New tourism signage initiative kicks off

BY MONICA KREBER
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PENDLETON — There may be a light at the end of the tunnel for local businesses struggling to get some tourism dollars.

The new Tourism Oriented Directional Signs (TODS) program is gearing up month to help increase business for the farm and tourism attractions found off the beaten path throughout South Carolina.

Vicki Fletcher, executive director of the Pendleton District Historical, Recreational and Tourism Commission, said the program is an initiative that the tourism industry has long wished to see happen. The S.C. Department of Transportation (SCDOT), along with S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (SCPRT) and the S.C. Department of Agriculture, have worked together to bring about TODS.

"I think it's going to help drive traffic," Fletcher said. "It's something we've wanted for a real long time."

A press release from SCPRT states the process for receiving TODS signing can take several months. It requires pre-certification, a review and approval from the program oversight committee and a contractual agreement with SCDOT's contract signing administrator — South Carolina Logos, Inc.

Fletcher said any and all road signs put up for business via TODS will be uniform.

"The goal is to help tourists find their way and leave their tourism dollars with us," she said.

Ken Sloan, president of the Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the signage opportunity is "definitely a good thing."

Sloan said signage has been a priority in Oconee County for some time.

"You get a lot of people who pass through and don't even know where these places are," he said. "I know about five places that have already made an application for it."

To be eligible for TODS signing, attractions must meet certain tourism and agri-tourism criteria, including being located in a rural area, being easily accessible from a paved rural highway or the state highway system, being open to the public and staffed on a regular basis, and offering unique, local and rural tourism or agricultural experience, the press release stated.

Regulations can be found at www.scdot.org/doing/agritourism.aspx.

The deadline for application submissions is Oct. 30. Applications for pre-approval are available at http://www.scprt.com/our-partners/tods.aspx for tourism-based businesses, and http://agriculture.sc.gov/agritourismandTODS for agri-tourism related businesses.

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