

# COLUMBIA REGIONAL BUSINESS REPORT

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# COR working to attract, retain talent

**T**alent matters and Columbia must be a place that attracts and retains talent to meet the needs of a changing economic landscape.



**C. Grant Jackson**

Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin put it quite eloquently in his 2013 State of the City address last month, "...we are faced with a wholly new economic reality where talent no longer follows industry. In fact, the reverse is true and will be true for the foreseeable future because, as the Millennials represent a demographic wave larger than the Baby Boomers, this trend will impact our city and our nation for better or worse for the next 50 years or longer."

For Columbia to move from good to great, we must attract and retain talent. To do that we must build a sense of place.

Columbia Opportunity Resource, also known as COR, has been in the forefront of efforts to do those two things since its founding in 2006 through the efforts of then Columbia City Council member Daniel Rickenmann and current member Tameika Isaac Devine, with the support of former Mayor Bob Coble. Alongside a group of dedicated young leaders, they began to focus on ways to bring Columbia's young professionals together to create positive change in the region.

After hearing urban affairs guru Richard Florida in 2007, COR and other groups launched the Columbia Talent Magnet Project to find ways to keep Florida's "Creative Class" in our region. The partners included EngenuitySC; the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce; the Midlands Authority for Sports, Conventions, and Tourism; New Carolina - S.C.'s Council on Competitiveness, and the Southern Growth Policies Board.

COR is now the Columbia region's primary vehicle for implementing the goals of the talent magnet project. In 2010 COR entered into a partnership with the Navigating from Good to Great Foundation and the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce. Funding provided by the city of Columbia to the Navigating from Good to Great Foundation allowed the chamber to hire Katherine Swartz as vice president of talent and leadership development. Swartz functions as director of COR and leads the chamber's flagship Leadership Columbia program and its alumni association.

COR is a nonprofit charitable entity with its own board. It sets its own policies, guidelines and programs. COR also must raise funds for programs. Since the partnership began, COR has had three very successful board chairs: Greg Hilton, now executive director of the Midlands Center for Entrepreneurial and Technological Innovation; Chakisse Newton, founder and president of Cardinal Consulting; and current chair David Laird, director of community impact, Central Carolina Community Foundation.

COR is doing what Mayor Benjamin urged, working to create a place that attracts and retains talent. As its website states, COR "connects young, talented professionals in the greater Columbia area to diverse and meaningful networks for leadership, service and fun."

## COR believes:

- Vibrant networks attract, retain and motivate talented people.
- Motivated and talented people create exciting communities; and
- Exciting communities continually renew their talent pool.

COR's vision is "an innovative, energized and successful Columbia community that attracts, inspires, develops and retains the best talent in the world."

Among its signature programs is the

Table for Six dinner series, which fosters networking among young professionals and leading business and organization executives. Last year more than 147 young leaders and 46 executives shared in these programs, which put five young professionals with one senior leader together over dinner. COR also hosted a Table for Six at Columbia College, connecting 30 student leaders with COR's own board. The next Table for Six will be March 14 and will feature "Young Gun" CEOs and C-Suite executives.

COR makes one of its biggest impacts through its service. In 2012 COR completed nine service projects with more than 1,287 volunteers who gave more than 11,480 hours with an estimated community impact of more than \$250,000. Projects include the twice yearly Marine Mud Run. The money raised supports Columbia-area Marines wounded or killed during service, and their families.

Easily one of Columbia's biggest promoters, COR shows that Columbia is a great and unique place for young professionals. Among COR's activities this past year was the Music Break held in August at the Tin Roof to promote the local music scene. In December, COR teamed with Historic Columbia Foundation's Palladium Society, the Leadership Columbia Alumni Association and the S.C. State Museum for an End of the World Party. More than 360 professionals celebrated, raising funds for the museum.

As the mayor said, "...people are looking for a sense of place when they decide where they will live and bring their time, talents and treasures. Together we must create that sense of place in Columbia."

COR is doing just that.

For more information about COR go to [www.ourcor.org](http://www.ourcor.org).

*C. Grant Jackson is senior vice president/community development for the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce.*

## COLUMBIA REGIONAL BUSINESS REPORT

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