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Pick Pickens

By Angela Shultz

There's something distinctly charming about any small, close-knit town. One that believes bigger is not necessarily better. Where people look you in the eye and give genuine smiles when you pass them on the street. Where no one is a stranger — even if they're out-of-towners. If this is the type of place you long for, then Pickens, SC, is the town of your dreams.

Named for the American Revolutionary War hero General Andrew Pickens and known as "The Gem of the Foothills," this quaint town of just over 3,000 people sits right off scenic Hwy. 11. And while Pickens is no bustling city, this beautiful little town has everything you could ask for. It's rich in historical landmarks, like Hagood Mill—a working 19th-century gristmill

with corn-grinding demonstrations and mill tours on the third Saturday of each month. And the streets are frequented by charming shops like Main Street Antiques and Uniques—filled with all things old and new, from antique furniture to popular brands of jewelry and handbags. And brimming with friendly folks.

So what will you do while you're in Pickens? Well, according to shop owner Margie Childs, in Pickens, you have to "find your fun." And most people have no problem finding it here.

A transplant from California, Mrs. Childs and her husband own The Butterfly—a fun and festive gift store right in the middle of downtown. When you open the door to her unassuming shop, you're greeted by a flood of color. Jewelry, purses, clothes and other knickknacks adorn every



Hagood Mill was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 and is one of the oldest surviving gristmills still producing grain products in South Carolina.

square inch of available space, and Mrs. Childs buzzes around the shop—all smiles and warm conversation.

After a visit with Mrs. Childs, visit the Pickens County Museum of Art and History. Housed in the old 1902 Victorian Pickens County "gaol" (jail), this unique building looks more like a castle than a museum. It houses two stories of Upstate history exhibits, new and permanent art exhibits. It's also home to Native American and African-American artifacts, musical instruments, displays that explore the county's history in depth and a gift shop featuring the works of some 70 local artists. Additional features include a recreated 19th-century pioneer cabin, a circa-1858 early post office and a pioneer school setting.

Nearby is a treasure trove of antiques and fine art in the Hagood-Mauldin House and Irma Morris Museum of Fine Arts. Filled with beautiful portraits, furniture, silver and porcelain, the museum was once home to Irma Hendricks Morris, a noted authority in 17th- and 18th-century antiques who traveled extensively, collecting art works and period pieces. In 1987, she willed the home and all of its contents to the Pickens County Historical Society so that they can be enjoyed for generations to come.

In addition to these permanent Pickens landmarks, the town plays host to some wonderful events during the year. Every April, the town is painted varying hues of pink and white with the blooming of the azaleas, and for an entire weekend, the town celebrates with the Pickens Azalea Festival. This invitational arts and crafts festival began in 1983 and has been likened more to a large family reunion than a festival. Today, the event is more than vendor tables of arts and crafts—varied musical entertainment, a classic car cruise-in, an amusement ride park and great food make it fun for the entire family.

Oh, and if you happen upon Pickens in the fall on the most sacred of small-town nights, be sure to take part in the ritual known as Friday Night Football. The cheers of fans, the beat of the band, the greetings of friends and the clang of footsteps on metal bleachers fill the air while the lights from the stadium brighten the night sky as the Pickens Blue Flame takes on their opponent. It's a tradition that connects the community. And Pickens is all about connections. You'll feel it in every shop you enter. And you'll see it in the smiling eyes of the locals. It's in everything. While the history, the shops, the festivals and the scenery are all wonderful, it's the people who make Pickens special. Because they, more than anything else, make you want to return for another healthy dose of small-town America.



Top: Margie Childs, owner of The Butterfly gift shop.

Bottom left: The Hagood-Mauldin House.

Center and bottom right: the Pickens County Museum of Art and History.