Leaders: 'Too early to tell' on Sunday alcohol impact

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BY GREG OLIVER
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Sunday alcohol sales are now in effect in Clemson and Oconee County, but local leaders say it's too early to gauge the impact.

"They have only had the one day," said Clemson mayor J.C. Cook, a former bar/restaurant owner who said Sunday was the first day alcohol was sold since the referendum passed Nov. 4. "It will probably take at least a few months to determine if it increases sales or not."

Clemson City Council approved a resolution in April that set the wheels in motion for voting on Sunday alcohol sales on the November referendum. Business owners had told council their business was being negatively impacted since customers, upon being told they could not order alcohol on Sunday, would go to another establishment.

Supporters said the sale of alcohol on Sundays would allow hospitality and accommodations fees to increase since more visitors are stopping in Clemson and staying in the city for Sunday meals and activities. They pointed out more tax-paying jobs would be provided, business license fees increased and revenues increased as a result.

Since the referendum's passage, businesses that sell liquor for on-site consumption are required to purchase a license for individual Sundays at $200 per day or $3,050 for the year. ABC stores are not allowed to sell on Sundays under any circumstances.

Clemson city clerk Beverly Coleman said businesses acquiring permits for Sunday sales are already licensed in the city and sold alcohol prior to the referendum, though not on Sundays.

"This does not impact their business licenses until maybe next year,

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Tiger Town Tavern manager Shane Vaught serves a pair of cold beers. Mayor J.C. Cook said alcohol was sold in Clemson bars and restaurants Sunday for the first time since a referendum allowing Sunday alcohol sales in the city passed Nov. 4.

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with an increase in revenue for them on their renewal," Coleman said. "I have not had any new business license applications because of it yet."

Assistant city administrator Andy Blondeau said the first weekend of Sunday alcohol sales in Clemson was uneventful.

"Everything has gone really smooth," Blondeau said.

Clemson police chief Jimmy Dixon, when asked if he anticipates any problems for law enforcement now that downtown bars and restaurants in the city can sell alcohol on Sundays, replied, "(It's) too early to tell."

Oconee County voters also approved a Sunday alcohol sales referendum, supported by owners who said their businesses were being negatively impacted compared to those in the Seneca city limits due to the availability of alcohol on Sunday. They also supported the measure because of the enhancement of economic development and tourism that would result.

County administrator Scott Moulder said Sunday sales "have been available for a while now" in Oconee.

"Businesses can submit their application in Greenville and begin selling immediately that same day," Moulder said. "It's been up to businesses — the county finished their part the Monday after the referendum."

Steven Bradley contributed to this story.

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