Broadband project advances

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — Oconee County's push to establish a broadband network is gaining momentum.

County officials already have launched oconeefocus.com to help the public get answers to frequently asked questions about the broadband project and what it'll mean to them.

Oconee County Procurement Director Robyn Courtright said Wednesday that she is working on a contract for Southern Pipeline Utility of Hayesville, N.C., to undertake the first phase of the project at a cost of $1.8 million.

County Council voted Tuesday to award the contract to Southern Pipeline.

Southern Pipeline was designated Oconee's primary resource for installation of fiber optic cable after successfully completing a smaller project three months ago that cost $19,500. The project entailed boring fiber optic cable from the Pine Street Administrative Offices to the Walhalla Library.

The Oconee broadband project, called FOCUS — Fiber Optics Creating Unified Solutions — will establish 245 miles of broadband fiber buried under county roads.

Southern Pipeline's contract calls for the company to bury the initial 80 miles of fiber optic cable in the network.

The project is made possible by a $9.6 million grant received last month that is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The entire project is expected to take three years to complete.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said the federal grant already assigned a project manager to the county to make sure Oconee abides by the terms of the grant.

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Stuart Pohl, owner of Spot On The Alley, also has taken advantage of the opportunity to provide dining and drinking opportunities outside.

"Every week has been busier than the one before it," Pohl said. "We'll see what happens this week, because that's the second week with the new band."

He' s referring to the new house act, a six-member band called Soulfeathers that fuses jazz, blues and rock into its musical flavor.

"It's been great for business," Pohl said. "We've had our regulars, but it has been bringing in people we haven't seen. I've essentially had to double the size of my dining room on Thursdays because of the tables we put outside. It's a good problem to have."

September's Jazz On The Alley, co-sponsored by Oconee County Chamber of Commerce, will be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. every Thursday.

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