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## Pacolet redevelopment projects beginning to show fruit

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The Indian Summer Festival in Pacolet has been celebrating the town's history for 22 years, but this year town leaders said they are also celebrating their future.

"By having this we remind people we are moving forward. We're not static," Mayor Elaine Harris said. "You see the beginning of things to come."

The town has been working to rebrand itself as a drive-to location for family day trips and cultural, historical and outdoor recreation for several years and recently began gaining traction by way of grants.

"We want to make this a place people want to come to get a feel for small-town South Carolina," Harris said.

Pacolet was once home to three major textile mills, and the home base of Pacolet Manufacturing, one of the largest textile producers in the South. It was a self-sufficient hub. That ended when the last mill closed in the early 1980s; a victim of cheap production overseas.

"Since the cotton mill closed, the hardware store closed, the grocery store closed. The drug store is just about the only thing that's holding on right now," said Pacolet business man Leland McKelvey, owner of The Lighthouse restaurant.

The town languished for several years, but like-minded community members began in the early 2000s to begin rebuilding. McKelvey credited Harris with creating a vision for the town and organizing the dwindling number of residents. Harris credited community partners who believed in her vision; particularly Pacolet Milliken Enterprises, the entity that owns all the mill land and is leasing it to the city at a nominal cost.

"This land has value for Pacolet Milliken, particularly sentimentally," said director of land holdings John Montgomery. "We have the real estate and there's a mayor that's passionate about revitalizing the town. We're very excited to work together ... I really hope the town can leverage our name and our resources for their benefit."

In 2004, the town developed a master plan that called for utilization of the town's picturesque waterfront to power economic development just as the river's currents once powered the mills. The plan calls for waterfront restaurants and retail establishments in close proximity to city hall — the historical apex of the town — creating a "village center."

Studies have shown the key to revitalizing a community is embracing natural



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The Pacolet Riverfront Park in Pacolet hosted the town's Indian Summer Festival on Saturday. This year's festival included American Indian artifacts, crafts, clothing, art, food, rides, clogging, and bands. This is the 22nd year the town has celebrated its American Indian heritage with a festival.

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resources and celebrating heritage, Harris said. Pacolet is rich in both and the goal is to leverage them to their maximum potential. In November 2011 the town completed a Feasibility Study for Recreation and Economic Development.

"As mills leave, so many communities die, but not Pacolet. We're reinventing ourselves," Harris said. "It is because of the spirit of the people and I think it goes back to our past."

Stone tools found in Pacolet suggest the Cherokee tribe of American Indians used the area as a home base for creating goods they traded throughout the region. Settlers to the area had to be hardy to withstand sometimes hostile relations with the Cherokee and the town played an important role in the American Revolution.

"We helped win the Revolution because we were Scotch-Irish and they drew a line in the sand and said we might lose this war, but we will not lose any battles on our land," Harris said.

Two years ago the Pacolet Milliken land adjacent to city hall was cleared and the Indian Summer Festival was relocated to draw people to the area targeted for economic development. Nearby, Lockhart Power is building a new hydropower plant. Down on the water, work is nearly complete on two put-ins and take-outs that will link Pacolet to the Pacolet River Paddling trail — a \$250,000 project undertaken by the Palmetto Conservation Foundation and funded by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

Most recently, \$802,000 has been secured for the Pacolet River Gateway Project, Harris said. Phase one will be a lighted boardwalk-style riverfront park paid for by a grant from South Carolina Department of Transportation. The design process is gearing up and Harris said she did not have an estimate for when they would break ground. The second phase will be intersection and infrastructure improvements paid for by a grant from the Appalachian Regional Council of Governments.

Skeptics point to the sluggish economy as a reason to temper excitement about redevelopment, but McKelvey said he wants to see the town he has called home for 32 years succeed.

"The only way to do that is to take a step forward," he said. "If you don't go to the meetings and hear about the grants you think nothing like this could ever happen here, but it is," he said.

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