Oconee panel awards $45,000 in ATAX grants

Foothills YMCA receives $8,000 to promote events

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — The Foothills YMCA received the biggest cut of $45,000 in recommended Accommodations Tax grants dished out by the new Oconee County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Commission.

The Commission reviewed 15 applications last week that totaled $167,011 in requests from ATAX funds.

Commission members recommended grants for 12 of the applicants totaling $45,073, PRT Director Phil Shirley said Tuesday.

Shirley said Oconee County Council must approve the grants.

The council meets next week.

The Foothills YMCA requested $25,600 to promote its Keowee River Scarecrow Festival and Spring Wildflower Festival.

The Commission approved $8,000.

In each case, Commission members awarded applicants a fraction of what they requested.

The Commission followed Shirley's recommendation to limit ATAX spending to $45,000, and did so by giving smaller amounts to as many applicants as possible.

Oconee had almost $166,000 last week in Local and State ATAX funds combined before the Commission recommended grants.



FILE PHOTO

The Foothills YMCA will receive $8,000 from Oconee County Accommodations Tax (ATAX) funds to promote its Keowee River Scarecrow Festival.

Shirley recommended that the group keep a reserve in its account to fund the Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau and other events that might come up.

South Carolina collects an accommodations tax every time someone spends a night in a hotel, motel or guestroom.

A portion of the ATAX revenue is returned to local government to help promote tourism.

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GRANTS: $6,545 went to Westminster event

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One of the PRT Commission's criteria in awarding grants is determining whether the event being funded would help generate more tourism dollars in the county.

Grant recipients are required to track how many visitors attend their events and how many of them travel 50 miles or more to those events.

The second-largest grant recommended — $6,545 — went to the Westminster Chamber of Commerce to promote Mayberry Comes to Westminster.

The Commission also awarded $5,000 or more to promote Oktoberfest in Walhalla ($5,366), Walhalla Civic Auditorium attractions ($5,300) and the Downtown Go 'Round and other events sponsored by the Downtown Seneca Merchants Association ($5,000).

Other grants went to the Blue Ridge Arts Council ($2,500), Seneca's Half Marathon ($2,500), Historic Old Pickens Foundation ($1,500), Lunney Museum ($1,500), Patriots Hall ($1,500), South Carolina Foothills Heritage Fair ($4,000) and the Upstate Heritage Quilt Trail ($1,362).

Shirley said the Commission meets again Sept. 29 to elect its officers and address other business.

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