Official calls tourism No. 1 industry in state

BY WAYNE MORTON
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WESTMINSTER — Marion Edmonds, who has worked for the S.C. Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT) Department for 35 years, called tourism the top industry in the state during his remarks last week at the annual Rotary Apple Festival Luncheon held as part of the 52nd annual S.C. Apple Festival in Westminster.

"Tourism represented a $16-billion boost to our state's economy last year," the director of communications said.

Edmonds, a North Carolina native who became a student at Furman University 40 years ago, told the audience of community leaders PRT is not the tourism industry.

"You are the industry," he said. "New audiences are finding out about you, the area is growing and the future is bright.

"Also, our home-grown products here in the state are beginning to receive widespread attention and everyone, including the political leadership in our state, is working well together, and we are seeing the results. People want to visit where people want to live. We have 41 state parks and festivals like

SEE TOURISM, PAGE A5

TOURISM: 'It all just came together then'

FROM PAGE A1

the Apple Festival to offer our visitors."

Edmonds congratulated the residents of Westminster for creating and maintaining the longest-running festival in the state.

"What you do to keep the festival running year to year for all of these decades is incredible," he said. "The individual sacrifices of so many have made it possible."

Former mayor and state house member Cecil Sandifer and his wife, Frances, received a standing ovation from the large audience for helping start the Apple Festival in 1961.

At the time, Sandifer traveled throughout the southeast to get ideas for a festival in Westminster and persuaded a small group of businessmen to help sponsor the annual event.

About the same time, thanks to the development of the Horseshoe Lake Farms by former actors and developers Grouch Marx and Robert Horton among other developers, the Long Creek area was receiving national attention as a chief apple-producer.

"It all just came together then," said Sandifer, who recently celebrated his 90th birthday.

Edmonds, in responding to a question about the proposed Sanctuary Pointe recreational complex at S.C. Highway 11 and I-85 south of Westminster, said he expects the new resort, which will cover several hundred acres, to begin perhaps as early as next spring or summer.

"It is all dependent upon the financing, but it will be successful because of the numbers of people who visit here," he said.