Leaders singing in perfect harmony

State of Oconee calls for civic cooperation

By BRETT McLAUGHLIN
brett@dailyjm.com

WALHALLA — Civic and business leaders from across Oconee County were singing from the same hymnal Thursday and the lyrics were all about teamwork and cooperation.

The festival of good feelings was the centerpiece of the first State of Oconee event, held at the Walhalla Civic Auditorium and presented by the Oconee County Chamber of Commerce.

A standing room only crowd filled the facility's new community room for lunch and listened as representatives of county and municipal governments sang the praises of their venues and touched on the communal theme of partnering for progress.

"Cooperation between the cities has never been better," said Seneca Councilman E. Riley, "and we need to do that to continue to progress."

Pointing to park improvements and expanded water and sewer operations, Riley said the city has "gotten things done by working together and being willing to compromise."

Even the keynote speaker, Clemson Basketball Coach Oliver Purnell, fell in line, saying that his team's success in recent years is attributable to teamwork and positive character traits.

"Talent is important but it is more important to have Clemson guys," Purnell said.

West Union Mayor Sharon Nunnery, who asked Purnell if she could come to his house for steak if she agreed to be the team "grandma," (He told her she had to bring the steak and audition for the part.) said, "We're all tired of every town trying to be a separate entity unto itself."

Also speaking on behalf of their communities were Westminster Mayor Derek Hodgin, Walhalla Chamber of Commerce President Glenn Buddin and Fair Play Community Association founder Tim Mays.

Buddin, using a theme of "changing perception" introduced by Purnell, said he believes Walhalla is at that stage of its development. Acknowledging the need to revitalize its downtown, Buddin said, "As the county seat, Walhalla needs to be a shining example of what a city should look like."

Westminster businessman and county councilman Joel Thrift vowed to continue efforts to make county government more efficient and transparent.

"It's not so much cutting (spending) as it is being more efficient with what we have," he said, adding that the recently approved county budget should result in no new taxation or millage increase.

He also urged support for continuing the current council-administrator form of government and promised that a budget and accounting review will take place after a special election fills a currently vacant council seat in late August.