

# The 'vision thing:' How far can you see across our state?

Earlier this year, our company launched SCBIZ, South Carolina's Media Engine for Economic Growth™.



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In February, the first quarterly issue of SCBIZ magazine was mailed statewide to 20,000 leaders in business, government and education. That same month we launched a companion Web site, [www.scbiznews.com](http://www.scbiznews.com). We also began publishing our daily statewide business e-newsletter, SCBIZDaily.

During a recent visit with one of our SCBIZ advertisers, we were pleased to hear the client report that he saw copies of our first issue "on coffee tables everywhere" as he called on business contacts around the state. He also reported that his organization had a great response to their special advertising section in the issue.

We've also had a positive response to our SCBIZDaily newsletter, with its focus on statewide business news. I'm enjoying reading it myself—previously, it was just not possible to get a feel for business activity across the entire state from one news source.

## But are we connected?

Which brings me to a recent personal experience: In April, I spent the better part of a week in the Upstate visiting key leaders in business, education, government and economic development. I had a really great time and learned a great deal.

I also enjoyed a "Charleston connection," staying at the elegant Westin Poinsett hotel in downtown Greenville and dining at the fabulous new High Cotton restaurant there. The Poinsett was renovated by Steve Dopp and Charleston-based Packwood Management, owners of the Francis Marion hotel.

High Cotton is part of Dick Elliott's Maverick Southern Kitchens group. The

Charleston "hospitality invasion" also includes a Sticky Fingers restaurant on Main Street. Richard Stoney and his Crew Carolina group are working on plans to open a Boathouse restaurant in the area.

That might make you think we're really connected between the Upstate and the Lowcountry.

Well, yes and no. Several conversations revealed a lack of awareness of the nuances of local issues in our region and the ways our economy is related to activity in other parts of the state.

One hot topic was the expansion of the Port of Charleston. The sense I got was that some business people in the Upstate see us here in Charleston as apathetic about the need to expand the port, while they see the port as absolutely essential as a transportation link for their huge manufacturing base.

I spent some time trying to explain the picture as it looks to me as a resident and business owner in our region: The general public and conservationists have legitimate concerns about the impact of port expansion on traffic congestion, air and water pollution and damage to our sensitive coastal environment.

That said, I explained that the Charleston area's business and political leaders have generally been supportive of port expansion and fully appreciate the economic impact of the port both locally and statewide. In other words, "we get it."

The flip side of that discussion was hearing that some business people in the Upstate really think that all we have going for us on the coast is tourism and resort and residential real estate development.

In contrast, their focus is on Atlanta, Charlotte and the I-85 corridor. We're hospitality and tourism driven, and they are all about big business and industry. They wish us well, but see little connection between their business goals and ours.

Somewhat defensively, I pointed out that we do have some non-leisure business activity going on in the Lowcountry: Nucor Steel, Alcoa Mt. Holly, Robert Bosch, Vought-Global Aeronautica, Blackbaud, Benefitfocus.com, Automated Trading Desk, SPAWAR and a host of defense con-

tractors and the medical sector led by MUSC, to name a few prominent examples.

Of course, it's very clear that the Upstate really is more about "big business" and the tremendous economic heft of the I-85 corridor and nearby Atlanta and Charlotte. Visiting the Upstate and seeing the regional headquarters of companies like BMW and Michelin makes quite an impression.

Still, the conversation left me wondering how many opportunities are being lost because we as business people and economic developers fail to look elsewhere within our own state for opportunities and connections that could contribute to our collective success.

## Mission possible

South Carolina is a relatively small state in terms of population and geography. It is not all that hard to network beyond our local regions, as I have found out during visits to Columbia and the Upstate. Without exception, people have been gracious, welcoming and accessible despite their busy schedules.

There are many good reasons for business people around the state to develop a better understanding of regions other than their own. First and foremost, as a state we are one political entity. Decisions by state government on taxation, regulation and economic development have a direct impact on the quality of life in our communities and the strength of our local economies.

Second, our image as a state and our attractiveness as a place for people to work, live and prosper depends on how well our citizens are doing and how vibrant our communities are in all parts of the state. We would do better to adopt as our mantra "leave no region behind" than to be uncaring about the economically depressed areas of the state, both urban and rural.

For our staff here at Setcom Media, helping to make the connections between business people across our state is our "mission possible." We will continue to aggressively develop the tools and resources needed to fulfill that mission. We are counting on your support, encouragement, ideas and feedback as we work together to build a stronger and more prosperous state. ■