



NEWS RELEASE

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Historic Downtown Beaufort earns SC ‘Cultural District’ honor

Historic downtown Beaufort’s growing mix of artists, galleries and thriving and varied restaurants earned the “Cultural District” designation from the South Carolina Arts Commission.

City leaders hope to market the designation to help attract visitors and residents downtown as a hub of arts and culture, Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling said.

“Cultural heritage, presented through the arts and through our unique three centuries of history, help drive redevelopment and economic growth in Beaufort,” Keyserling said.

“The City and our Redevelopment Commission look forward to marketing the area collaboratively under the banner of a state-sanctioned Cultural District. It’s a terrific honor and one that is well-deserved by our arts community,” he said.

A cultural district is an easily identifiable geographic area with a concentration of arts facilities and assets that support cultural, artistic and economic activity, according to the S.C. Arts Commission and the General Assembly.

Bonnie Hargrove, director of the University of South Carolina Beaufort Center for the Arts, coordinated the application process with Keyserling. Together, they worked with local leaders and Arts Commission staff to develop a map of cultural assets and a strategic plan for the district.

“Historic Downtown Beaufort has a great cultural scene, from art galleries, artist studios, museums, and multiple music and festival venues to a wealth of great culinary experiences,” Hargrove said.

“It’s a complete experience, for people who live in the area and the many who visit throughout the year. We didn’t have to invent a cultural district. The district was always part of the charm of Beaufort, and really is what makes us such a highly-rated place to live and to retire,” she said.

One of the primary goals of the Redevelopment Commission is “to grow and expand our economy to fund the maintenance and improvement of the City’s infrastructure,” said Jon Verity, chairman of the Beaufort Redevelopment Commission.

“Adaptive re-use and the infill of downtown Beaufort have long been key elements in our plan for economic growth,” said Verity, a former treasurer of the Joffrey Ballet in Chicago and past president of the Dayton (Ohio) Ballet. He also served as chairman of the Montgomery County (Dayton) Arts and Cultural District.

“For many, many years in Beaufort, the arts have been a creative lure that helps attract new residents and businesses,” he said. “Earning the ‘Cultural District’ designation is like the Good Housekeep Seal of Approval.”

Those non-arts businesses are important pieces of a cultural district, said Ken May, S.C. Arts Commission executive director.

“A successful cultural district attracts creative enterprises, such as galleries and theatres, whose patrons want to dine out and shop, so nearby retail and other businesses benefit from that increased economic activity,” May said.

Other states with similar cultural district programs include Massachusetts, Kentucky, Texas and Colorado. For complete guidelines, visit www.SouthCarolinaArts.com.

The cultural district program is administered by the South Carolina Arts Commission, a state agency charged with creating a thriving arts environment that benefits all South Carolinians, regardless of their location or circumstances.

Created by the General Assembly in 1967, the Arts Commission works to increase public participation in the arts by providing services, grants and leadership initiatives in three areas: arts education, community arts development and artist development.

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