

Ridge Notes Ridgeway, South Carolina



Revitalization, Responsibility, Relationships

“How One S. C. Town Rallied To Save Its Water Tower”

The State, Salley McInerney – Feb. 2017

There's some real good news leaking out of Ridgeway, South Carolina. The antiquated blue-green water tower that sits one street back from the center of the small town will be preserved, joining the quaint and curious ranks of the community's other iconic structures – a one-room police station said to be the smallest one in the United States; a phone booth with a pay telephone that reportedly still works with the clink of a quarter; and the brick, vine-covered doorway of the old Ridgeway High School. “Officially” said Mayor Charlene Herring, “the water tower is called a riveted finial ball tank. It was built in the 1920's. It's still operational. It's a 75,000-gallon tank, but because of leaks, we can't fill it up to the top. Preservation of the water tower drew me to the town recently. About 25 miles north of Columbia and several miles east of I-77, Ridgeway is a busy place, chock full of beautiful old brick buildings cozying up to Palmer Street, the main thoroughfare through town. If there's a poster child for the can-do attitude of a small town determined to survive, Ridgeway is it.

The mayor and I sat in two red rocking chairs outside of a small clothing store, chatting it up. With the tenacity of a tour guide, she wants to know who you are and where you came from and what brings you to her beloved little piece of the South Carolina pie. “I interview everybody,” she said, laughing. So I learned from the third-term mayor that leaks in the water tank were once fixed by a process called “waxing,” which is no longer allowed due to environmental regulations. Repairing the tank at this point would not only be expensive, but there are questions as to whether the structure could survive the process – including sand-blasting and new riveting.

“Age has taken its toll,” said Robert Arndt, who works with the town's water system. “It needs a new roof. The metal is thin in places.”

So last fall, the town received a state grant to replace the water tower with a new one and the community turned on the proverbial water works when it considered the demise of the old tank. Among other moves to preserve the tank, a Facebook page was set up – Save The Ridgeway Water Tower. And you can't blame folks for wanting to keep the gangly structure standing tall.

For lack of a better word, the darn thing is endearing. It towers over the town; its big, black letters emblazoned across the front of the tank-RIDGEWAY, S.C. ELEV 625 – leave no doubt about where you are. Furthermore, the tower bears a striking resemblance to the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*. And memories of it abound. Back in the day, young folks were known to climb its ladder and swim inside the tank. One elderly Ridgeway resident winked and told me this story. “A couple of fellas climbed up the tower and were swimming in the tank when one of the boys looked at a friend and asked, ‘What're you gonna do if you have to go to the bathroom?’ The boy looked back and said, ‘Well, you don't think I'm gonna climb back down, do you?’ Another story – this one from Herring – goes that a goat was once hauled up to the top of the tower. And from Margaret Dixon, who grew up in Ridgeway: “I remember the military planes from Fort Jackson, flying over the water tower, dropping flour sacks on the tank, conducting ‘bombing practice’ during World War II.” The water tower is a symbol of the strength of our community,” she said.

And so by a unanimous vote last month, Herring said the Ridgeway Town Council entered into a partnership with the Fairfield County Revitalization Commission – a citizens' organization promoting preservation efforts in the county – to “support the work to restore the tower.” “Everybody in town came together to save the tower,” Herring said.

“It's simple,” said Lee Dixon, whose family ties to Ridgeway date to 1791 and who leads the revitalization commission.

“Economic development (comes) through respect and reservation of historic landmark such as the Ridgeway Water Tower ... There was a great amount of resistance to this project due to cost, and that is certainly understandable considering the wise use of funds available to the Town of Ridgeway. Efforts such as this should not burden the town ... It is in such situations that citizens should be involved.”

Herring said private and public funds are going to be used to care for the old tower. “The challenge now is to find a new site for the new tank. You have to have a vision, a dream, otherwise small towns die. Everybody in town came together to save the tower. Sometimes we have challenges, but they help to move the community forward. The Tin Man wanted a heart did he not? And the people of Ridgeway had a heart, too, did they not?”

**Grant Progress
PARD, RIA, MASC**

PARD

Playground equipment has been installed. Fencing has been ordered. An official day for usage will be announced soon.

RIA

Old water tower has been saved. Site for new tower is still under investigation.

MASC

- World's Smallest Police Station has been painted, roof repaired and a new floor installed. The kiosk has been ordered.
- The telephone booth has been painted.
- The Arch work is underway regarding stabilization and finishing touches.

**Entrepreneur of the Year
2016-2017**

The Town of Ridgeway in appreciation for the businesses in the community gives our citizens an opportunity to nominate an Entrepreneur of the Year. The following have been recognized in the past: Carol Allen, Laura's Tea Room/Thomas Company Store; Tina Johnson of Over the top Emporium; Denise Jones & Jennie Price of the Cotton Yard Market; Rodney Lee & Sons of R.H. Lee Antiques and Auction; Eddie Nelson of Nelson Funeral Home, and The Farm at Ridgeway. It's time to nominate another outstanding business by completing the form included in the newsletter, noting the qualifications for nominations and returning the information to Town Hall by March 31, 2017.

Arts on the Ridge

"Opening Minds and Hearts to the Arts" is the theme of this year's Arts on the Ridge Festival to be held on May 6 and 7, 2017. Special events are being planned such as a Juried Art Show, Art Exhibit at the Century House, Artists' Reception Garden Party and music downtown on Friday night. This year's art poster will feature the old water tower in paintings by Barbara Yongue and the late Rex Pratt. If you are interested in submitting your art, being a sponsor for the event or volunteering, please see the forms provided on the Ridgeway website at www.ridgewaysc.org or call Arts Chair, Phyllis Gutierrez at 803-337-8675.

Calendar of Events

March 1, 2017	Fire Department Meeting	7:00 pm
March 3, 2017	First Friday Downtown Ridgeway	5:00-9:00 pm.
March 7, 2017	Fairfield County Arts Meeting (Town Hall)	6:00 pm
March 8, 2017	Ridgeway Merchants Meeting (Town Hall)	5:30 pm
March 9, 2017	Ridgeway Town Council Meeting (Town Hall)	6:30 pm
March 11, 2017	FCAC Children's Art Class (Century House)	9:30-12:00 pm
March 19, 2017	Ridgeway Reads (Embleton Home)	3:00 pm