

**Report to the Board of Directors**  
**Pride of Kinston, Inc.**  
Annual Meeting  
June 23, 2005

An annual meeting is not only a time to look back at the past year, but also a time to look ahead into the future.

Go with me for a minute to the future.

It's a warm Saturday afternoon. Sun is shining. There's a slight breeze in the air.

The sidewalks along enchanting Queen Street— narrow so as to be safe when you walk across it, designed back to the future so it's a non hassle to park, pleasing to the senses in all respects—are filled with people: young and old, white and black and brown, leisurely strolling along, going in and out of colorful and inviting shops and department stores, taking shopping breaks to tour a magnificent Civil War Museum featuring the remains of the CSS Neuse, taking in a provocative film and lecture at the engaging Cultural Heritage Museum, and going over to the boutique Fireman's Museum to examine the artifacts which tell the story of Kinston's firefighters and some of the raging blazes of the 1800's and 1900's which changed the downtown landscape.

Soon, small knots of people—families and friends--head off to tour Harmony Hall on King Street and from there they walk over to Maplewood, Cedar Grove and the Colonial cemeteries: the final resting places for the County's earliest and leading citizens. Some of the markers exhibit remarkable artistic craftsmanship. Others are simplicity at its best.

In the Colonial Cemetery, the visitors find the burial plots for the Peebles family, the family that lived for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Harmony Hall. In Maplewood, they'll find monuments to the Harveys, the Stadiums, Johnsons, Harts, Spears, Howards, Kings, Foxmans, unknown Confederate and Union soldiers who died on the outskirts of town during the Civil War ...killed in battles which raged along stretches of roads and fields which join Kinston and New Bern and Goldsboro.

Back on South Queen, visitors encounter the aromas of soul food and barbecue in the making, and hear jazz wafting out of popular clubs.

Some of the crowd explore King Street before turning onto Herritage. A few peel off to go to the Nature Center, crossing over the Neuse River on a fun pedestrian footbridge. Looking down on the river, they see a canoe race underway, and a fishing tournament just around the bend.

Others in the group saunter on to check out the produce and other goods at the Farmers Market, climb aboard the CSS Neuse II to get an idea of just how big the original one was, and pick out a spot in the Tiffany West Park for a picnic. (They learned about the area from a brochure at the Civil War Museum which gave details about all of Kinston's

Museum Row including a description of the CSS Neuse II replica built largely by volunteers...a remarkable achievement.)

The park and a boardwalk along the *cleared* riverfront unveil a breathtaking vista of the mighty Neuse rolling through the county...lapping at the edge of our town and our history as a constant reminder of God's grace and power.

Then the shoppers get another chance to spend money in Kinston along Heritage Landing. They shop at the Briary, the Right Angle, at a clever Briary Coffee and Cafe for a refresher....and at Parrott Brothers...an authentic hardware store with ties to this town's early history. While in the neighborhood, some of the shoppers make reservations for an elegant dinner at 120 West Gordon.

The laid back traffic on Queen and Heritage consists of cars with license tags from all over North Carolina: New Bern, Goldsboro, Morehead City, Wilson and Rocky Mount, as well as Florida, Ohio, Virginia, South Carolina and a whole lot of other places. And our visitors see posters along our streets advertising a road race, soap box derby, a Kinston Indians championship game....

What year is this? In a lot of ways, it's up to us.

In all likelihood, we'll never have another downtown with a Sears, Montgomery Wards, Foxman's Jewelers, Belks, Brodys, AJ Suttons, JC Penny, Woolworth, Canadys, Hoods Drug Store, Marston Drugs, Standard Drugstores (of course, with Realo, we don't need all them back....) the Mans Store, Dave the Clothier, Spears Sporting Goods...and with a Hotel Kinston towering over it all.

But we can have a *new* downtown that is defined by history and culture, boutique retail, beautiful landscaping, professional services, fine and fun dining, entertainment and sports, featuring traffic facilities which are inviting and user friendly....and a riverfront that beckons Nature and Commerce to come together in harmonious dance.

This Kinston of the Future can become Real. It only takes believing and hard work. That's all. I can only assume that's why each of you give your time and energy and good wishes to Pride. You believe it can be done.

In the past few months, we have begun to raise the bar...to set new agendas.

If Susan Moffet-Thomas told us anything last week it was this: No matter how many times people say you are wasting your time, don't believe 'em. Say it ain't so! Prove them wrong.

She also advised to create the future in manageable bites. New Bern's plan to put its utility lines underground was accomplished block by block...not all at one time. The downtown was revitalized one building at a time...not through some mysterious tornado which swept away the old and installed the new.

She also said in so many words that while it was a public private partnership which created a new New Bern, it would not have happened without private leadership. In Kinston, we are the entity which can galvanize that private leadership.

What is the year's record:

- You have approved more than \$12,000 in façade grants to help business owners make downtown more attractive.
- You have completed the terms of a \$200,000 technology grant from the Golden Leaf Foundation to make sure the Kinston Enterprise Center is truly a 21<sup>st</sup> Century institution.
- You decided that the best way for the CSS Neuse to be completed is through a direct partnership between the CSS Neuse II and the Golden Leaf Foundation.
- You have seen the Kinston Enterprise Center, open for only 2.5 years, near self sufficiency.
- You have exercised leadership by taking on the question of Queen Street's design to serve the public of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, using the creative mind of architect and colleague Michael Dunn as gas for the trip;
- You have been a firm but unapologetic steward of Kinston's downtown landscaping, with the chair of your Design Committee spending her Saturday mornings pulling weeds wherever she finds them;
- You have encouraged new businesses to open their doors in our downtown and worked to provide adequate parking for their customers. John Marston and the other members of the Property Development Committee are changing the very geography of downtown Kinston. I'm glad that we haven't been billed for mileage by John and William and others.
- You have worked hard to maintain the lines of communications with our partners: the businesses and property owners in the MSD; the City of Kinston and the County of Lenoir;
- And you selected new administrative leadership.

There are other opportunities ahead for creative leadership;

- What can we, as a community, do to develop the Neuse River waterfront as a natural and beautiful economic engine for downtown Kinston? A special task force headed by Dr. Lyn Turner and Kinston businessman Tommy Pressly will take us to that answer, and both Lyn and Tommy are dedicated to moving more quickly than slowly.
- In the meantime, there are some things we can encourage such as cleaning up the riverbank so that pedestrians and motorists can actually see the beauty of the Neuse as they walk or drive along. There are other, smaller projects which can be undertaken along the river to help speed us to a fuller plan.
- Are we organized as well as we might be to meet the challenges of the new century? The Organizational Committee has begun that research.
- Do we need to develop a menu of incentives to assist not only new business but also to help existing downtown businesses to stay and prosper?
- How can we best counter the totally inaccurate misconceptions that you are not safe in downtown Kinston? Many folks seem to believe that you are not as safe downtown as you are elsewhere in town. **That is not so...**and we need to say it long and loud. (Refer to Greg Smith's research and Randy Hemann's letter of 1996.)
- What's the future of the historic railroad freight depot just next door? We need to set in motion the ways and means to find an answer.
- What are the long term financial and operational goals for Pride? We need a plan.
- Do our marketing and promotion activities positively impact the environment supporting downtown real estate investment? They should ...at all times. If not, they are a waste of money.

In conclusion, I thank the Board of Directors for selecting me to be the executive director. I've been fortunate in my working career. I've had some great experiences, much of it dealing in one way or another with non profit organizations dedicated to making a difference in their respective communities. I appreciate the opportunity.

I'm not turning maudlin on you. Whatever time I have with you, I want it to be interesting, exciting, creative and most of all productive. I don't want you or the rest of the community to say: It's been a waste of time...and money.

Adrian King  
June 23, 2005