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## NATURAL LEADER: CASTILE PUTS PEOPLE BEFORE PROCESS

FOR JOHN CASTILE '88, basketball paved the way for his future, and not just because it earned him a full scholarship to Furman. The sport put him in touch with people who supported and encouraged him — and now he's returning the favor as city manager of Greenville.

"When I look back, I can see how my high school basketball coach found a way to instill values in kids who may not have had value elsewhere," Castile says. That coach, George Glymph of Eau Claire High School in Columbia, S.C., inspired Castile and other players to achieve success beyond sports.

For Castile, that encouragement led to Furman, which he chose because it was close to home and because he wanted a small school with high academic standards. But upon arriving, he felt out of place. "I come from a very urban setting," he says. He considered leaving, until several professors approached him and told him he needed Furman — and Furman needed him.

"They wanted me to succeed," says Castile. "My world was broadened. It was growing and evolving." He now views his time at Furman as pivotal to his career success. "Without coming into contact with people that were different, my fear is I would not have been able or suited to be successful in the business world. Without them, I'm not sure I'd be doing what I'm doing now."

As city manager Castile is Greenville's chief executive officer, managing more than 800 employees and an annual operating budget in excess of \$136 million. He oversees the city's day-to-day operations, works closely with City Council, and has been a key part of many of the city's most lauded efforts, including the development of Fluor Field (the minor league baseball stadium), RiverPlace (a retail, restaurant and housing development) and the Kroc Center (a 20-acre recreational and cultural facility).

Castile cites RiverPlace as an example of the public-private partnerships that have become the hallmark of the city's revitalization over the last 25 years. "Here you see a \$70 million investment supported by a \$13 million public park, and it became the postcard for Greenville," he says.

But before building beautiful parks and grand hotels, he says that cities must have the less glamorous aspects of infrastructure in place, from wastewater collection and stormwater management to police and fire protection. "Private investors are looking to protect their investment, and the public sector is the place to start. We build communities, and our communities are judged by what the public infrastructure looks and feels like."

Greenville mayor Knox White calls Castile a natural leader and problem-solver. "He understands the city's mission and its priorities and motivates the whole organization to move in those directions," White says. "He always puts people and problem-solving ahead of red tape and process."

Castile says his athletic background taught him about leadership, teamwork and how to balance demands on his time. At Furman he was captain of the basketball team his junior and senior years and a unanimous All-Southern Conference selection in 1988, when he finished second in the voting for Player of the Year.

He originally planned to be a lawyer, but after completing his political science degree he realized law wasn't his passion. "I was intrigued by the public sector and



how much of an influence it has in everyday life," he says. He worked in several management positions before joining Greenville's recreation department in 1995. He became assistant to the city manager in 1999 and deputy city manager in 2003, and was promoted to city manager in 2010.

Grateful for the positive example of coaches, teachers and mentors, Castile considers it important to provide similar support to others. "My focus is on encouraging people to live life without regret and to challenge themselves," he says. "It's about developing people and giving them opportunities."

He says "synergy" has become a buzzword, but it really means empowering people to make decisions about how to do things better. "You have to create an environment where people are willing to put ideas out there," he says. "You can always build on those ideas."

At 45, Castile doesn't play basketball anymore, although he does enjoy watching March Madness and professional games on television. He coaches youth teams when his schedule permits and relishes the chance to teach kids the same lessons he learned and the philosophy he shares with his city employees. "It's not about wins or losses," he says. "It's about trying to achieve something greater as a team than what you can do yourself."

— LEIGH GAUTHIER SAVAGE

*The author, a 1994 graduate, is a freelance writer in Simpsonville, S.C.*