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**For Immediate Release**

**Greenville, SC** – The Sister City relationship between Greenville and Kortrijk, Belgium is creating business, education and cultural opportunities for both regions, the Greenville City Council was told on Monday.

Stijn Van de Velde, Kortrijk City Program Director for Greenville Sister Cities International, presented results of the June visit to Kortrijk by a delegation of 11 Upstate representatives to Council at its Aug. 8 meeting.

“We not only found a wonderful community excited to connect to Greenville. We also met strong businesses looking to grow, talented artists and chefs interested in collaborating, and schools and universities searching for new partners,” Van de Velde said.

Craig Lundgren, president of Greenville Sister Cities International, said that Van de Velde, a native of Belgium and member of Greenville Sister Cities International, organized the trip to connect his adopted hometown of Greenville, South Carolina with his native state of Flanders.

“Stijn initiated, organized and executed an engaging delegation visit creating economic development value and countless opportunities for broader community collaborations. Together with Dianne Clark-Kudless, co-leader of the Kortrijk delegation visit, they managed to engage the greater Greenville community to make meaningful connections strengthening our ties with Kortrijk,” said Lundgren.

Mark Farris, president and CEO of Greenville Area Development Corporation and a member of the delegation said organizers emphasized “making business connections and contacts for GADC that are vital to promoting Greenville County as an investment option for Flemish companies.”

Van de Velde told City Council that, among its results, the trip has created several economic development opportunities, solidified a trip by 100 Belgian Rotarians to Greenville next year, and created several educational and cultural exchange opportunities between the two cities. The team is now working on a return visit by a delegation of community and business leaders from Kortrijk to Greenville, scheduled for May of next year.

“Sister Cities provided an avenue to develop relationships with peer organizations such as the West Flemish Chamber of Commerce, as well as to directly engage with companies and CEOs who shape capital investment decisions for their firms,” said Hank Hyatt, vice president of the Greenville Chamber of Commerce and member of the delegation. “As a result of the visit, our Chambers are exploring the development of an official Memorandum of Understanding to promote future collaboration.”

During the trip, the delegation, among others:

* Visited industry knowledge centers supporting textiles and transportation, as well as an advanced regional Welcome Center designed to ease foreign companies into the local economy.
* Participated in a major network event focused on creativity and design, during which Furman University hosted a live online program with the Belgian delegation from their brand new Hurley Finance and Business Analytics Lab. The online broadcast matched business leaders in Greenville and Kortrijk around six topics of common interest: school innovation, public health programs, culinary arts, the business of cycling, co-working spaces, and entrepreneurial business growth.
* Hosted a CEO luncheon attended by a select audience of 30 high level West Flemish business leaders, during which Greenville delegates profiled the city, county and wider Upstate region, and celebrated Orian Rugs’ owner Lucien Vanwynsberghe, a Belgian, to honor his company’s longtime operations and continued growth in Anderson County.
* Laid a wreath at the World War I Kemmel American Monument. The monument commemorates the services of the US 30th Division which received its training at Greenville’s Camp Sevier.

“The economic development focus for this trip was remarkable,” said Elizabeth Feather, director of research for the Upstate SC Alliance. “Our visits to Uptex and i-Trans let us further explore bonds between the Upstate and Kortrijk based on common industry strengths, while the CEO Lunch gave us the opportunity to connect directly with company decision-makers and to celebrate and thank companies like Orian Rugs, which has thrived in the Upstate.”

Greenville Sister Cities International was created in 1984, joining an international network to create global ties and reduce the chance of world conflict. In addition to Kortrijk, Greenville has sister city relationships with Bergamo, Italy and Tianjin, China, and has prospective interest from Clermont-Ferrand, France, Vadodara, India, Kemer-Antalya, Turkey, and Nagahama, Japan.

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Visit Greenville Sister Cities on Facebook or online at <http://greenvillesistercities.org>.