Football signals start of peak

Accommodations tax revenue spikes in Oconee and Pickens

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SENECA — The kick-off to the Clemson University Tigers' 2009 football season could not have come soon enough for area hotels.

A Days Inn clerk said on Monday that the Seneca hotel was almost booked to capacity, thanks in part to the Tigers' first home game of the season Saturday in which the home team easily disposed of Middle Tennessee, 37-14.

The start of Clemson football coincides with the peak fall season for local hotels. Area hoteliers, restaurateurs and shopkeepers are crossing their collective fingers and hoping that business picks up for the six remaining Clemson home games on the schedule.

Tourism-related businesses are coming off a disappointing spring and summer, if 2008-09 fourth quarter state accommodations tax (Atax) revenue distributions are any indication.

Oconee County received $25,175.60 from Atax collections by the state, or 11.2 percent less than the $28,365.97 brought in during the fourth quarter in 2007-08.

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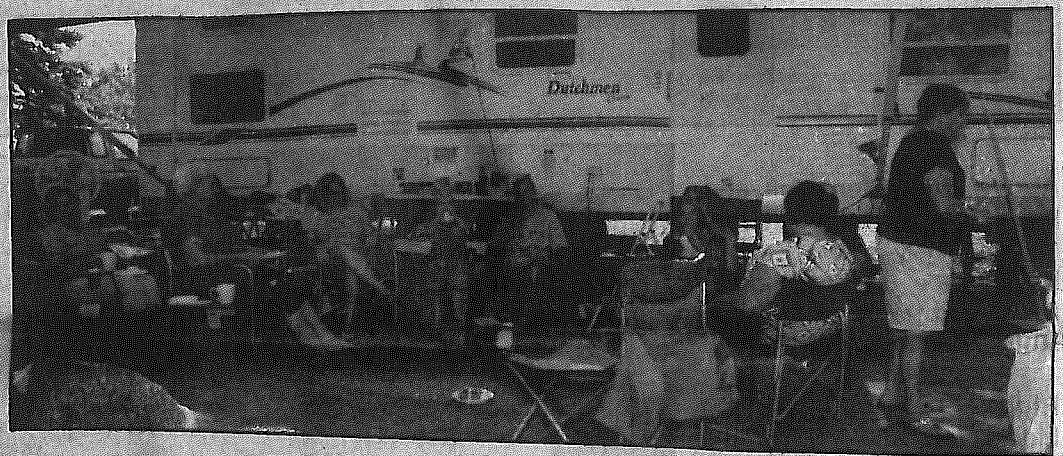
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For instance, despite being in the grips of a deep recession, Oconee received $38,813.84 in Atax revenue during the first quarter of 2008-09, while Pickens County pulled in $74,388.33.

Aside from Clemson football, local tourism gets a boost in the fall from annual events such as the Apple Festival Oktoberfest next month in Walhalla.

Tourism officials in Oconee and Pickens will be closely monitoring Atax revenues in the coming months to see if indeed the worst is over from the two-year-long economic downturn.



Jessica Nelms/Staff

Members of the Kelly, Smith, Talley and Neal families spend Labor Day weekend camping together at South Cove Park in Seneca. State accommodations taxes collected for overnight stays are sent back to local communities to promote tourism.