



Walking along the Yadkin River Greenway, you can diverge to scenic spots like the Reddies River Dam at the south end of the Jefferson Turnpike in North Wilkesboro.

Connected by a River

Wilkes County residents came together to turn their waterway into a community hub. BY NICK PATTERSON



ABOVE: A couple of Wilkes County residents enjoy a stroll along the greenway, a project created through the concerted efforts of local volunteers.

Once, the Yadkin River around North Wilkesboro and the surrounding county was just a waterway winding between the towns. Now, it is a community treasure, a source of pride, and proof of what can be accomplished when a county puts its collective will behind a project.

The Yadkin River Greenway (YRG) is one of those feel-good civic efforts that pays dividends both to locals and to visitors. In the mid-1990s, Dr. Philip Carlson's canoeing jaunts down the Yadkin River made him realize what a resource it could be. And his vision inspired the community to make the river a welcoming destination.

In 1998, the nonprofit Yadkin River Greenway Council began to raise money and turned to Chuck Flink, whose Triangle-based Greenways, Inc., developed the master plan for the linear park. And they secured the volunteer labor of hundreds, many of whom now form the Friends of the Yadkin River Greenway.

How It Came Together The council obtained permission from landowners and marshaled the efforts of volunteers to clear land to survey the properties along the river. Fund-raisers and grants brought in money to staff the effort and

PHOTOGRAPHS: CARY JOBE

Experience NC wine country.

Water isn't all that flows freely from the Blue Ridge to Atlantic beaches. The first grapes of a fledgling nation were cultivated here over 400 years ago.

But the real story lies in the most recent chapters. Come explore more than 80 wineries, each with its own character.

Walk the vineyards. Taste the wines. Share our indigenous foods. Inhale the air and take in the scenery. This is a wine tasting like no other. You're invited.

visitncwine.com

PEOPLE & PLACES

construct the greenway. YRG takes in several historic sites, including parts of the Overmountain Victory Trail, which retraces the 1780 campaign of the Revolutionary War. So far, organizers have raised about \$3 million through grants, in-kind contributions, and fund-raising efforts.

"It has not been government-driven. It's been an initiative driven by citizens and volunteers," says Bill Clifton, director of the YRG Council. "We have not had to spend one dollar on getting an easement. It's been voluntarily given by landowners."

Since opening phase one in 2002,

the park has provided a scenic pathway for moms with kids, cyclists, walkers, and others. A little more than half of the 10-mile trail is completed.

Eventually, the contiguous strip of land will seamlessly connect Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro through a series of dedicated spaces along the banks of the river.

"It's a big deal," Bill says. "I walk it about five times a week. We probably have 80,000 visits a year. It's their kids' recreation area and their place to exercise." ●

YADKIN RIVER GREENWAY:

www.yadkinrivergreenway.com.

The Yadkin River, one of the longest in North Carolina, inspired the creation of the greenway along its banks in the northwestern part of the state.



How You Can Do It

If your community has an underutilized space that could be converted into a public park, follow the lead of the residents of Wilkes County: Come together to make it happen. Here are the main steps.

- **Determine the function.** Will the park be for walkers, runners, cyclists? Will it have a playground area?
- **Get the right design.** The folks in Wilkes County contacted a park designer to help lay out the greenspace in the way that makes the most sense for its prospective use.
- **Secure permissions.** Find out who owns the property. You may have to have an easement or permission from the landowner to convert it to public use. That step may take time. In fact, it continues with some of the landowners in Wilkes County, says Bill Clifton, director of the Yadkin River Greenway Council. You may also need a legal act to declare the property a park, which means you need officials representing the city, county, or state—or all three—to get onboard. They may also be able to clear hurdles connected with funding or the actual installation of the park.
- **Round up volunteers.** You may need them to clear part or all of the land, contribute other labor, and/or raise money. The more people who commit to the project—the better.
- **Don't give up.** The Yadkin River Greenway didn't come together overnight. It is a big project. "You've just got to keep pushing," Bill says.