

# 10 Reasons to LOVE Conway

HOMETOWN PRIDE



WHEN DEBBY AND STAN STEPHENS first wandered into downtown Conway in the spring of 2003, “It was love at first sight.”

The couple were then living in Moline, Ill., where Stan worked as senior vice president for a retail grocer. They were searching for a new place to call home, and after strolling through the lovingly restored downtown, the couple knew they had found it. They moved to Conway that fall, and later purchased Bodega, a kitchen store on Main Street. “We fell in love with Conway’s small-town feel and charm,” Debby says.

They’re not the only ones. In the past decade, Conway’s population has grown nearly 40 percent as visitors—captivated by the historic city on the banks of the Waccamaw River—decided to return and put down roots.

Residents and visitors agree: There’s a lot to love about this city in the heart of Horry County. Here are 10 things that top the list.

**1 STATELY LIVE OAKS.** Dubbed “Conway’s oldest citizens,” the moss-draped live oaks that line the city streets are a major source of civic pride. It’s been that way from the city’s founding in 1700s when crews built roads around the trees, rather than cut them down. There is a full-time city arborist who cares for the legacy oaks, and the town’s unofficial slogan is: “The trees have the right of way.”

“Our trees are such an important part of the town—so important that we wrote their history and gave them names,” says Mayor Alys Lawson.

That history takes the form of a brochure that guides visitors on a walking tour featuring 10 of the famous live oaks, some more than 400 years old. The map is available at the Conway Visitor Center (903 3rd Avenue, 843-248-1700, [cityofconway.com/visitors](http://cityofconway.com/visitors)) located in the restored Paul Quattlebaum house.

**2 A RICH HISTORY.** Conway is one of South Carolina’s oldest cities. Founded in 1734, it was originally named Kingston (after Britain’s King George II), but residents changed the name after the Revolutionary War to honor Gen. Robert Conway. Surrounded by farms and plantations, the city was a thriving river port throughout the 1800s and 1900s, and much of downtown was built during this period. Another walking-tour brochure available at the visitor center identifies 39 historic homes and buildings, many of them listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Among the scenic stops: Kingston Presbyterian Church, which was built in 1858, and Conway City Hall, which was designed by South Carolina



Stan and Debby Stevens were looking to move from Illinois when they found Conway. They own Bodega, a store that sells dining and kitchen luxuries.

architect Robert Mills—the man best known for designing the Washington Monument.

For the full story of the human and natural history of the area, don't miss The Horry County Museum (438 Main Street, 843-915-5320, [horrycountymuseum.org](http://horrycountymuseum.org)) in the heart of downtown. The museum's newest project is the L.W. Paul Living History Farm (2279 Harris Shortcut Road, 843-365-3596, [horrycountymuseum.org/farm](http://horrycountymuseum.org/farm)).

The working farm, constructed by local businessman Larry Paul, gives visitors a hands-on glimpse of life on a “one-horse family farm” in the early- to mid-1900s. “Visitors to the farm may see the farmer plowing fields, gathering tobacco or curing meat, depending on the season,” says curator Walter Hill.



Historic Kingston Presbyterian Church sits among just a few of the town's many stately live oaks.

**3 RIVER VIEWS AND RECREATION.** The scenic Waccamaw River is another point of civic pride and one visitors can explore from the picturesque River Walk winding along its banks. Guests of The Cypress Inn (16

Elm St., 800-575-5307, [acypressinn.com](http://acypressinn.com)) can pull up a Carolina rocker and watch the boats come and go from a private marina, or take a stroll down Elm Street to enjoy the riverbank vistas of Mayor Martin Riverfront Park (843-248-1740, [conwayparksandrecreation.com](http://conwayparksandrecreation.com)). Conway native Jim Holbert offers river cruises that explore the history of Conway on *River Memories* (843-246-1495, [rivermemories.org](http://rivermemories.org)) a 21-foot electric cruiser built in the style of passenger boats that steamed along the river in the 1900s. Feeling more active? Rent a boat or join a guided paddling excursion from Conway Kayak Tours (843-488-0999, [conwaykayak.com](http://conwaykayak.com)), and explore the Waccamaw tributaries known as Kingston Lake and Crabtree Swamp.

**4 GREAT FESTIVALS.** Major annual events include the Rivertown Music and Arts Festival on the first Saturday in May, Bluegrass on the Waccamaw on the second Saturday in May, and the Conway Fall Festival on



Jimmy Martin, above left, and Chris Grainger, above right, own Conway Kayak Tours and lead guided trips when they aren't working as line crew foremen for Horry Electric Cooperative. Co-op member Jim Holbert, right, also provides river tours aboard his electric cruiser, *River Memories*.

the first Saturday of October. But the city's biggest annual bash is Riverfest, sponsored by the Conway Chamber of Commerce (203 Main Street, 843-248-2273, [conwayscchamber.com](http://conwayscchamber.com)). Held every June as a pre-Independence Day celebration, it's the town's longest running festival and features live bands on multiple stages, boat parades, raft races and fireworks.

Weekly goings-on include The Conway Crawl, with live music and extended shopping hours at downtown stores, and the Conway Farmers Market (217 Laurel Street, [conwayfarmersmarket.org](http://conwayfarmersmarket.org)), which opens 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays from May through October.

**5 GOOD EATS.** Hungry? Downtown Conway has no shortage of places to enjoy your next meal. Check out Crady's Restaurant, Bar & Bakery (332 Main St., 843-248-3321, [cradys.com](http://cradys.com)), a popular Sunday brunch stop that also opens for dinner during performances by Theatre of the Republic (see #6). Try the ham brioche, a smoked ham sandwich topped with Granny Smith apple slices and red onions. At Rivertown Bistro (1111 3rd Avenue, 843-248-3733, [rivertownbistro.com](http://rivertownbistro.com)) diners enjoy a bird's-eye view of the city from the second-floor terrace while noshing on Lowcountry spring rolls. The Crafty Rooster Bar





Once vital to Conway's commerce as a bustling port, today the Waccamaw River is treasured for the leisure-oriented activities and businesses it supports.

& Grill (1125 3rd Avenue, 843-438-8330, [craftyrooster.com](http://craftyrooster.com)) is the hangout for students and alumni of Coastal Carolina University (see #8), serving up Chanticleer spirit along with hamburgers, pizza and wings. The Trestle Bakery (322 Main St., 843-488-2069, [trestlebakery.com](http://trestlebakery.com)) is a popular lunch and breakfast stop that's famous for home-style cookies, cakes, breads and pastries.

**6 LOTS OF COMEDY AND DRAMA.** Theatre of the Republic, Conway's community performing arts group, keeps the town entertained with an ambitious schedule of Broadway-style performances including *Hairspray*, which kicks off the 2011-12 theater season on Aug. 19 at the Main Street Theatre (337 Main St., 843-488-0821, [theatreoftherepublic.com](http://theatreoftherepublic.com)). Tickets cost \$18 to \$22 and you might just get to see a rising star or two on the stage. In 2006, talented tween actresses, Caitlin Gann and Caroline Blanton were double cast to play *Annie*. Gann later appeared in the Broadway musical *13*, and Blanton reigned as Miss South Carolina's Outstanding Teen. "We have quite a few actors and actresses who have gone on to work professionally in theatre," says Tim McGhee, the theater's executive and artistic director.

**7 A BRAND NEW GYM.** The 60,000-square-foot Conway Recreation Center (1515 Mill Pond Road, [conwayparksandrecreation.com](http://conwayparksandrecreation.com)) is scheduled to open Sept. 1. City residents will have access to weight rooms, a suspended walking track, a five-lane indoor swimming pool, as well as new athletic fields and nature trails winding through protected wetlands.

**8 PLENTY OF SMART PEOPLE.** Visitors to Conway can't miss the fact that it's a college town. Coastal Carolina

University (843-347-3161, [coastal.edu](http://coastal.edu)) is a public liberal arts school offering 53 undergraduate degrees and seven master's degree programs to more than 8,700 students. In 2003, the school added football to the athletics program and tailgating at Chanticleer home games is now a favorite fall pastime. Horry-Georgetown Technical College (843-347-3186, [hgtc.edu](http://hgtc.edu)) is located on an adjacent campus offering degree programs and continuing education classes that range from marine biology and education to photography and chocolate making.

**9 UNIQUE SHOPPING.** "Shopping downtown Conway is as much about what you'll see and experience, and the service you'll get, as it is about what you'll buy," says Russell Fowler, who built Black Water Market, a shopping and apartment complex that incorporates historic architecture and some of the state's largest murals. The market's shops include Haberdashery and HerDashery (1019 4th Avenue, 843-248-9999, [thehabconway.com](http://thehabconway.com)), women's and men's clothing stores stocked with Coastal Carolina University dress attire including the school's official blazer. Other unique downtown merchants include Bodega (301 Main St., 843-248-9271, [shopbodega.com](http://shopbodega.com)), where Debby and Stan Stephens sell dining luxuries from a beautifully restored 103-year-old building with the original windows and heart-of-pine flooring. Encore Florals & Fine Gifts (225 Kingston St., 843-488-4086, [encoreflorals.com](http://encoreflorals.com)) is located in the Paul Quattlebaum house next to the visitor center.

**10 COMMUNITY SPIRIT.** Conwayites have a tradition of pulling together for good causes, and that tradition of caring for the community is one of the core principles behind Horry Electric Cooperative, says Penelope Hinson, manager of public relations, marketing and energy management. The co-op is headquartered in Conway and has served the surrounding area since 1940. "The people who work at the co-op actively participate in the town's activities like serving on the board for the Chamber of Commerce, volunteering during the United Way Day of Caring, and serving meals for homeless at the Shepherd's Table," she says.

Other volunteer organizations that work to improve the quality of life in Conway include Fostering Hope, a nonprofit organization that provides clothing, school supplies, books and toys to area foster children; Waccamaw Riverkeeper, which monitors the health of the waterway; and the Conway Historical Society, which preserves and showcases the city's past. Working with the city, the volunteers behind these organizations help preserve Conway's charm, says Joe Henderson, the city's zoning administrator.

"The people of Conway, more than anything, care for their town," he says. ☺

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