



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Visiting Lake Jocassee at Devil's Fork State Park is just one of the many outdoors options for those who want to be active on the first day of the new year.

BY JOSIE RABBITT
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SENECA — The concept of January 1 was first introduced to society by Julius Caesar when the 304 days-a-year calendar in Rome didn't "quite sync with the cycle of the sun and moon," according to an online article from the History Channel.

Caesar created a Julian calendar, which is much like the Gregorian one used today, instituting Jan. 1 as the first day of the year to honor the month's theme — beginnings. Romans embraced the concept by giving gifts and throwing feasts.

Centuries later, similar traditions continue.

Making the new year memorable is made easy in the Upstate as several venues throw unique events to kickstart 2014 — from a local karaoke night to polar plunges to 5K events — there's something for everyone.

Local residents can sing the last day of 2013 away at The Spot on Ram Cat Alley in downtown Seneca. The Spot is one of the few venues open during the holidays. The Spot's New Year's Eve party will start at 8 p.m., according to bartender Tracy Donald. A disc jockey will be spinning some tracks in memory of 2013.

"The DJ is really good about implementing karaoke, too," Donald said. "It will be a very fun last night of the year."

Greenville's shopping villas and an ice skating plaza are open Tuesday-Thursday in celebratory fashion for the new year. However, if Greenville is too far, the Simon Mall in Anderson is also hosting holiday events.

The mall's $10,000 sweepstakes ends Jan. 1. Anderson's mall calls it the "Holiday Sweeps," with five entry methods and a winner's list to be announced at the start of 2014. There is no purchase necessary to sign up for the sweepstakes, but a visit to the mall to enter and to cash in on New Year's Eve deals are added incentives.

Looking for more outdoorsy events for New Year's Eve and New Year's Day?

Oconee State Park in Mountain Rest is hosting a waterfall excursion from Tuesday-Thursday. The program is a special one designed as a two-night stay in one of the park's cozy cabins and a trip to four of the Upstate's iconic waterfalls. The first day's itinerary begins with a 4 p.m. check in. Day two includes hiking to Yellow Branch Falls, Brasstown Falls, Bull Sluice on the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River and Reedy Branch Falls. Day three is a 10 a.m. check-out, but an additional night's stay is only $50 as part of a special for 2014 celebrators.

Can't pull an all-nighter?

At 2 p.m. Jan. 1, Oconee State Park will host a 1.5-mile excursion through the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) structures for a "more laid back and historical hike," according to Brooks Wade, co-owner of Lake Jocassee Tours.

Table Rock State Park in Pickens County will host several unique trail-blazing events where hikers of all kinds are invited to start the new year off exploring the great outdoors. Table Rock's "First Day" hike begins Jan. 1 at 9 a.m. at the Table Rock Nature Center. The hike is a 7.2-mile hike estimated to take about six hours and covers more than 6,248 feet. According to Wade, this hike "will leave you breathless."

Table Rock's second hike, scheduled on New Year's Day, begins at 10 a.m. The hike is 1.6 miles around Lake Pinnacle. A tour of past CCC activities combines with the present day activities of the CCC to make this hike one for the history books.

Not to be outdone, Lake Keowee park rangers are leading a New Year's resolution hike at Keowee-Toxaway State Park in Sunset that rewards hikers with hot chocolate afterward. The strenuous 1.4-mile hike along the Natural Bridge Nature Trail highlights the uneven and rugged terrain. Wade encourages hikers to bring cameras "to capture New Year's memories."

Not interested in hiking but still want to start that exercise resolution?

Devils Fork State Park, located in Salem, will be hosting a 5K run Jan. 1 at 10 a.m. Registration is open until Thursday. For just $20, runners, hikers and resolution-makers can participate in the 5K or in an alternative hike led by park rangers. The fee also includes the "Noon Loon Lunge" where a plunge into icy waters is sponsored by the Friends of Jocassee. Park admission is free for all participants.

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