Survey: Entertainment, dining among Seneca needs



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Above, The Mighty Tams perform during the 2012 Fourth of July celebration in Seneca. While events like this draw crowds from near and far, a recent survey suggests the area needs more nightly entertainment and dining options to attract more tourists. Below, boaters spend a hazy Saturday afternoon enjoying the cool breezes of Lake Keowee. Amenities such as the lakes and mountains are a big draw for tourists, who said in a recent survey that they'd like to see more shopping and dining options.

BY MONICA KREBER
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — When tourists come to the Seneca area they often have three complaints: a lack of dining, a lack of shopping and a lack of nightlife/entertainment.

Those findings, presented to Seneca City Council recently, were the result of a Clemson University research study commissioned by the Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau (MLCVB). Ken Sloan, president and CEO of MLCVB, presented the results to council members.



Sloan said the purpose of Clemson's study was to define a marketing strategy based on who comes to visit Seneca: where people are coming from, why they come here, how much money they typically spend, etc.

Clemson students spent six months surveying about 850 people. Research determined that most of the visitors Seneca receives are middle-aged and come from within 200 miles of the area.

A lot of them have a relatively high income, are very technologically prudent and came to visit the area on a whim (a last-minute decisions) after doing some digging on Internet sites such as Facebook and Google.

Sloan is in the process of developing an Ambassador's Program in the county to try and promote dining, shopping and nightlife – and essentially boost tourism.

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SURVEY: 'Tourism creates more jobs and more revenue in the area'

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"If you are a tourist, you don't necessarily know about Ram Cat Alley," he said.

Sloan said tourism is currently the No. 2 industry in Oconee County (agriculture is No. 1). He wants to make tourism first, which is why he's revealing Clemson's research results to municipalities.

"I want to bring it to their attention and help any way I can," he said.

Russell Johnson, project and marketing manager from the Oconee Chamber of Commerce, said he felt the findings are pretty accurate.

"I wouldn't say it lacks in those things (entertainment and dining), but there's always room for growth," he said. "We support growth and tourism in the local economy."

Billy Boylston, interim executive director of the Oconee Chamber of Commerce, said he could understand people wanting an increase in shopping and nightlife.

But, he said he was "very pleased with the restaurants here. They do a wonderful job."

Boylston said he would like to see more jobs coincide with boosting tourism.

"Tourism creates more jobs and more revenue in the area," he said. "I'd support getting more jobs."

Vanessa Penton, executive director of the Walhalla Chamber of Commerce, said she would like to see a boost to the tourism industry that keeps tourists within the area so they don't have to venture out to find more entertainment.

"That's all part of the big picture that we've got planned," she said. "I think people need to understand that this is an industry – and we can really use it for our benefit."

Sloan pointed to several accomplishments Oconee has celebrated in the last year, such as Jocassee Gorges being named one of "50 of the world's last great places" by "National Geographic."

"Ultimately, tourism is on the rise," he said. "We've made a great deal of accomplishments toward our tourism industry."

The area also has upcoming summer events to look forward to, such as Seneca Fest 2013 and Jazz on the Alley, which begins in April.

"I'm very optimistic," Sloan said. "But we still have a lot of work to do."

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