Cherokee museum needs funding to open

BY MIKAYLA KREUZBERGER
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WALHALLA — The Museum of the Cherokee in South Carolina, just behind the county's courthouse on Short Street, has enough Native American artifacts, replicas, maps and images to open tomorrow.

But it can't.

"We have thousands of artifacts waiting in storage, but right now we don't have enough funding to open," Curator Luther Lyle said.

Lyle said the museum only needs a few more thousand dollars to finish interior construction for the project to be complete.

The walls are painted and the floors are tiled, but Lyle said the structure still needs a security system and more display cases, among other necessities. Currently, Lyle is installing donated baseboards and outfitting doors and windows with trimming.

"We've spent everything we have," Lyle said. "And right now there just aren't any grants available."

He pointed out that the money spent since renovations began in 2009 has come mostly from grants and private donations.

"Most of the labor and materials are donated from people interested in the project and from other Native American tribes within the state," Lyle said.

He said a few businesses have help cut costs, too, by selling materials at wholesale prices.

The building has gone through tremendous renovations over the last few years.

"The roof was rotted completely through — there was no ceiling, and the floor was crumbling as roots had grown under the concrete and into the building," Lyle said. "We've closed up a few windows, torn down the tree causing the root problems and we've added a few back rooms for storage and utilities."

The exterior is finished and outfitted with a new door and plaque that details the building's history as a law office built in 1905.

Lyle said he's also restored the original fireplace, which is now wired to use electric logs.

The museum, once open, will be the only Native American museum in the state of South Carolina, Lyle said.

"That includes all Native American tribes, not just Cherokee," he said. "The Catawba tribe has a reservation, but not a museum. We will be the Native American museum for the state."

Lyle said anyone can donate to the museum. Call (864) 710-9210, email lutherlyle@bellsouth.net or visit www.cherokeemuseumsc.org.



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The Museum of the Cherokee in South Carolina will be the only Native American museum in the state once it opens. However, lack of funding by only a few thousand dollars has prohibited the museum from opening this fall.

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