Oconee council OKs $37K in tourism grants

SenecaFest, Walhalla auditorium get most

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Oconee County Council approved $37,686 for accommodations tax grants and internal tourism projects Tuesday, with $10,000 apiece going to Walhalla Civic Auditorium and SenecaFest.

A portion of local and state ATAX revenues received by the county are available by ordinance for ATAX grants, which are tourism-related grants that meet guidelines specified by local and state mandates.

Grants are recommended by the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Commission based on tourism impact of the project and then submitted to county council for approval.

Oconee parks, recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley said the PRT commission — of which he is the liaison — is given $30,000 in the fall and the same amount in the spring in external

SEE GRANTS, PAGE A5

prioritizes money

Oconee County ATAX grants

Applicant	Approved funds
SenecaFest	$10,000
Walhalla Civic Auditorium	$10,000
S.C. Apple Festival	$3,500
Strickland Museum	$3,000
Oconee Heritage Center	$1,000
Walhalla Chamber-MayFest	$936
Collins Children's Home	$500
Lunney Museum	$500
Oconee Forever	$500

GRANTS: Committee

FROM PAGE A1

grants for tourism marketing and promotion.

The Walhalla Civic Auditorium's project description on its application is for sound and lighting equipment, while SenecaFest plans to use its funding for TV and radio advertising.

The South Carolina Apple Festival received $3,500 in funding for TV and magazine advertising, while the Strickland Museum in Seneca got $3,000 for magazine and online advertising.

The Oconee Heritage Center received $1,000 for advertising with brochures and rack cards, while the Walhalla Chamber of Commerce's MayFest got $936.

Collins Children's Home, the Lunney Museum and Oconee Forever each received $500 in ATAX grants.

Council also approved $3,750 for new boards for the handrails and walkways to upgrade the fishing pier at South Cove County Park, and $4,000 to construct an entrance for the disc-golf course at Chau Ram Park.

ATAX funding comes in on a monthly basis from the lodging and accommodations providers to the county.

"That money comes in, the committee hears all the applications, and they try to prioritize based on the tourism priority, and then they make recommendations based on that," Shirley said.

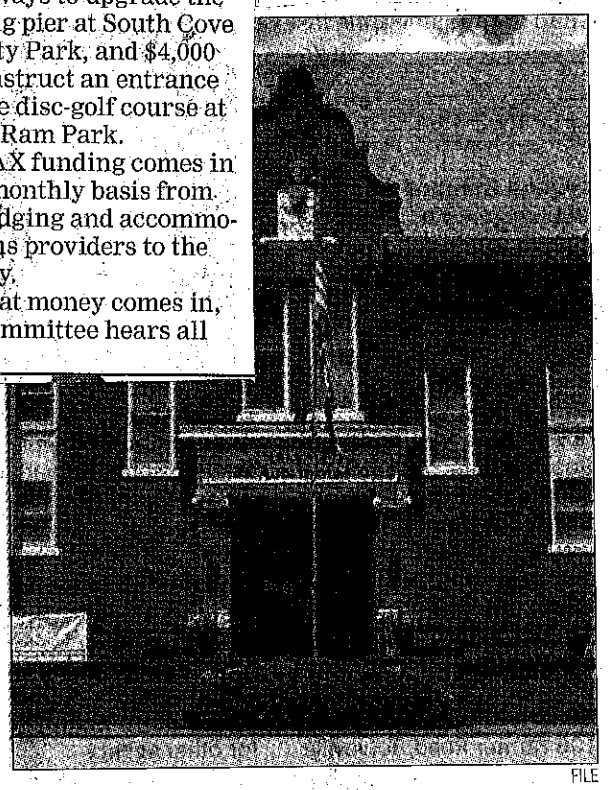
Shirley said the allotment for ATAX grants was capped at $30,000 in the spring and fall in order to spread the funding equitably to all county events throughout the year.

The funds are generated by a 2-percent state and 3-percent local accommodations tax on hotels, campgrounds and vacation rentals.

All ATAX grant recipients are required to turn in intermediate reports every 60 days on the progress of the grant and a final report upon completion of the grant.

After the projects were approved, the county's local ATAX balance is $150,843.

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FILE

Along with SenecaFest, the Walhalla Civic Auditorium was the top beneficiary of Oconee County accommodations tax grants awarded at Tuesday night's county council meeting.