

## **Buggy Factory's rebirth Honors heritage, marks future**

SANFORD – Transforming places like Sanford from small rural towns into walkable, attractive urban centers takes large infrastructure projects like Streetscape, the \$6.5 million initiative that reshaped walkways, buried power lines and added the kind of aesthetic touches that attract visitors and commercial investment.

For Sanford, the revitalization effort didn't stop there. Organizations of all kinds joined forces to renovate one of the city's historic buildings — even with a poetic twist.

The Buggy Factory was built in 1907 when a business in Carthage established the Sanford Buggy Company to build horse-drawn buggies, an enterprise that dwindled a couple of decades later with a new innovation called the automobile.

Since then, its location across a wide expanse of railroad tracks from the more active side of downtown Sanford deteriorated. And The Buggy Factory did, too. That was before Progressive Contracting Company purchased the property as part of their ongoing effort to restore historic buildings near the corner of Carthage and Chatham streets.

Joni Martin, a former chamber of commerce president who now serves as development director for Progressive, says it wasn't easy. They sorted out a number of potential uses for the old mill building, considered what kind of historic tax credits were available to help fund the conversion and how complicated it might be to structure and secure leases.

The twist in the story?

The revitalized building is now a hub for revitalization. The Buggy Factory is home to joint city and county planning offices providing zoning, building inspections, strategic mapping and neighborhood development. It also houses the Sanford Area Growth Alliance and Downtown Sanford Inc., two economic development groups, in a building local officials describe as a “one-stop shop” for growth and development.

The project has attracted plenty of attention. The Buggy Factory was honored by the N.C. Main Street Center earlier this year with an Award of Merit for the Best Adaptive Reuse Project, and Martin says preservation groups occasionally come through to see the facility.

Martin believes projects like The Buggy Factory speak well for the community and strengthen the area's economic future — in this case, helping revitalize an entire block, putting property back on the tax books and generating revenue for the community.

At the same time, it requires vision and a lot of hard work.

“It’s not the easy route,” Martin admits. “Some people say, ‘Let’s just tear it down and move on.’ But you have a much better building in the end when you have the historic facade outside and state-of-the-art offices inside. You’re checking off two things instead of just one.

“It’s important for our community, our heritage and future generations.”