Oconee sees $51M in tourism in 2011

BY MIKE EADS
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WALHALLA — Oconee and Pickens officials are celebrating a new report that shows strong tourism growth for both counties.

A new report from The United States Travel Association, a national trade group, states Oconee County did $51 million in tourism business for 2011, a 7 percent jump over 2010. It was the first time the county cracked the $50 million mark.

Pickens County reported strong numbers as well, taking in $91.5 million and generating 850 jobs for 2011.

"Our focus on promoting Oconee County as a destination is paying off for the local economy," said Phil Shirley, director of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (PRT) for Oconee County. "Product development not only benefits our visitors, but also continues to enhance the quality of life for all of us."

Shirley's colleague, Ken Sloan, couldn't agree more.

"One of the unique things about Oconee County, notwithstanding our phenomenal natural resources, is the support that our tourism efforts have received from the local community," said Sloan, president and chief executive officer of the Mountain Lakes Convention & Visitors Bureau. "This is just the beginning of great things to come for the tourism industry in Oconee."

Tourism is responsible for 420 jobs across Oconee County and provided $5.83 million in local and state taxes, according to Shirley, offsetting taxes on Oconee households by $150 each on average.

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