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## Zipcodes

### Pittsboro: The Best of Both Worlds

BY JANE PAIGE  
SPRING 2005 ISSUE

Forrest Greenslade is living the best of both worlds. After a career as a scientist and manager, Greenslade retired to the upscale Fearington Village and started a new passion as a whimsical sculptor. Hours now are spent in his outdoor studio, shaping peat moss and concrete into frogs, pigs and dragons to adorn a garden or patio. Combining the elegant with the eclectic, Greenslade is actually a reflection of his own new hometown, Pittsboro.

#### **Pittsboro maintains a small town charm**

Located in Chatham County about 35 miles west of Raleigh, Pittsboro maintains a small town charm accented with a vibrant artists' community, a thriving historic and antique district and one of the most elegant hotels and restaurants in the world.



Ray Strawbridge

Established in 1787 as the Chatham County seat, Pittsboro developed into a stylish little town known for its hostelries and academies and its planters, doctors and lawyers. It was named for William Pitt the Younger. Today the town's population is just over 2,000 citizens, not much larger than it was more than 200 years ago.

The county courthouse, built in 1881, still is a commanding presence in a traffic circle and sits squarely at the actual geographic center of the state. Quaint and unique shops and restaurants are located near the courthouse in a district that is listed on the National Historic Register.

#### **The café is "the heartbeat of the community"...**

The General Store Café, located in a former Chevrolet dealership, serves as a favorite community gathering spot for artists, residents and tourists alike. With its high ceilings and glass facades, the café provides an eclectic setting for live music, commissioned artwork and unique dining.

"The building lends itself to diversity in music, art and food," says Vance Remick, who has owned the café for three years with his wife, Joyce. "We have jazz, bluegrass, Irish music on a regular basis and are always looking to provide something new and special."

The twosome spent considerable time creating space where art is shown. A small dining room off the larger dining space is devoted to a local artist to hang art in for a month. A boutique of sorts features the paintings, birdhouses, jewelry and photography of local artists.



"This is the place where art and food meet," says Remick, who spent 30 years in interior design. He and Joyce raised their children in Chapel Hill before moving to Chatham County six years ago. Featured in both *Southern Living* and *Bon Appétit* magazines, the café is "the heartbeat of the community," says Mary Simpson, executive director of the Chatham County Arts Council, also known as ChathamArts.

Founded in 1972, the arts council has an office and gallery also in the downtown district. The space is a central gathering place for artists as well as a hub of activity, with artists dropping in and visiting with one another and art lovers admiring the displays.

The council sponsors the annual Chatham County Studio Arts tour for the first two weekends in December, featuring 57 artists last year. More than 4,000 people attended. Started in 1992, the self-guided tour is one of the oldest such tours in North Carolina.

Simpson maintains a lengthy list of the numerous artists in the county, ranging from potters to musicians to actors. Several artists' works are featured in a calendar being sold by the council. A website keeps artists up-to-date on the numerous shows, exhibits and programs in the county.

### **A cluster of outstanding artists in Chatham County**

"We have developed a cluster of outstanding artists in Chatham County," says Simpson. "Our gallery is a venue to display their work and gathering place for our offices. We are very proud of the awareness these artists bring to our area." Forrest Greenslade, the scientist become sculptor, serves on the board of directors for the active arts council. He is eager to promote the arts in Pittsboro and the entire region. His unique creatures, called "Forrest dwellers" vary from sleeping dragons to winking pigs.

Greenslade and his wife, Carol-Ann, are active and accomplished gardeners and have created the perfect setting on their 1.2 acres for the artist's menagerie. Water for a pond flows from a large frog head with its mouth open and Forrest dwellers hang out all around the garden.

"Numerous galleries in downtown Pittsboro are ideal for showing off the work of the local artists," says Greenslade, who sells his work at several area stores and on the Internet. "The support we all get here is tremendous."

Also part of the unique downtown district are S&T's Soda Shoppe with its restored woodwork and marble counter with barstools and Beggars and Choosers, a unique shop specializing in vintage clothing, jewelry and furniture. While artists add to the charm and uniqueness of the historic downtown district, the most famous attraction in Pittsboro greets newcomers with black cows featuring wide white stripes around their middles.

### **Ferrington Village is the main attraction in Pittsboro**

Ferrington Village, located about eight miles south of Chapel Hill, blends elegant lodging, upscale dining, unique shopping, a planned residential community and beautiful gardens on

the site of an 18th-century dairy farm. Fearington Village is the main attraction in Pittsboro, according to Neha Shah, director of the Pittsboro-Siler City Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Internationally recognized, the Fearington House Country Inn and Restaurant is a recipient of AAA's prestigious Five Diamond Award and Exxon Mobil's Five Stars—the only establishment in North Carolina to receive both accolades.

"Fearington is just like a European village dropped right down in Pittsboro," says Shah. "The entire property has a dressy, country-gentleman air about it."

The Belted Galloway cows—black cows with a wide white strip—are the first sign that visitors are in a special place. A rare breed of Scottish beef cattle, their role at Fearington is strictly to make people smile.



A large white 1927 farmhouse is the perfect setting for the restaurant that offers two menus for \$45 or \$75. The offering changes regularly. The luxury hotel features 33 rooms each furnished in English antiques with fresh-cut flowers.

A main village center has shops, cafes and boutiques clustered around a central area accented by gardens. Shops include The Market Café, which is a gift shop, country store and café all rolled into one; McIntyre's Fine Books & Bookends; Dovecote: A Home & Garden Shop and The Potting Shed, which carries an assortment of plants propagated from the Fearington Gardens.

Accolades for Fearington roll in yearly. In 2005, *Conde Nast Traveler* listed it among the world's 700 best places to stay. *Travel + Leisure* also listed it among the 500 best places to stay in the world this year.

In addition to the elegant hotel at Fearington Village, Pittsboro has several bed and breakfast inns for travelers. Rosemary House, Old Graham Road House and Windsong Retreat Center offer three unique experiences.

#### **Pittsboro's historic district**

Located in the historic district, Rosemary House is a white 1912 Colonial Revival with five guestrooms. A vegetarian breakfast is served. Old Graham Road House has two guestrooms. Windsong Retreat Center is a former farmhouse located on 16 acres. It is used for family gatherings, conferences, meetings and spiritual retreats.

Other special historic features in Pittsboro include the unique courthouse at the center of the downtown traffic circle. Remodeled in 1959 and restored from 1986 to 1990, the courthouse gained a clock in the cupola in 1999. Listed on the National Historic Register, the courthouse is open weekdays and the Chatham Historical Museum is open Wednesday afternoons.

Other historic structures in Pittsboro include the Pittsboro Presbyterian Church and the Pittsboro Masonic Lodge. Both are located on East Street, near the courthouse.

The church began in 1850 as a simple brick building and was renovated in 1875. In 1971, it was restored. The pews in Pittsboro's second brick structure are believed to be the originals. The church bell, imported from London, was offered to the Confederate government during the Civil War, but the offer was not accepted.



Built in 1837, the Masonic Lodge has been used as a community-meeting place. To the back is the small, frame law office of Charles Manly, a former state governor. The entire downtown area is listed on the National Historic Register and a walking tour includes Chatham Mills, the Patrick St. Lawrence House the Pittsboro Community House and other places built between the 1780s and 1949.

### **A glimpse of real farm life**

Visitors to Pittsboro and rural Chatham County also can get a glimpse of real farm life at the annual Piedmont Farm Tour each April. Produce, flowers and dairy products are usually for sale at many of the farms. Similar to the artists, some of the modernday farmers are trying their hands at new crops such as garlic, mushrooms, and even cheese and ice cream. The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association sponsors the tour.

However, those seeking fresh produce do not have to wait for the once-a-year farm tour. The annual Pittsboro Farmers Market is held Thursdays from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. from April to November at the Chatham County fairgrounds. Just the names of some of the 2004 vendors is enough to attract a curious crowd this spring— Bee Happy Apiary, Dancing Doe Dairy and Ewe Dance Wool.

### **Those seeking a different atmosphere can check out the Pitt Stop Cafe**

While historic buildings, shops and restaurants are part of the downtown Pittsboro experience, those seeking a different atmosphere can try out the Pitt Stop Café and Race Shop, located on East Street.

Home of the Premiere Motorsports racing team, the shop is decorated with racing paraphernalia, photographs and track layouts. Suspended from the ceiling are noses and hoods from some of NASCAR's most memorable races.

"To complete the dining experience, a two-way mirror spans the back wall of the café, allowing visitors to watch racing mechanics at work," says Shah.



### **Tigers, leopard, jaguars--even bald eagles call the Pittsboro area home**

Another unique feature in Pittsboro is the Carnivore Preservation Trust located on Hanks Chapel Road near Jordan Lake and Haw River. Founded in 1981, the 55-acre compound is home to about 110 animals representing 11 species of threatened and endangered carnivores from around the world.

These include tigers, spotted leopards, jaguars, ocelots and more. The large cats were mainly rescues, while the small carnivores were part of a selective breeding program. CPT houses the largest captive population of Asian bearcats in the United States. Tours are given on Saturdays and Sundays and must be scheduled in advance.

Bike and hiking trails are also popular at nearby Jordan Lake, a 3,900-acre reservoir in Wake and Chatham counties. The lake offers boating, camping, fishing, swimming and a full-service commercial marina. It is the largest summertime home of the bald eagle in the Eastern United States.

"Jordan Lake was named one of the top 10 urban birding areas in the nation," says Shah. "With more than 200 bike trails, Chatham County is a great outdoor area also."

Like many other artists and newcomers, Forrest Greenslade finds it ideal living in Pittsboro. "To be in a community of people who are all right-brained is just marvelous," he says. ■

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