

GO Experience picks architects

By Jenny Munro

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A Chicago architectural firm and a Charleston-based project management company are partnering with the Greater Greenville Convention and Visitors Bureau to bring two flagship tourism projects to fruition.

The GO Experience at 301 River St. will be an interactive visitors center and an attraction for local residents while the Blue Wall Centre will be a gateway to mountain adventures. Completion is ex-

pected in mid-2011.

Studio Gang was selected as the architectural firm from among 34 proposals presented to RhodesDahl, the project manager.

RhodesDahl looked for firms that do innovative work that become attractions while being environmentally sustainable structures, said Noreen Hughes, a RhodesDahl partner.

"The buildings need to be iconic," she said.

In addition, a local archi-

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GEORGE GARDNER / Staff

Jeanne Gang speaks at a GO Experience press conference.

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tectural firm will be selected to partner with Studio Gang, said Jeanne Gang, principal and founder of Studio Gang.

Gang said Greenville "is full of people who have had amazing foresight about design" and she wants to build on that.

Environmental preservation and conservation are part of the Greenville ethic, Gang said.

Plans are for the Blue Wall Centre to complement Reedy Park in downtown Greenville. Instead of an urban park experience, it would provide a mountain experience.

A 178-acre parcel on State 11, the former Camp Spearhead property is owned by Naturaland Trust. Upstate Forever holds the conservation easement. The Tourism Leadership Council is negotiating with the parties for a ground lease.

"It is a critical natural asset," Gang said of the property along the Blue Ridge Escarpment. "It's literally a wall. It's pretty stunning."

Conceptual designs are to be completed by December, Hughes said.

"We focus on trying to make the building part of its city," Gang said. "We're excited. We were drawn right away to the quality and assets of Greenville and this area."

With the designs in hand, serious fund-raising then begins, said Paul Wickenbaker, chairman of the CVB's Tourism Leadership Council. Greenville County provided a total of \$10 million in seed money. However, the total cost is expected to be about \$30 million, with funding sought from federal, state and city governments as well as corporations.

Joe Dill, Greenville County Council member, said the county participated in the seed funding because the projects "will generate a massive amount of tourism."

Bogue Wallin, CVB chairman, said that tourism currently is responsible for less than 5 percent of the local GDP.