Seneca wins multiple awards, safety distinction

BY ERIC SPROTT
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SENECA — While the grand announcements have yet to be made, Seneca officials elected to go ahead and spill the beans on a pair of awards for the city's utilities department during last week's city council meeting.

City administrator Greg Dietterick announced the city received an achievement award in the area of public works from the Municipal Association of South Carolina for its new water treatment facility, while the city has also been recognized with the safety award for safe operating practices from the American Public Power Association.

It's the second straight year Seneca has earned distinctions from both organizations. The city received the same award from the APPA last year, while it also won a MASC award in the area of public service for its all-electric bus fleet.

Dietterick said utilities director Bob Faires and water plant supervisor Steve Fletcher recently visited Columbia to give a presentation on the water plant to MASC officials, who obviously came away impressed.

"I've got to say, it was the fastest turnaround I've ever seen," Dietterick said. "They didn't make it back from Columbia, and I got a call that we won. In July, we'll go down there and bring another one of those big silver cups home."

In a copy of Seneca's application provided by the MASC, Faires wrote the water treatment plant project, which cost in excess of $10 million, was "prompted by the desire to change the disinfectant process from a hazardous chlorine gas to an on-site generated, sodium hypochlorite process."

That move helped eliminate the chlorine gas chemical from the site, and also from the residential area adjacent to the site.

Faires wrote the project "addressed neighborhood concerns over water plant aesthetics and operations," while he also credited the neighborhood's homeowners association for its cooperation during the endeavor.

The APPA honor will be formally announced April 4, while the MASC award ceremony will be held in July in Columbia.

Dietterick added the city earned a high mark from Safewise.com as being one of the top 20 safest cities in the state based on the most recent FBI Crime Report statistics.

Seneca ranked No. 17 out of the 84 cities on the list — cities with less than 2,000 residents were not included in the findings — with 3.77 violent crimes and 24.69 property crimes per 1,000 residents.

Walhalla led the area at No. 11 (3.99, 18.79), while Clemson (No. 27), Westminster (No. 37) and Central (No. 41) also made the list, though no statistics were listed.

In other news from Tuesday's city council meeting, it was announced Seneca city council would hold its swearing-in ceremony at 3 p.m. Sunday at the water plant.

Mayor Dan Alexander, along with councilmen Al Gaines, Dana Moore, Ronnie O'Kelley — the city's mayor pro tem — and Anthony Smith all ran unopposed, and the municipal election that was slated for Tuesday was called off in January.