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Obama spotlight casts uneven glow on Greenwood

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Last summer, Barack Obama visited Greenwood, S.C. The end result was a frustrating one for some and the city landed on the cover of The Wall Street Journal.

Jay West, CEO of Partnership Alliance of Greenwood, was not happy with the article that ran Sept. 27.

“It painted a grim picture of Greenwood County and it’s something that went out all over the country” he says. “It was very inaccurate. We’re seeing a lot of growth right now.” Despite the article, Obama’s stop in Greenwood did bring about a positive thing for the city that has really gotten crowds fired up – a new chant for the presidential candidate’s rallies across the country.

The rally cry “Fired up! Ready to go!” came about due to one Greenwood resident.

Her name is Edith Childs and the city is grateful for her spunk.

“Her phrase left Greenwood and went all over the country and the world,” says West.

Childs, a county councilwoman, says it put Greenwood on the map.

“I’m humbled that he’s using it and when you hear those five words, it just kind of energizes you,” she says. In September, Obama called Childs on her cell phone and she didn’t believe it was him.

“I was at the Dollar General and said, ‘I don’t have time to play games.’” When she realized it really was him, he said, “Do you realize you are a celebrity? Everyone is singing fired up.”

Jackie Norris, Obama’s senior advisor in Iowa, said the phrase became a rally cry for supporters.

“It was used as a conclusion to show people the power an individual has when they come together as a group,” says Norris. “After it took place, it became a staple to his conversations in Iowa and across the country.”

Early that summer Obama kept a promise to Anne Parks, who represents part of Greenwood County in the South Carolina House of Representatives, and stopped in Greenwood, a town of 22,400, along his campaign trail.

“He is a man of his word,” says Norris.

When he arrived in Greenwood on a rainy June morning, there were only 38 supporters due to a miscommunication between the campaign aides and Parks. Many people were disappointed they weren’t able to attend.

So did these issues with the residents of Greenwood hurt Obama’s campaign in any way?

“Gosh no,” says Norris. “When you run for office you put yourself on the line and every vote counts. The goals are still the same whether it’s 20 people or 1,000.”

When Obama realized there were hurt feelings, Childs says he knew he had to come back to Greenwood. “It kind of lifted people’s spirits,” says Childs.

Obama returned to Greenwood Jan. 22.

And he brought the lady with the purple church hat onto the stage and those five strong words woke everybody up.

Although the story about hurt feelings was heard across the country, Childs says the publicity was a good thing.

“It was an eye opener to the Greenwoodians,” she says. “If people don’t come and see what you have to offer, they will think it’s a country hick town, but if you visit you can come and form your opinion.”

West did contact the reporter with The Wall Street Journal to tell him the positive things about Greenwood, such as the growth of the downtown and retail sector.

West says he feels Child’s phrase and the notoriety it’s brought has been positive for the community and Obama’s campaign.

“What she did was tremendous,” he says. “This might be the next President of the United States and (the phrase) created momentum for him. That’s very important for Greenwood.

“Edith’s enthusiasm is shared with others in Greenwood,” says West.

Childs’ plan is to be a delegate at the national convention in Denver, but she plans to pay her own way.

“I’m ecstatic about going to Denver,” she says. “I already have my ticket.”