The Family Plan: Greenville Proves that there's No App for Quality Time

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Available at: http://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol59/iss1/23

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The Family Plan

GREENVILLE PROVES THAT THERE'S NO APP FOR QUALITY TIME

BY BLAIR KNOBEL '03

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TJ GETZ
Though the buzz of our smartphones may have replaced the dinner bell, Greenville still has homespun character, a two-lane Main Street where folks remember your name, and four seasons that offer pleasurable treks throughout the year. Savoring time together is not just important, it’s also easy in the Upstate. To do it well, here is a year’s worth of activities—some familiar that merit revisiting, and others under the radar that you and your family should try.

SPRING

Beyond the lure of Falls Park picnics, there is another green that’s worth your time. Heritage Green—the longtime location of Greenville Woman’s College (which merged with Furman University in the 1930s)—now provides a home for six institutions: the Children’s Museum, Greenville Little Theatre, Greenville County Museum of Art, the main branch of the Greenville County Library, Bob Jones University Museum & Gallery, and the Upcountry History Museum.

You could spend your entire day on the Green, as locals call it, weaving in and out of the museums, the library, and catching a show at the Greenville Little Theatre, but I wouldn’t recommend it. After all, you need time to take in the thoughtful programming at each place and room for that picnic.

Instead, spread the visits over the season, but start at the Upcountry History Museum, which is a Smithsonian affiliate and partner with Furman. "History connects to just about everything—you can’t understand your community if you don’t know where it started from," says Elizabeth Gunter, the museum’s director of programs and marketing. This spring, noted illustrator David Small will feature in an exhibit that is at once whimsical and satirical. “A David Small World” will showcase several works by the prolific artist, including art from the popular children’s book My Senator and Me by the late Senator Edward Kennedy.

As it happens, literacy is a main emphasis of the museum’s programming, which it incorporates through exhibits such as “Storyland,” coming to the museum this summer. "The exhibit will actually allow families to enter into the storyline world," Gunter says, bringing Beatrix Potter, Peter Rabbit, and others to life. And on the first Sunday of every month, the museum hosts a Family Fun Day, which engages all ages in art projects, science experiments, and story time—interactive, hands-on activities that get young minds excited about learning. The museum also plans free Neighborhood Night programs every Thursday evening, from 5:30-8:30, with storytelling for children and literacy counsel for parents.

Above: Activities abound for families, including exhibits at Upcountry History Museum and the South Carolina Children’s Theatre.
The Comeback

SUMMER

On any given summer Saturday at the Swamp Rabbit Café & Grocery, you’ll see a line of bikes parked at the rack outside, parents and kids milling about at the picnic tables, and young ones enjoying the playground under pecan trees.

To get there, take a ride—not on four wheels, but two. The GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail, now a 19.9-mile multi-use thoroughfare connecting Greenville Technical College to Travelers Rest, is a nearly perfect conduit for family activities from Falls Park to art galleries at Riverwalk (where kids can cool off at the trailside fountain, and you can enjoy a refreshing bubble tea from nearby Cha Tea Bar).

Continue on to the Swamp Rabbit Café, about two miles from downtown, to grab a scone, sandwich, or other café delight (you’ll find croissants and beyond—try the Brazilian pao de queijo or a Turkish pogaca). Older kids will probably be up for pedaling further to Furman, maybe for a picnic under the lake’s broad oaks, or even on to Travelers Rest for spectacular homemade ice cream at Sidewall Pizza.

If biking isn’t your thing, head to the TD Saturday Market to stock up on local produce and artisanal wares, then make your way to the steps of the new “literary hub,” M. Judson Booksellers and Storytellers where Story Time on the Steps takes place every day at 10:30 a.m., sharp. (The name M. Judson is a nod to namesake Mary Judson, the forward-thinking principal of Greenville Female College, who lived a modern life in a Victorian world.)

Cap off your day (remember the long daylight) at a Greenville Drive game, a member of the South Atlantic League and Class-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox. Reward your adult self with a cold beer while watching your kids light up at the sight of the game-winning fireworks.

An alternative to Fluor Field is time at the family-friendly Quest Brewing Co., where lazy summer nights are best spent at their Thursday evening concert series. The brewery near the downtown Greenville airport keeps a varied selection on tap, including seasonal offerings. A food truck or two is usually parked out front to make for easy drinking (and dinner, of course).

FALL

Greenville’s proximity to the Blue Ridge Mountains demands a road trip. Driving north will deliver you to many a charming mountain town.

Head up Highway 276 to Caesars Head State Park and take in the fiery horizon at its popular lookout. On the way, stop at Slater Drug in Marietta for one of its famous milkshakes. Choose from 40 flavors, from the classics (add malt!) to the more adventurous: think birthday cake and bubblegum.

If you take the Highway 25 route, Saluda, Flat Rock, and Hendersonville in North Carolina beckon. Drive in the morning to Wildflour Bakery in Saluda for its legendary sticky buns, then make your way toward Flat Rock for Sky Top Orchard—not just for the expansive views or the 24 apple varieties or the petting zoo
or the tractor rides. Go chiefly for the apple cider doughnuts. Stand in line. Get them hot from the fryer, dusted with sugar.

Of course, the doughnuts (and sticky buns) are merely a prelude to lunch at the Flat Rock Village Bakery, which is a short five-minute drive after you come down the hill from your apple-picking odyssey. The bakery crafts brick-oven pies bearing local ingredients (butternut squash and kale with roasted garlic, walnuts, mozzarella, goat cheese, and a balsamic drizzle is a favorite). Grab one to go and keep driving toward the Blue Ridge Parkway for its majestic views.

**WINTER**

Back in 2010, Greenville got a few degrees colder when The Greenville Road Warriors, the city's first East Coast Hockey League team, took to the ice. Now, five years later, the team has a new owner and a new name—the Greenville Swamp Rabbits, a nod to the city's current recreational path. Through April, the Swamp Rabbits, featuring a Kids Club with special offers and discounts, play at the Bon Secours Wellness Arena.

If you want a more skates-on experience, Ice on Main, the city's only open-air rink, will entertain all ages in downtown Greenville through January. The lawn at the Courtyard Marriott is transformed into a winter wonderland à la Rockefeller Center, complete with treats, coffee, and hot chocolate. For skating later in the year, the Greenville rec's Pavilion offers an enclosed rink, where instructors can help you stay upright.

After a day on the ice, or in lieu of it, make your way to the South Carolina Children's Theatre. “We have something for ages 2 to 92 at SCCT,” says executive director Debbie Bell. The theatre's 2nd Stage productions, which allow for intimate and lesser-known performances, are also home to programs related to social awareness.

Tell Me a Story Theatre, ongoing throughout the school year, brings your little ones (pre-K) into the mix, with a favorite tale read and acted out. At 30 minutes each, and one dollar per person, these shows are short and sweet, ideal for incorporating weekday variety and time well shared—the perfect antidote to our fast-paced lives.