

## Gaddy finds passion down unlikely career path

by LIZ SEGRIST  
lsegrist@scbiznews.com

**T**avia Murphy Gaddy aspired to be a greeting card writer but became even more inspirational.

She is the first black woman in South Carolina to be an economic developer at the community level, a job she said comes with its own set of challenges.

"It felt very lonely at first. Sometimes it still does. It's getting better," said Gaddy, a project manager at the Greenville Area Development Corp., or GADC. "It's really one of the primary reasons I decided to come to GADC, for the opportunity to be the first person of color on a local level."

Since joining in 2005, Gaddy has been involved in creating 4,584 new jobs and more than \$100 million in capital investment in Greenville County. Her expansions and recruitments are highlighted with companies like Gordon Food Service, Genesis Press, Samsung, Sealed Air Corp., W.W. Grainger, Saati Americas, Alexium, Proterra, Perceptis and Amy's Kitchen.

Her passion for economic development was personified when her favorite shoe saleswoman at a local department store told her she was leaving for a job that enabled her to make more money, work regular hours and spend more time with her kids.

"She didn't know it and I didn't tell her, but I helped expand that company she was going to work for," Gaddy said. "That's the part of the job I love the most - because what we do as a whole - I can improve the quality of people's lives without them knowing I'm doing it."

### Tavia Murphy Gaddy

**Favorite sport to watch:** Boxing

**Fun fact:** Started a new job, moved and got married all in less than two months

**Original career goal:** Greeting card writer or sports writer

**Hobbies:** Loves reading and shoes

**Organizations:** A Phillis Wheatley Assoc. board member and a Junior League of Greenville member



Gaddy is a sports writer turned state government employee turned economic developer.

"There are some people fortunate to know what they want to be when they're young and become it. I didn't, but looking back and thinking about all the twists and the turns, I realize it has brought me to this point," Gaddy said. "It's been a great ride."

The Columbia native received her bachelor's degree in technical writing from Grambling State University in Grambling, La., and her master's degree in mass communications from the University of South Carolina.

She began her career covering sports as the associate producer for WIS in Columbia. Her stint in the television world made her realize radio was more suited to her liking. The self-proclaimed shy woman pushed herself when she became an audio personality for Clear Channel Radio for the next seven years.

Gaddy switched gears when she became the African-American Heritage Coordinator for the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. She traveled around the state with marketing materials she created to bring awareness to the state's African-American culture and to influence the family reunion travel back into the state.

Gaddy was charged with smoothing tensions following the confederate flag's move from the capitol roof to the state grounds in Columbia in 2000.

"It was a tough job," Gaddy said. "Even as an African American, to go into a St. Helena and get people to discuss their heritage and culture with someone from the government was difficult. It taught

me how to get into the tough markets in rural South Carolina."

The S.C. Department of Commerce then recruited Gaddy to the Community and Rural Planning Development Division for the next three years. She created strategic plans for undeveloped or least-developed counties and prepared them for prospect visits, industrial parks and industrial development.

In October 2005, Gaddy was hired as GADC's project manager. Within less than two months, she had relocated to Greenville, started a new job and gotten married.

"It was crazy for a while, but it seemed like an excellent opportunity," Gaddy said. "It was Greenville and all I could think was 'why not?'"

Gaddy showcases the talent pool; the skilled labor force; the infrastructure; the sites; and the quality of life to prospective companies thinking about relocating to or expanding within Greenville County.

"We discuss advantages of locating in Greenville as opposed to another area by showcasing sites and downtown," Gaddy said. "Not a lot of people expect to see that kind of downtown when they hit Greenville."

Gaddy said she doesn't have a preference with industry recruitment as long as the companies are employing people and paying competitive wages with benefits.

Gaddy was also the third GADC staff member to receive the S.C. Certified Economic Developer, or SCCED, status by completing the intensive five-day S.C. Economic Developers' Advances Symposium in 2008.