

Irmo-Chapin LEADER

by Jackie Perrone

Elizabeth Taylor

Elizabeth Bethea Taylor has no trouble at all describing the greatest achievement during her term as Executive Director of the Irmo-Chapin Recreation Commission. “Saluda Shoals Park! That was my baby,” she says. “It’s a great accomplishment of the entire community, with a lot of people chipping in to make it happen. I like to think of it as the crown jewel of our community.”

In the mere 18 years since it opened, the park has become a premier, self-sustaining attraction for the midlands, attracting more than half a million visitors annually. Mrs. Taylor recently retired after 30 years on the staff at ICRC, serving as Program Coordinator, Development Director and Associate Executive Director before being named as Executive Director in 2008. She says the Commission started dreaming in the early 1990s; by 1997 they obtained land via long-term lease from SCE&G, and funding with a \$7.5M bond issue along with the specially-created Saluda Shoals Foundation. “We received public and private donations to get it started, with 200 acres,” she recalls. “Later we were able to add another 200 acres, from the old GE plant at the corner of St. Andrews and Bush River Roads, with a huge cleanup effort to make it usable.”

This Midlands transplant grew up in McColl, SC, graduating from St. Andrews Presbyterian College in Laurinburg, NC. She married Jim Taylor from Hamlet, NC, and they lived there for 10 years. Upon being transferred to Columbia via his job at Bell South, they “chose Irmo for its schools, parks, and quality of life,” she says.

She’s been an active leader in continuing and improving that quality of life ever since. In 2009, the Commission adopted a Master Plan which has been carried through to completion. It included renovation of Seven Oaks Park, and adding sports fields to Saluda Shoals Park, also the development of Melvin Park in Chapin with ball fields.

“It seemed the right time to retire,” she believes.

Mrs. Taylor retired in June, and spent her summer enjoying the grandchildren and a relaxed schedule. Beginning in September, she’s stepping into action with the Saluda Shoals District, planning for the community’s future. “You can’t sit back and watch a community grow old,” she says. “We have wonderful residential neighborhoods as well as business areas which need revitalizing. We have organized a District group with the goal of doing something positive to stabilize the area: beautification and modernization, to show off our best assets. When newcomers arrive in our towns, we want them to see a place everyone can be proud to call home.”

She has been recognized with awards including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Greater Irmo Chamber of Commerce, TWIN Award from Palmetto Center for Women, S.C. Recreation and Park Association Professional of the Year.

Elizabeth and Jim have two adult children, Catherine and Jack, and four grandchildren. ■

