New cottages open door to natural world



KEN OSBURN / Staff

Jackie Kippen shows off the new cottages that will serve as dorms for children at Camp Hannon at Pinnacle Falls. Cliffs Communities gave land to Clemson University in 2008 for the Youth Learning Institute.

Kids facing difficulty to get place of retreat

Groups partner to provide camp experience for children

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SUNSET — Work has been completed on the first phase of an Upstate educational facility organizers say will potentially impact thousands of children.

Two custom-built cottages have opened at Camp Hannon at Pinnacle Falls, property located in Jocassee Gorges in northern Pickens County.

"I think that thousands of children who would otherwise never experience the beauty of the natural environment in South Carolina's Upstate will get a chance to do that," said Pam Bryant, director of public relations for the Clemson University Youth Learning Institute.

The camp is a partnership between Clemson University and its Youth Learning Institute; Jim Anthony and The Cliffs Communities; and the Scott Hannon Memorial Foundation, a nonprofit charity based in Columbia that is focused on helping needy and underprivileged kids, according to Bryant.

In 2008, Anthony and The Cliffs Communities donated 80 acres that make up the Pinnacle Falls site to Clemson University, where Camp Hannon now is located.

Thomas Buxton, director of the Scott Hannon Memorial Foundation, which was established in memory of Scott Hannon, a junior at East Carolina University who was killed in a car accident, said the foundation has long had a vision of buying property and establishing its own camp for youth.

Buxton said this partnership is the realization of that vision. He said the foundation has funded

See CAMP on page 5B

CAMP

FROM PAGE 1B

kids to go to camps, including those who are undergoing chemotherapy, who have siblings who have died from cancer or who have at least one parent in prison.

Until now, however, the camps have had inadequate facilities.

"We wanted to create a place where these kids could go and really have a wonderful place to enjoy," he said.

Construction of the cottages started in the spring of 2009 at a cost of just more than $1 million. Around $400,000 of that was donated to the foundation through goods and services, Buxton said.

Together the two cottages can accommodate just under 100 kids, he said.

"They are just stunning," Bryant said of the cottages. "They will serve as boys and girls dorms — one for boys and one for girls."

She said the Scott Hannon Memorial Foundation has donated the cottages to Clemson.

"So now Clemson owns the land, owns the cottages, and the Youth Learning Institute is the university's chosen steward in terms of overseeing the property and the facilities and running the program," Bryant said.

She said Camp Hannon will be used for youth development programs, including summer and year-round programs, and said during the school year they will welcome students to the site for environmental education.

"We'll begin using the cottages this fall for programming," Bryant said.

Buxton said phase two for the camp calls for a 500-seat, multi-purpose auditorium and two more cottages.

Plans are underway for the second phase, Buxton said, but a timeline hasn't been set.