multiple levels of accreditation that business license officials can receive, and the S.C. Business Licensing Officials Association provides more than 30 hours of training annually on topics including business licensing law, technology and customer service. •

For additional information about this new application and the list of cities that have adopted it, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: BL application).

Embracing alternative energy

By Amy Geier Edgar

South Carolina cities and towns are embracing alternative energy. By harnessing the power of the sun, wind, and earth, North Charleston, Woodford and Wellford are leading the charge toward a clean energy future.

Alternative energy is defined as any source of energy that does not come from fossil fuels. That includes not only solar and wind energy but also energy produced from biomass, landfill gases, geothermal energy or hydropower. Some innovative South Carolina towns are proving that clean energy can make a difference.

In 2011, the Town of Woodford (pop. 185), located in Orangeburg County, received an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant to undertake energy efficiency upgrades to their community center and firehouse. A portion of that grant went toward purchasing and installing a 5kW solar array on the town's community center. The 36-panel array now powers the community center and is producing so much power that the town is getting a credit on its monthly bills, saving more than 20 percent on energy costs.

Mayor Charles Stoudemire, in an interview with the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation, noted that it was a six-month stint in Holland that opened his eyes to alternative energy. Stoudemire says that "what they did with wind power and conservation really got me interested in how we use energy. We're really wasteful." Of his



The City of North Charleston uses open-air fully electric vehicles for patrol of neighborhoods and events.

town's new solar panels, Stoudemire mused that "there are no moving parts; no maintenance we need to do; they just sit there and soak up the energy," he said.

In 2012, the City of North Charleston (pop. 98,471) proved itself as a leader in energy efficiency when it constructed its new city hall, which earned Silver LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

"As home to a majority of the state's solar power and the world's largest wind turbine and drivetrain testing facility at the Clemson University Restoration Institute, North Charleston is a proud supporter of the use of alternative energy sources," said North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey. "Large solar arrays are a common sight in North Charleston, including the installations at the Boeing 787 Final Assembly Facility, Water Mission International, and atop the Intertech Group's buildings around town."

"We have made strides to lead by example, outfitting our fire stations with solar water heaters and

utilizing open-air, fully electric vehicles for a more personal police patrol of neighborhoods and large city events, among other initiatives," Summey continued. "Coupling alternative energy with sustainable development practices, as North Charleston has done, is producing a brighter future for us all."

In 2011, the Town of Wellford (pop. 2,378) partnered with Lockhart Power Company to generate renewable energy from its landfill. The Wellford Renewable Energy Landfill Gas-to-Energy Project captures methane from the landfill and converts the gas to power for its customers. Landfill gas is a byproduct of the bacterial decomposition of organic materials. The methane gasses produced as garbage decomposes can be combined with oxygen to create fuel that can be converted to electricity, or compressed to fuel vehicles. By capturing the methane from the landfill and converting it to electricity, Wellford and Lockhart Power have created a partnership that brings clean energy not only to town residents but also to other Lockhart Power customers.

The South Carolina Energy Office, through its ConserFund and Energy Efficiency Revolving Loan programs, can help towns across South Carolina realize their energy efficiency goals. Municipalities can apply for funding to assist in energy efficiency upgrades as well as the installation of alternative energy infrastructure. •

Information about the SCEO loan programs is available online at www.energy.sc.gov/incentives.



A day in the life of water and wastewater managers

By Amy Geier Edgar

Most of us turn on our faucets and flush the toilets without considering where the water comes from or ends up. Water and wastewater treatment plant operators work quietly behind the scenes ensuring that the water we all use on a daily basis is safe for public health and for the environment. While most folks may take their water for granted, these operators and managers work diligently to clean, test and monitor this vital resource.

The duties of water and wastewater treatment plant operators vary depending on the size of the plants. In a small plant, there may be only one operator maintaining all the systems. In large plants, multiple operators may work shifts or have specialized duties. The operators run and maintain the pumps and motors that move water and wastewater through filtration systems. They

are responsible for making sure plant equipment works properly. They run tests to determine the water quality and make any necessary adjustments to the amount of chemicals in the water.

Water and wastewater plant operators also are responsible for complying with the strict standards of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. Violations can result in environmental concerns and public health issues, as well as hefty fines.

Eric Moats has been superintendent of the Abbeville water and wastewater plants for 26 years. He has a degree in microbiology from Clemson and is a member of the Water Environment Association of South Carolina and the S.C. Rural Water Association. Moats holds an “A” class

license from the state Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation in water treatment, biological wastewater treatment and water distribution. He also has an “A” level license in wastewater collection from the Voluntary Certification Program. Both of these license types are based on education level, experience and a passing a test.

Moats said his duties include everything from administrative to laboratory work. He even has been involved in discussions with industries looking to locate in the area.

“It’s very rewarding helping our community,” Moats said. “Most people aren’t aware that there is someone



Greg Gress, Town of Sullivan’s Island

at the water plant while they're at home eating their Thanksgiving dinner or asleep at night."

Moats has four operators at the water plant and two operators at the wastewater plant. All of the operators are dual license holders so they can work in either capacity.

Moats said it's extremely hard to find qualified, licensed operators who can come in and work. He said it took him a year and a half to find a replacement for an operator who retired. And Moats said he expects hiring will continue to be a challenge.

"We're running out of time in the state of South Carolina," he said. "The average age of our operators is 55."

In fact, the American Water Works Association estimates that almost 50 percent of today's water and wastewater operators will retire within the next five to seven years. Moats said he and other superintendents have been communicating with technical colleges to express the need for more young people in the field. Central Carolina Technical College has developed a Youth Apprenticeship program that encourages high school students to consider a career in the water and wastewater industry.

Moats said the work is steady ("People flush their toilets every day!") and vital to the environment and the public health of the community. He wishes he could hire two more operators, plus a maintenance worker and janitor. In the meantime, he and his crew continue to put in long hours.

"Sometimes people want to take a vacation and I say, 'Sorry, I have to have you at work,'" Moats said.

When employees do get time off, Moats has to pay overtime for others to fill in. With budgets tight, this can be difficult.

Lee Bailey, public works director for the City of Woodruff, also works with a small crew. On the wastewater side of his job, he is the lab director with all of their testing done in house. He handles the collection system



Tammy Jackson takes readings in her job as lab director for the City of Dillon's water treatment operations.

and all of the maintenance and repair of pump stations and collection lines. He also operates and maintains the wastewater treatment plant.

Bailey has two employees at the plant and said they are on call round-the-clock because of their small number of staff.

"My family is accustomed to me leaving at all times of the day and night," he said.

Bailey is a second generation operator with Biological "B" Wastewater and Water Treatment "D" licenses. He has been employed by the City of Woodruff for 14 years and has been in his current position for six years.

Bailey thinks the public might be surprised by how much dedication it takes to operate a wastewater system.

"This is not a factory job or even a job at a regional wastewater treatment plant where they have an abundance of employees," he said. "We are a small community that has to handle every aspect, and it's on my shoulders to make sure everything gets completed."

Hiring at the wastewater plant can be difficult. First, Bailey has to find people who can overcome the stigma of working with wastewater. Then, the applicant has to be able

to pass the required certification exams and learn multiple skill sets such as plumbing, electrical and construction. Being a small system makes it hard to compete and pay an operator what they are worth, he added.

Tammy Jackson has been the lab director for the City of Dillon for more than 23 years. She has a biology degree from Francis Marion University and is a member of SCRWA. She holds an "A" Water Treatment license and an "A" Biological Wastewater license. She also is certified as a Class A/B Underground Storage Tank Operator.

Jackson has numerous duties including analyzing water samples, adjusting chemicals, running tests on sludge, and completing DHEC reports. Along with Jackson, there are 15 employees in the Water and Wastewater Department. Finding and hiring operators can be a struggle, she said, when oftentimes operators want to stay where they are or go to larger areas that can afford to pay more.

Many people do not realize that water and wastewater is checked seven days a week, Jackson said.

"I think most people automatically assume the water is readily available, not realizing that it was treated, sampled and tested



Lee Bailey, City of Woodruff

that through our labor we are contributing to make the lives of our customers healthier, safer and more convenient by having quality tap water at the push of a faucet,” she said.

Doris Wilson has been the chief operator of the Town of Pendleton’s wastewater treatment facility since 1999. She has worked in the wastewater field for the last 20 years. Wilson has an “A” South Carolina Biological Wastewater license, a “D” South Carolina Water license, a Trainee Permit South Carolina Wastewater Collection, and a Trainee Permit South Carolina Water Distribution. She is a member of the Water Environment Federation and the SCWEA Blue Ridge Foot-hills District.

Among her duties, Wilson manages operations and performs daily inspections of the facility, troubleshoots facility equipment and processes, maintains daily records, collects data, writes permit renewals, prepares reports and helps with budgeting.

Her staff of three full-time operators, including herself, and one part-time laborer/maintenance worker works every day of the year, including holiday and weekend schedules. Like the other operators, Wilson agreed that it’s hard to hire an operator in a small town due to the pay scale. Plus, with a small crew, they ultimately work more holidays and weekends than facilities with more operators, she added.

Wilson said people would be surprised at the clarity of their effluent. She said she has given plant tours and heard people comment it was clearer than their tap water.

Wilson said she is proud that through proper wastewater treatment, generations to come will get to enjoy the creeks and lakes.

“The most rewarding thing about my job is being able to minimize the impact of wastewater on the environment,” she said. “I leave every day with the feeling of pride in our accomplishments.”

Greg Gress has been manager of the Sullivan’s Island Water and Sewer Department

since 2001. He has spent 30 years in the water and wastewater treatment business. He is a certified Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator in both Illinois and South Carolina. He holds an “A” Wastewater Treatment license and a “B” Water Treatment and Distribution license in South Carolina.

Gress is a member of the Water Environment Federation, American Water Works Association, SCRWA, South Carolina Water Quality Association and the National Association of Sewer Service Companies.

Some of his responsibilities include making recommendations to council on budgeting and rate projections, interpreting technical documents and contract language, managing construction of all capital improvement projects, maintaining compliance with the regulatory requirements on both drinking water and wastewater, and communicating the status and performance of the utility to council.

Gress has a five-member crew (including himself), plus a billing clerk. Being part of such a small utility, he says it is a challenge to recruit quality staff who can work together.

“One of the keys to our success is our incentive program,” Gress said. “I try and keep a pulse on salaries that surrounding utilities are paying and keep our incentive program up to date.”

A challenge of the job is maintaining the level of service while keeping rates down. Sullivan’s Island has a fixed base so all cost of service must be spread among the same number of users each month, Gress said.

Gress said the most rewarding part of his job is providing the tools for his employees to ensure that their water and wastewater is safe for both the public and the environment.

Gress said he thinks there is much the public doesn’t know about water and wastewater treatment jobs. Indeed, the work of these employees is vital to every community, but they fall in a rare category where their anonymity actually spells success. ●



Doris Wilson, Town of Pendleton

every day,” she said. “We have to screen and remove the solids, treat and test effluent, and send results to DHEC monthly.”

Jackson said it is rewarding to know that her work has a role in preserving the safety of the environment as well as protecting the public health.

“Not only is it our responsibility to deliver safe drinking water to our customers 24/7, but we also have their health in our hands. What a wonderful feeling to know

HOMETOWN SNAPSHOT



Photo/Lowcountry Local First

An actual farm is part of Lowcountry Local First's Growing New Farmers Incubator Program. Six new farmers are learning at Dirt Works, shown here. They have access to an acre of land, a tractor, packing shed and mentor farmer, among other things needed to help them learn.

You see a street...



We see a lifeline that is a hometown with planned traffic flow, fire stations, thousands of visitors each year, city parks and community centers for children of all ages. Our streets take us to our jobs, our churches, our fun places and even to grandma's house.

www.CitiesMeanBusiness.org



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