

Florence Center Brings Governments Together

By: Joshua Lloyd, Morning News

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FLORENCE, S.C. – The Florence Center, formerly known as the Florence Civic Center, is growing both figuratively and literally.

In 2017, construction of a 28,000-square-foot expansion with a price tag of \$16 million got underway. That project is nearly complete and is expected to be ready for use before the end of January.

What it took to get here, however, was no small feat: a multi-government cooperation for a publicly funded project during a time when Florence city and county council weren't seeing eye-to-eye.

Tensions rose between Florence's city and county councils throughout 2016 and into 2017 over downtown parking woes, peaking with a disagreement on funding paths for a joint deck and a "going of separate ways" on the matter.

At this point, the two governmental bodies had already approved \$15 million in funding for the civic center expansion, but construction officials needed another million to complete the project in a feasible way.

Neither entity hesitated to work with their counterpart to get the job done. The decision to find the extra funds was unanimous from both sides.

"We might not always like the other's approach, but more often than not we all agree on why the things we're doing need to be done," Florence Mayor Pro Tempore Buddy Brand said at the time.

Officials agree the center has led to massive investment in hotels, retail and food, and this addition will increase the



center's profile for more convention-style events.

A major driver behind this decision is a universal, bipartisan desire for continued economic development.

"Our philosophy is we don't want to give anybody an excuse not to come here," County Council Chairman Kent Caudle said. "We don't want to deter the wheels of commerce, and we know the city is the same way."

The new expansion adds 28,000 square feet to the center – which includes 8,000 square feet of sub-dividable space, 5,000 square feet of new kitchen space and 12,000 square feet of lobby and meeting room space.

Anyone driving by the center will see a new paint job and color scheme, along with a new logo that sports the rebranded name.

Beyond that, the center is under new leadership in General Manager Paul Beard – a veteran in that market with fresh ideas on how to make the center thrive in this new chapter of its existence.

The new motto to match this new chapter is, "We're at the Center."

UPCOMING EVENTS

MLK Celebration

Thursday, January 11th
Francis Marion University
6:00 PM

Business After Hours Carolinas Hospital System – Women's Center

Thursday, February 8th
5:30 – 7:00 PM

Legislative Breakfast

Friday, February 23rd
Florence Center
7:30 – 9:00 AM

Business After Hours Florence County Sheriff's Office

Thursday, March 1st
5:30 – 7:00 PM

Building Bridges

Monday, March 19th
Floyd Conference Center
10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

State of City & County Luncheon

Tuesday, March 20th
Florence Center
Program begins at 12:00 PM

Administrative Professionals Day

Wednesday, April 25th
SiMT Building
11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Chamber Spring Golf Classic

Thursday, May 3rd
Traces Golf Club

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