Clemson football frenzy fills hotels



CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE | THE JOURNAL

lemson University cheerleaders fire up passersby Friday afternoon while ESPN ameDay production crews set up for this morning's live broadcast from Bowman ield. Hotel rooms in the area have been hard to find in advance of the game.

Demand 'off the charts'

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Tonight's big-time college football game in Clemson is generating big-time business for hotels, restaurants and stores along the U.S. 123 corridor from Seneca to Central.

That the game falls on a long Labor Day weekend is generating plenty of foot traffic for area businesses.

Ken Sloan, head of the Mountain Lakes Convention & Visitors Bureau, said that hotel rooms are hard to find.

"All hotels in the area are booked," Sloan said Friday. "People are calling about renting private homes, sort of like what happened when Atlanta hosted the Olympic Games."

Becky Patton, assistant property manager at Lake Keowee Rentals, the rental division of 1st Choice Realty, agreed with Sloan that the demand has been off the charts. Lake Keowee Rentals manages more than 100 rental properties, including about 40 two-bedroom, two-

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bath condos, villas and townhomes. Although some of the rentals are long-term, the majority of units booked have been driven by the Clemson versus University of Georgia game.

"Housing is definitely in demand," Patton said. "We are completely booked. Some people are having to stay in Greenville."

Sloan said it's unfortunate that the new Hampton Inn in Seneca likely won't be ready to open for another two weeks, because it would have had its 100 rooms completely booked, too. He said hotels make more money during Clemson's football season because the rates are at least 70 percent more expensive than off-season rates.

Kevin Short, director of the Oconee County Regional Airport, said calls have been streaming in all week with inquiries about parking at the facility, rental car referrals and hotel accommodations.

Short said he expected to start seeing a pick-up in the number of flights coming in for the game by late Friday afternoon. However, he said the busiest time would be today.

The airport, which extended its runway to 5,000 feet in 2012, is expecting a few more arrivals from larger corporate jets that previously could not land there because of the shorter runway.

"Typically, the people that come in corporate jets are alumni," Short said. "It's the season opener with a renewing rivalry from a next-door neighbor, and it's going to make for a great football weekend."

The positive ripple effect on the local economy extends to many restaurants, shops and stores, Sloan said.

"The rule of thumb on the economic impact is that visitors spend about $125 a day while they are here," he said.

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FOOTBALL: Season kicks off tonight



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Shopping and browsing picked up steam along College Avenue in Clemson on Friday. The season-opening showdown between the Tigers and University of Georgia tonight is generating traffic for businesses along the U.S. 123 corridor from Seneca to Central.