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July 16, 2008 9:00AM

Parham speaks to organization she once led

Uptown Lexington Inc., Lexington Appearance Commission present numerous awards

By **WILLIAM KEESLER**
The Dispatch

Since former Uptown [Lexington](#) Executive Director Liz Parham moved away in 2005, she has been back many times.

In 2006, for instance, she returned as an artist for a pig in the Pigs in the City III sidewalk art exhibit.

Tuesday evening she came back as the newly hired director of the Office of Urban Development in the N.C. Department of Commerce's Division of Community Assistance, the new head of the state Main Street Program, and the guest speaker for Uptown [Lexington](#)'s annual awards meeting.

"I'm thrilled to be back," she said. "I always liked annual meetings. It was like, 'We got through another year.' It's a great way to celebrate."

Before and after the meeting, Parham spent time talking individually with many people she got to know during a dozen years as Uptown [Lexington](#)'s founding executive director. The setting - the mezzanine of the refurbished Belk/Vestal department store building on South Main Street - was significant. The renovation and preservation of the building during Parham's tenure in [Lexington](#) won Barry Owen, the redeveloper, a designation as [Lexington](#)'s Main Street Champion.

After spending the past three years as executive director of the Chapel Hill Downtown Economic Development Association, Parham starts her new state job in Raleigh this coming Monday and is preparing to move to a new home in Hillsborough.

"It is really a good time to be involved in revitalization," she told her [Lexington](#) audience. When she entered the field 20 years ago, only about 15 people were doing Main Street revitalization work, she said. Now 5,000 people are doing it worldwide. There's far more public interest and far more support from local and state governments and the news media, she said.

Her [Lexington](#) experience taught three important lessons, she said.



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Former Uptown Lexington executive director Liz Parham, now director of the Office of Urban Development in the N.C. Department of Commerce's Division of Community Assistance and the new head of the state Main Street Program, speaks during the Uptown Lexington annual meeting Tuesday night. Donnie Roberts/The Dispatch

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- Be creative ("unique," "imaginative" and "fresh").
- Be demographically correct (do projects that appeal to all parts of the population).
- Be authentic.

Applying those lessons in three projects in particular - the uptown streetscape project, Pigs in the City and the Belk/Vestal building - helped take Uptown [Lexington](#) to the next level, she said.

"So many of you have put your hearts and souls into Uptown [Lexington](#)," she said. "You've also put your financial resources into it." Successful programs require both, she said.

Mike Turlington, Uptown [Lexington](#)'s outgoing president, listed a number of successes over the past year - a well-attended 14th annual Christmas Open House, renewal of the Uptown Municipal Service District for five years, a net gain of five new businesses in the district and the launch of Pigs in the City 4, among others.

Wade Nichols, the organization's third executive director, listed a number of projects for the new fiscal year, including the 15th annual Christmas Open House on Nov. 23, more focus on facade improvement and the Friends of Uptown support group, the sale of the Grimes Mill building, incorporation of the new railroad bridge on East Center Street in streetscape planning, replacement of uptown Christmas decorations, an auction for some pigs from Pigs in the City 4, the beginning of planning for a fifth Pigs in the City and hopefully, he said, a return of the bicycle races that drew so many people uptown this past Friday night.

"We had people uptown well past 8 o'clock at night," Nichols said. "It is possible, if we give them a reason and an excuse."

Toby Prince, owner of All About Education, is the incoming president for Uptown [Lexington](#). Linda Cook, a Candy Factory employee, and Tom Hall, owner of Gallery Hall, will replace outgoing board members Vicki Comer, owner of The Olde Homestead, and Phillip McGirt, former owner of the Wine & Kitchen Shop.

Uptown [Lexington](#) presented these awards:

- Best Facade Improvement Project: Conrad and Hinkle by Paul Dieffenderfer.
- Best Retail Repositioning: Pandora's Books, by Ronnie and Pandora Hamilton.
- Best Interior Upgrade: Gallery Hall, by Tom and Andrea Hall.
- Best Retail Expansion: Merle Norman Cosmetics, by Don Rea Padon.
- Most Innovative New Business: Perfect Blend Coffee Shop and Roastery, by Tyler Prevatte and Madison Davis.

Becky Anderson, chairwoman of the city Appearance Commission, presented these awards to businesses outside the uptown district:

- Best New Development: The Arneg USA refrigeration plant on Hargrave Road next to the [Lexington](#) Business Center. Anderson said Arneg "has created an industrial building with flair that makes a statement of importance and brings the taste of Italy to our community."
- Best New Infill Development: Lanier Village condominiums at State Street and Second Avenue.
- Best Redevelopment: Family Video on South Main Street.

"We know that the city's appearance is important to [Lexington](#)'s economy because it impacts recruiting jobs and businesses," Anderson said. "But beyond that, the beauty that we take in on a daily basis shapes our experiences and memories. It affects us and how we feel about our community, and therefore it is vitally important."

"In tough economic times, utility and efficiency often take precedence, while attention to beauty in architecture and landscaping can easily be forgotten. There is something to be said for someone who invests in the beauty of our community. And that is "Thank you."

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