$200K seed money helps advance Destination Oconee initiative

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
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SENECA — Destination Oconee, a comprehensive tourism plan that would uniformly brand and market every corner and community in the county, already has $200,000 seed money to invest.

Ken Sloan said $100,000 made available through the efforts of Oconee's delegation in the state legislature has been matched by $100,000 from the South Carolina Heritage Corridor that will help advance strategies contained in the 200-page Destination Oconee plan approved earlier this year by municipal and county elected officials.

"Some of the recommendations (of Destination Oconee) are already in play," Sloan said at last week's meeting of the Oconee Economic Alliance, which got an update on the proposal.

Sloan said work is underway on preparing signs incorporating a "rustic elegance" branding design.

"You'll see some very nice rock (and) timber 'rustic elegance' entrance signs coming in from Clemson and coming off Highway 11," Sloan said. "We'll do a couple (of signs) this year, a couple next year, with the goal of having every entrance to Oconee County with some sort of rustic elegance signage."

OEA executive director Richard Blackwell told board members the next step would be hiring someone whose role it will be to coordinate and implement more than 10 recommendations contained in the Destination Oconee plan.

"We haven't figured out the name of the position yet," Blackwell said of the future hire, which has been approved by county council as a position within the OEA.

"Let's just call it a community developer of sorts," Blackwell said, adding that the person so hired is going to "live, breathe and eat" the Destination Oconee initiative every single day.

Blackwell compared the Destination Oconee undertaking with the vision drafted by the city of Greenville for its downtown in the 1960s.

"It didn't happen overnight," Blackwell said. "It took the city of Greenville 40 years after they started the initiative, and they're still working on it. They never stopped working on improving their downtown. This is the same concept.

"You never want to stop improving. ... In order for us to never stop, we have to have a person that is responsible."

County administrator Scott Moulder, who sits on the OEA board, said volunteers are needed to be part of an action committee created to implement Destination Oconee.

"We've got to start organizing our efforts and what our objectives are going to be over the next five to 10 years," Moulder said.

Applications are being accepted for the citizens committee that will work on Destination Oconee, Moulder said. He said candidates need to be approved by county council.

"We're not going to do it all in the first year," Moulder said. "We need to start taking baby steps, and that's what that committee is going to do."

carlos@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6684
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