

Florida Secretary of State addresses Greenville

By Jessica Taylor
Editor in Chief

Before Glenda Hood became mayor of Orlando, the word “Disney” was synonymous with her city.

After 12 years at the city’s helm, Hood erased that stereotype and transformed Florida’s sixth largest city into a cultural and technological mecca. Now, as Florida Secretary of State, Hood is spreading that same vitality and vigor statewide.

Hood’s “Creative Economies: Cool Cities” address was Wednesday, Sept. 21, at The Peace Center’s Gunter Theater. Hood was the inaugural speaker for The Riley Institute’s Vision 2025 series, an initiative co-sponsored with the Greenville Chamber of Commerce and Greenville Forward to attract younger generations to the city by the year 2025.

“Our primary goal should be to make sure we create a lifestyle that attracts hot jobs in our cool neighborhoods,” Hood said.

The foundation for any thriving city is a creative class, where the “lifestyles are cool and the opportunities are hot,” said Hood. But this doesn’t mean cloning development plans to spawn artificial growth. Instead, diversity in the economy breeds more choices, which will successfully attract a creative workforce.

The basis for the initial attraction to such a city must be built upon cultural facets and provide neighborhoods that are the roots of a community.

“We want our neighborhoods and we want our downtowns to be the hub of our cities,” Hood said. “We want a purpose behind our involvement in our community.”

When planning cities, Hood said that the design matters, and values must be reflected in each step of the process. “Good neighbors make good neighborhoods,” she said. “Interactions are the key.”

In her current role, Hood has extended those interactions farther to encompass the regional and state levels.

“Competition among cities has been divisive in the past,” she said. “We must come together and encourage collaboration.”

Ideas must be shared among cities for progress to be made, said Hood.

“No one knows where boundaries end in regions. There may be a welcome sign, but businesses shouldn’t care.”

On the state level, the diversification of key cities and rural areas is even more important in an expanding global market like Florida’s has been over the past few years.

“We recognize our deficiencies and accept the challenge,” said Hood of her state’s plan to revitalize their image.

“The perception is that we’re not the place for businesses but are a wonderful place to vacation and retire.”

Hood is now ready to begin the task of reinvigorating Florida’s creative class.

“The creative class will be attracted by the diversity of our workforce and the livability of our communities as we continue to expand our global business image,” Hood said. “All it will take is some forward thinking and careful planning.”