

# A welcoming 30 years

Story by **Tim Flach**

*What's  
next?  
More plans  
to attract  
tourists*

Lake Murray tourism director Miriam Atria wants to open a satellite office in Blythewood, 20 miles east of the shoreline.

To her, it's an opportunity to capture the attention of motorists who otherwise come nowhere near the lake.

"If they're going down I-77, they're missing us completely," she says.

Such dreams are typical of Atria in her 28th year of leading efforts to attract tourists to the 650-mile lakefront through Capital City/Lake Murray Country Visitors Center, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

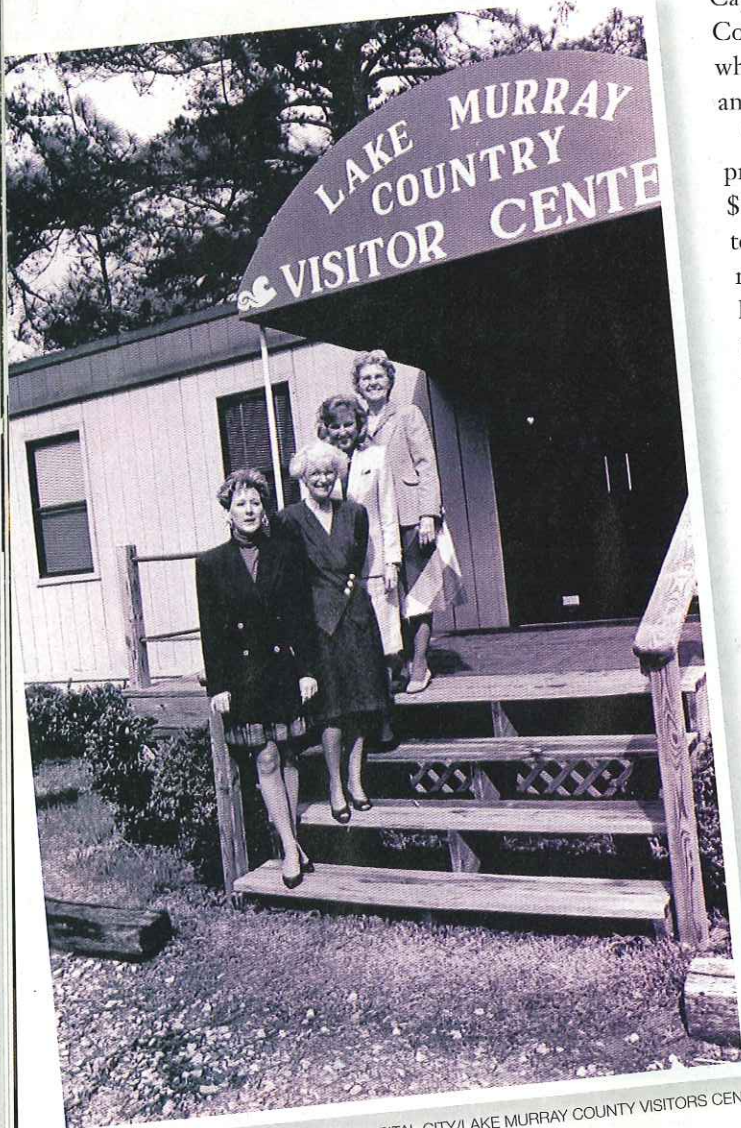
Their efforts range from producing a mid-summer \$100,000 fireworks show to promoting 12 area museums with cultural and historical themes as a way to relax away from the water to bringing in more fishing tournaments as a way to expand marketing the lake.

Smaller touches also are in place.

Rocking chairs and picnic tables welcome newcomers to the lake's Visitor Center on the north edge of the dam.

New exhibits in the center's small museum focus on local history like recovery of a World War II bomber

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COURTESY OF CAPITAL CITY/LAKE MURRAY COUNTY VISITORS CENTER



**Visitors center.** The Lorick Plantation Home was relocated in 1955 to North Lake Road to accommodate the Lake Murray Country Visitor Center and Museum.

# for visitors center



KIM KIM FOSTER-TOBIN/KKFOSTER@THESTATE.COM

## At a glance

Lake tourism officials measure their success during the past 30 years mainly in two ways:

**++ \$681.6 million**

in business generated at nearby hotels, restaurants and other businesses. By their count, that's a 46-1 return on advertising.

**++ 1.8 million**

tourists assisted.

that had been underwater 60 years and examples of life in a Saluda River valley before it was flooded in 1930 to create the lake.

A career affiliated with water is ideal for Atria, who learned to swim at age 3 on a lake in Virginia and on vacations on the coast.

“My passion is here,” she says.

Lexington Mayor Randy Halfacre describes her as a “hard charger.”

Atria left a job in corporate public relations to take charge of what was initially a job solely for herself in an office six miles east of the lake, a \$40,000 operation yearly. Today she oversees a six-person staff and a \$1 million annual operation, half of which is spent on advertising.

Her future goals include encouraging development of a lakeside



**Tourist attraction.** Miriam Atria has been working with the Lake Murray tourism board for 28 years.

resort and beautification of roads leading to the dam.

“We’ve got big plans,” Atria says. “There’s lots to do yet.”



PHOTOGRAPH BY KIM KIM FOSTER-TOBIN/KKFOSTER@THESTATE.COM

**On exhibit.** Amy Hoffman and Jayne Baker put the finishing touches on the newly updated museum at the Lake Murray Visitor Center and Museum. The updates come as the museum celebrates its 30th birthday. ‘People really have growing interest in our history and we’re answering it,’ says Hoffman, the special events manager.