

Irmo-Chapin LEADER

by Jackie Perrone

Art Guerry

To research world affairs, try Encyclopedia Britannica and Google. If it's local Irmo-Chapin-Lake Murray history you want to discover, just set up an appointment with Art Guerry. It's all in his head.

"I've lived in Irmo for 46 years," he says. "I came here wanting to contribute to things that would make a better community, and I still do. Elective office is one way; volunteering is another. Everyone should be involved in supporting our community."

This Midlands native grew up in the Dentsville area and was a member of the first graduating class at A. C. Flora High School in Columbia. He chose Mars Hill University for his college degree because it offered the degree program in economics that he wanted. He embarked on a master's program and completed a thesis on the subject of Home Rule Act in local government. (He finished the thesis but not the rest of the requirements, hence, no master's degree.)

Home Rule Act? What is that? A foreign phrase to a couple of recent generations.

As Guerry describes it, "Fifty years ago, there was no local government to speak of. The legislators in the general assembly and the commissioners at the highway department made all the decisions for a county. It took an upheaval in the legislature to establish Home Rule so that county government could manage things. It's been a pet project of mine all my life."

He demonstrated this with action, serving on the Lexington County Council for 16 years and then later as Lexington County Auditor for another seven years.

He did this while running a real estate development business, "so I could afford to run for public office," as he puts it. He is now retired from an active career in that field, just overseeing the real estate properties he acquired over the years.

Art Guerry has participated in many aspects of Lexington County's phenomenal growth and expansion. Whether it's sewage or garbage disposal or water supply or road maintenance, he knows who is responsible, where to make the call, and how to see it through. One of his earliest projects was pushing through the widening of St. Andrews Road, against vocal opposition ("It costs too much, and we don't need it"). Many of the streets in the housing developments, which have sprung up in the area, are now crumbling, partly because at the time they were built there was no code requiring durable construction. "Our developers have put a lot into this community," he says. "They cleared land, designed and built streets, put in sewers and water service. Everything was perfectly legal, but the codes requiring stricter construction did not exist at that time."

Besides all the action, which was part of the elective office, this civic-minded citizen chose to support local activities such as a baseball team at the Irmo-Chapin Recreation Center. His work in helping to accomplish expansion of the outgrown library system won him a state-wide award. Governor Nikki Haley named him to a municipal legislative committee, which handles oversight of plans for communities, which would like to incorporate.

He serves currently as president of the Whitehall Homeowners Association, working to improve such things as garbage collection and recycling in that area. ■

