



Greg Beckner/Staff

Landscaping improvements to public areas such as Morgan Square downtown is an example of what the Spartanburg Men's Club is trying to encourage among other area residents.

Yes, they can dig it

The Spartanburg Men's Club takes its annual jaunt around town, looking for gardeners and landscapers doing good things with green.

Spartanburg struts its greener side

By Lyndsay Cayetana Bouchal
Staff Writer

There is no underestimating the value of curb appeal.

And that appeal not just to residences, but also to businesses.

It's a theme that will be on the minds of judges from the Spartanburg Men's Club next weekend when they fan out to critique the 40 or so businesses whose leaders have signed up for the annual Landscape Evaluation Tour.

Sponsored in conjunction with the Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce, the tour divides the participants in a category including industrial, branch libraries, apartments/hotels, professional, large commercial, small commercial, large public service and small public service.

Judges consider landscape design, originality of design, grounds maintenance, plant selection and plant placement.

"It's a way of recognizing excellence in landscape within the business community," said Claire Hess, vice president of finance and administration at the Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce.

Participants also get advice and criticism from experts on how to improve their grounds.

The contest usually kicks off around 8:30 in the morning. Ten teams of two or more judges tour assigned locations, organized by geographic convenience. The tours typically conclude by noon and the scoring sheets are then brought back to the chamber and tallied.

"It's one of the largest arrangements that the chamber has. It's been an ongoing contest for the past 48 or 49 years," says



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As many as 40 businesses will receive an evaluation from the club this year.

"Everyone likes to see that. They like to see their names and properties," says Hess.

Hess said the tour began as an idea proposed by the Men's Garden Club.

"They came to the Chamber asking for help - more administratively - wanting to encourage the beautification of the business community," she said.

Previous participants such as Spartanburg Community College and Spartanburg's Courtyard Inn along Interstate 85-Business agree the tour has had a positive impact on the community, causing many to become more aware of their properties' appearance and create a more inviting atmosphere.

Kelley Jones, executive assistant to the president of Spartanburg Community Col-

lege and 25-year Spartanburg resident said, "I've been impressed with the recent changes to Spartanburg's landscape. Of course, the downtown is the most obvious."

Jones cited as examples improvements to the Morgan Square area. "They are not only beautiful but practical when you attend Jazz on the Square or Music on Main; the QS/1 and Extended Stay America buildings are truly impressive, making us feel not only like a 'big city' but a big city that cares about the community. Add to that Barnet Park and the Chapman Cultural Center as well as the spots of pride along our streets, and you have a beautiful city," Jones said.

While Jones cannot vouch that this competi-

tion has increased enrollment at SCC, she believes the attractiveness of the campus, which has earned the institution numerous awards dating back to 1988, is unquestionable.

"The aesthetics of our campus welcomes students and assures them that they will receive a quality education. It is their first impression of Spartanburg Community College, and I think it is an incredibly positive one," she said.

Darryl Kosiorek, general manager of the Courtyard by Marriott in Spartanburg, shares a similar view.

"I think the competition has a secondary effect. There's no way to judge if it brought in more business, but it probably happened with return guests and people who see the hotel from the highway, Business-85."

Kosiorek said he ran a Fairfield hotel in North Carolina where there was no similar program. "It helps Spartanburg and companies who participate; it keeps focus on landscaping, the aesthetics," he said. "Any program like this benefits that city."

Other chambers have inquired about Spartanburg's program with the idea of starting their own.

Hess said a business in Asheville wanted to participate in Spartanburg's contest, but was denied because of the distance.

"It's a contagious thing, we got up a half dozen businesses over the past six or seven years," Hess said. "It's pleasing to anyone driving by, it puts the person in a better mood, and it betters how the community looks. It makes their inhabitants proud."

"I've been impressed with the recent changes to Spartanburg's landscape."

— KELLEY JONES

garden club member Frank Falk.

Falk has been a judge for the past three years and will continue handling evaluations this April.

"It's one of the most important activities we do," Hess said. "The judges really take it to heart, do a conscious job. They take notes, let the participants know - everyone benefits."

Once the scores are tallied, winning businesses are either awarded first places or honorable mentions at an awards ceremony, generally held in late May in the chamber offices. The judges return to the winning sites, photograph the landscapes and compile the photos into a Power Point presentation that will premiere at the ceremony.