Oconee tourism boss secures funding from Walhalla

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WALHALLA — Oconee County's tourism boss made a convincing case for continued funding from the city of Walhalla this week.

Unlike in previous appearances before Walhalla City Council when he's come asking for money, Ken Sloan, director of the Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau, had an easier time when he came calling Tuesday night.

"Last year alone there was over $55 million of tourism expenditures deposited in our coffers," Sloan told elected officials. "Those are new people, new visitors coming in and depositing $55 million in the county. It's an all-time high. We could not have had this success or those numbers without the continued support of the county and without the continued support of our municipalities."


Sloan

Now in its seventh year, Sloan reminded council of the CVB's history, and how it operated on a shoestring budget during a three-year trial period.

To make ends meet, Sloan said he reached out to Walhalla, Westminster and Seneca for money to start the CVB's Visitors Guide. Blue Ridge Electric Coop was also an original contributor, Sloan said.

"We started with 25,000 copies," Sloan recalled. "It took us almost 18 months to distribute.

"Last year we printed 60,000."

The CVB prints 30,000 copies of the guide in the spring and an equal number in the fall, according to Sloan. Additionally, he said the CVB counts 12,000 subscribers to its monthly newsletter and has more than 40,000 fans on its social media accounts that include Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

"The sponsorships are the same today as they were seven years ago — $5,000," Sloan said.

Councilman Tjay Bagwell wasted little time making a motion to approve the expenditure.

"I think the numbers speak for themselves that the work being done is good for Oconee County and Walhalla," Bagwell said.

At Sloan's suggestion, and so he would not have to make his annual plea for funding, council also agreed it would in the future make the $5,000 contribution part of its hospitality tax spending plan at budget time.

Sloan left the meeting with a big smile.

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