Hagood Mill key to tourism

By Amy Clarke Burns
Staff writer
aburns@greenvilleonline.com

The shuttered doors of Hagood Mill will soon be flung open for visitors again as Pickens County moves to hire a new site director and get the historic mill up and running again under new leadership.

Hagood Mill Historic Site and Folklife Center has been closed, except for Music in the Mountains special events, since the unexpected death of site manager Ed Bolt in December.

Since that time, Hagood Mill has been reorganized under a new division within Pickens County's government, and a replacement manager will be hired to reopen the mill and help it grow.

"If you look at the mill itself, it functions as so many different types of things for our community," said Helen Hockwalt, director of the newly created tourism and marketing division for Pickens County.

Hockwalt took over the position at the beginning of this year.

In the absence of a traditional convention and visitors' bureau, the tourism department will help promote and market the county's destinations, including Hagood Mill, the South Carolina Rock Art Center located there, and Mile Creek Park on the shores of Lake Keowee, she said. A music venue for Liberty is also in the works.

Hagood Mill previously fell under the control of the Pickens County Cultural Commission, which included the Pickens County Museum of Art and History, and its director, Allen Coleman.

Coleman and Hockwalt both described the transition as the experience of watching a child grow up and venture off on his own.

"It's time to give it its own space," Hockwalt said.

When Hagood Mill reopens, a date for which hasn't been set, it will feature the same attractions that have made it a popular spot in recent years, including the monthly Music in the Mountains series, operation of the 1845 grist mill, and field classes on primitive skills and historic art forms.

In addition, the goal is to eventually expand the offerings at Hagood Mill to take advantage of its role as a historic site.

One of the early steps will be introducing a special Visit Hagood Mill website to provide information and encourage visits from near and far.

With the addition of the Rock Art Center highlighting the prehistoric petroglyphs, Hockwalt said, Hagood Mill may start getting curious visitors and researchers from around the country and even the world.

Hockwalt said funding for Hagood Mill isn't expected to change in the wake of the reorganization.

For the fiscal year ending July 1, 2013, the mill received more than $76,700 in county funding, a large portion of which came from the county accommodations tax, Coleman said.

In addition, fundraising and other sources, including gift shop sales, event sponsorships and donations, brought in an additional $36,600 that was used to fund programming at Hagood Mill.

Meanwhile, visitors may use the site for hiking, picnicking and sightseeing during the day.