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■ RETIREMENT

Arnoti leaves with foundation in place

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The bricklayer is moving on, the painter's moving in.

Colleton County Economic Development Director Peter Arnoti's desk looks a little barren as he moves closer to retiring from the post he has held for six and a half years and makes room for his replacement.

Arnoti buys into the bricklayer analogy, "I've built the foundation," he suggests. "I've done the horizontal stuff, the things that were not earthshaking news." Getting city water lines installed to serve the Colleton Commerce

See ARNOTI, page 6

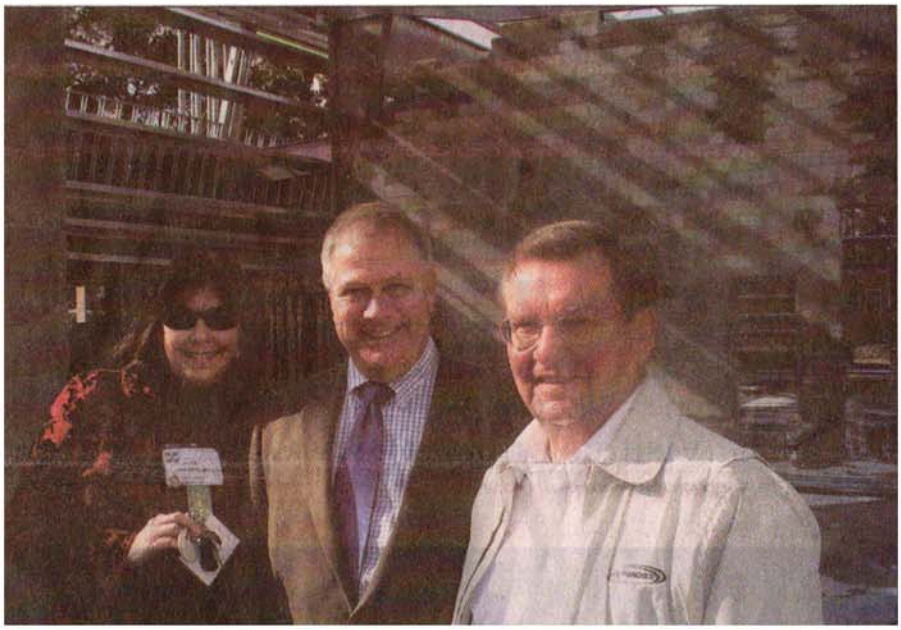

Photo by GEORGE SALSBERRY

ONE LAST VISIT. Outgoing Colleton County Economic Development Director Peter Arnoti, right, took the members of this year's Leadership Colleton class on a tour of the Quick Jobs Center adult training facility under construction on Thunderbolt Drive Wednesday morning. Arnoti is shown with, left to right, Leadership Colleton Director Jean Harrigal and Heyward Horton, who has been hired to replace Arnoti.

Heyward Horton will take over from Arnoti on Jan. 31

ARNOTI

Continued from 1

serve the Colleton Commerce Center on McLeod Road, spending four years working to have the industrial park designated a trade zone, he suggested, did not draw a lot of news coverage.

But, he suggests, the work has been noticed. "The word is getting out about our commitment to economic development."

That is where Heyward Horton, who takes over when Arnoti leaves Jan. 31, comes in.

Arnoti said all the groundwork he's laid has translated into the county's being "really ready to contribute to the economic development of the region, being able to bring something to the table in both the Charleston and Savannah markets."

"Horton has those connections." Arnoti said. Horton will be able to talk to the movers and shakers in both those markets and paint an accurate portrait of what Colleton County has to offer because he has worked with them before in his post with the Charleston Regional Development Alliance.

It is a message, Arnoti suggests, that has not gotten through to those involved in economic development in the two major markets before, despite the county's best efforts.

"I'm confident Heyward will come on board and continue the relay race we've been in," Arnoti said.

Even though Jan. 31 is Arnoti's last official day, on the first day of February he will be leading a group of company officials on a tour of the spec building.

Arnoti had planned to retire from the director's post last January, but decided to dedicate one more year to the job.

He hoped that those 365 additional days would enable him to see the county's Quick Jobs Center constructed and the spec building at Colleton Commerce Center sold.

Neither of those things happened during the course of the year. It has not deterred Arnoti. "It has not been frustrating, its been challenging, it continues to be challenging. I look at the past year and I see activity because of what we had done in the past six and a half years."

The spec building has been looked at, and is on the short list for two projects, Arnoti reports.

"The training center construction continues at its undesirable pace," Arnoti said. "It is taking on a scope that allows you to visualize the concept."

Getting the adult training center up and running, he suggests, "is one of the most critical elements to the success of our economic development."

"I know progress is slow but this has taken longer to materialize than I expected," Arnoti said. "It is a sign of the economic times we are living in."

"There is an old adage in economic development," Arnoti said, "never waste a recession."

The county hasn't sat idly by during the economic downturn, according to Arnoti. "Our capital improvements have put us in a competitive mode in a very cost-effective fashion."

Despite the delays, Arnoti suggests, "we are ready to play in the major leagues. We are better prepared, we have something to talk about."

It is also time for Arnoti to move back to the upstate, to reunite permanently with his wife, children and grandchildren. He departs, Arnoti said, "knowing I'm leaving Colleton County in good hands."

"I've got my Medicare card in my pocket," Arnoti said, "my supplemental insurance card and discount drug card are on their way."

"I start collecting Social Security checks March 1," Arnoti added.

"I don't know how I'm going to live," he joked.

Looking toward his departure, Arnoti said, "I will miss everything. I've been operating for the last 40 years in third gear, I don't know how I will be able to put it in neutral and be content."

But, the Greenwood County resident added, "I have to get back to my family."