Money flowing into Cherokee Museum

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Project receives grants for one-of-a-kind center in SC

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A gutted, abandoned school district building in Walhalla is being turned into a Cherokee museum. Grants are beginning to roll in for the project.

WALHALLA — Money is beginning to flow into Oconee County for the proposed Cherokee Museum in Walhalla.

Oconee Arts and Historical Commission Chairman Luther Lyle said Wednesday that the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor has approved a $17,500 matching grant for the project.

Last week, the Oconee County Council voted to accept a state grant for $3,980 for the future museum.

On top of that, Duke Energy tentatively approved an employee's application to donate up to $1,000 for materials to be used at the museum site. Through the "sweat equity" program, Duke Energy donates money for materials on the condition that the employee also would participate in the project.

Lyle said the Cherokee Bear Clan is actively participating in raising funds and working to turn an abandoned school district building into a Cherokee museum. The building is located across the street from the Spirit of Oconee monument erected by the Cherokee Bear Clan on the sidewalk directly in front of the Oconee County Courthouse. The monument is the Clan's gift to Oconee.

Lyle said the project is not lacking in support.

"We have more volunteers than we have money," Lyle said.

The focus now is to get a roof on the gutted building by September, Lyle said. "I think that once the roof is on people are going to take notice and get excited about what we're doing."

The Cherokee Museum would be the first of its kind in South Carolina to be completely dedicated to Cherokee history, heritage and culture.

The nearby Oconee Heritage Center and the Cherokee Bear Clan signed a 20-year lease on the future museum building, which sat empty for more than 10 years.

Members of the Cherokee Bear Clan are Cherokee descendants from Oconee and Pickens that never left the area.

Lyle said the lease agreement with the Heritage Center stipulates that a museum must be open within five years.

"We would appreciate any other donations to help match the Corridor grant to put a roof on the building," Lyle said.

Donations may be sent to the Cherokee Museum, PO Box 1014, Walhalla, SC 29691.

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