

Community projects bode well for 2010 2009 left a legacy of change - and hopefully, progress - in bits and pieces in many local areas.

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Three days ago, you were putting 2009 on checks and letters.

Now, the old year is history, leaving behind a legacy of change in just about every area.

Maybe things aren't quite where we'd like them to be yet. But in many cases, we're better off than 12 months ago.

Progress is welcome, even in bits and pieces.

In Mount Holly, supporters of the Catawba River Greenway got a big boost at year's end. Just before Christmas, the Clariant Corp. presented the city with the first conservation easement for the greenway.

Scott Griffin, co-chair of Friends of the Greenway, told me that outgoing Mayor Robert Whitt had worked long hours with City Manager Eric Davis and City Attorney Kemp Michael to make this happen before Whitt left office.

According to Griffin, Whitt had resigned himself to the fact that the easement wasn't going to happen on his watch.

But Clariant made Whitt's dream come true.

The easement is the beginning of an 11-mile-plus greenway for Mount Holly and Gaston County. It will also be a key part of the Carolina Thread Trail.

Don't expect to hike the whole 11 miles in 2010, however.

But the first piece is in place - and that's a big deal.

Former Mount Holly City Council member and mayor Brian Hough has returned to the mayor's post. I wish him well as he deals with such issues as wastewater treatment and economic development.

Cramerton also has a new mayor, Ronnie Worley, who told me wastewater is the biggest issue facing that town. A few years ago, Cramerton spent about \$5 million on state-mandated improvements at its wastewater treatment plant. When the town's largest water customer, Eagle Finishing, closed its doors, residents had to pick up the tab for water plant upgrades.

The bottom line: "We have the highest water bills in the county," Worley said.



Clariant Corporation's donation along the Catawba River will be a part of the Catawba River Greenway. PHOTOS BY L. MUELLER - lmueller@charlotteobserver.com



Clariant Corporation announced recently that it will donate a conservation easement along the Catawba River to be a part of the Catawba River Greenway at Mt. Holly. PHOTOS BY L. MUELLER - lmueller@charlotteobserver.com

Cramerton is looking at regional approaches to the problem. The town has a memorandum of agreement to treat all the wastewater for Lowell, McAdenville and Pharr Yarns and a portion of Gastonia's wastewater. Worley said there's a possibility of discussions with Belmont about a partnership.

Meanwhile, construction is scheduled to begin in 2010 on a new high school at the old Lakewood Golf Course in Cramerton. The 1,200-student school, as yet unnamed, will help relieve overcrowded conditions at East Gaston and South Point highs.

The new high school - Gaston County's 10th - won't be open in 2010, but the project appears to be on track.

A lot of new projects are in the works in Gaston and Lincoln counties and the Catawba Valley.

I look forward to watching their progress. By the time 2010 has flown by, I hope we're even better off than before.

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