Oconee, Clemson, Pendleton OK Sunday alcohol sales



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Poll worker Joanne Metts, right, helps voter Cindy

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WALHALLA — Voters in Clemson, Pendleton and Oconee County all passed referendums to allow the sale of alcohol on Sundays during Tuesday's election.

The passing of the referendums allows businesses to obtain permits from the South Carolina Department of Revenue to sell alcoholic beverages on Sundays.

Oconee County passed its alcohol sales referendum with 11,380 voting in favor (56.14 percent) and 8,890 voting against (43.86 percent).

Oconee County Council decided to put the referendum on the general election ballot in April after hearing arguments that restaurants were losing business to those located inside the city limits of Seneca. Seneca approved its referendum in 2012 and was the only municipality in the county that allowed for the Sunday sale of alcohol.

Dick Cottingham, owner of the Lighthouse Restaurant and chairman of the Sunday sales task force in Oconee, said he believes the decision means people will stay in the

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county on Sunday instead of going to other cities.

"It is about what I expected, and I really believe it will pay off for the citizens of our county," Cottingham told The Journal on Tuesday night. "I believe the biggest benefit is quality of life. I believe it is something that to some degree we have been deprived of — to go to a restaurant and have a glass of wine with Sunday dinner.

"Maybe the biggest benefit will be the economic benefit for the county. I believe people will stay here on Lake Keowee on Sundays instead of going back to Greenville and other places that allow Sunday sales."

"I saw that it was carrying big in Clemson, too," Cottingham added. "I think it is necessary for us to keep pace with the way the nation is going and certainly the way the trends are in South Carolina with Clemson and Pendleton and other places.

"We have to do it to keep pace or we'd be losing people on Sunday to Clemson. Not only will we keep our people here, but we'll draw some others here."

Jillian Lusk, executive director of the Oconee County Chamber of Commerce, said Oconee's task force had supporting members such as business owners Ernie Washington of Fatz, Salvador Onate of Los Amigos and David Land of Bountyland Quick Stop.

"I am very glad the referendum passed," Lusk said. "It puts our local businesses on even playing ground with neighboring counties and states. It is our hope that with Sunday sales now available across the county, it will be one more tool to attract more residents, visitors and businesses to invest in our community."

Voters in the city of Clemson passed their referendum by a large margin, with a vote of 2,254 (72.6 percent) to 851 (27.4 percent). Clemson City Council approved a resolution regarding the issue in April after business owners told council their customers had said if they were unable to order alcohol on Sundays, they would instead patronize other locations where they could.

The approval of the referendum in Clemson means the city would be able to put money received from the sales into capital improvements, purchase and renovation of historic buildings and festivals that have "a significant impact on tourism."

Pendleton passed its referendum with 471 voting yes (69 percent) and 211 voting no (31 percent). It will have to pass two readings of an ordinance before it can become official, according to town officials.

"It looks like the town of Pendleton will have Sunday alcohol sales in the near future," municipal clerk Amber Barnes said.

Resident Kerry Walker said many people were excited about the results Tuesday night, and the decision gives businesses in town an option to open on Sunday.

"It's an economic growth opportunity for the town of Pendleton and the businesses," Walker said.

Pendleton residents voted on the issue in a special election Tuesday held by the town, which coincided with the Anderson County general election. The Pendleton Town Council approved an ordinance in August to put the referendum on the ballot for voters. It allows "bona fide nonprofit organizations" and businesses to be licensed for consumption and on-premises sales and allows for a seven-day sale of beer and wine at permitted off-premises locations.

According to the South Carolina Department and Revenue website, the seven-day off-premise beer and wine permit is only issued in counties and cities who have passed a Sunday alcohol sales referendum and allows for the sale of beer "to-go" only, seven days a week with no restrictions on hours or sale.

Norman Cannada and Greg Oliver contributed to this story.