Walhalla vying to be South's top outdoor town

BY JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL
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SENECA — The city of Walhalla is in contention to be named the South's top outdoor town.

In Blue Ridge Outdoors magazine's Top Adventure Town 2016 competition, Walhalla is facing off with Bryson City, N.C.

The magazine invites readers to vote for their favorite towns in 24 matchups across categories of small, medium and large towns. Walhalla was the only South Carolina municipality to make the small-town category. Greenville is pitted against Waynesville, N.C., in the medium-town category, while Charleston faces off against Atlanta in the large-town category.

"It should be no secret that the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic boasts dozens of zip codes with vibrant outdoor scenes, an active lifestyle and access to amazing adventures," according to blueridgeoutdoors.com.

The website acts as the digital outlet of BRO, a guide to outdoor sports, health and adventure travel in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic.

Readers can vote on the site every 24 hours on multiple devices until Sept. 19. Round one runs until 9 a.m. Aug. 22, with round two starting at noon Aug. 23. Three winners will emerge as the best small town, best medium town and best large town.

BRO, which narrowed down the towns to 48, touted Walhalla's character, rivers and hiking trails.

"Southern charm meets outdoor mecca in this South Carolina town," BRO said. "Paddlers will want to add the nearby Chattooga and Tallulah rivers to their tick list, while hikers and car campers should be sure to add Oconee State Park to their next road trip."

BRO also pointed out Walhalla's convenient location near the Georgia border and at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains.

Oconee County tourism head Ken Sloan told The Journal that Walhalla should win top small town because of its vicinity to the Jocassee Gorges, designated by National Geographic as one of the "World's Last Great Places" in 2012.

Sloan cited the area's concentration of waterfalls and "pristine" national forests.

"Within a few minutes drive, you can be hiking through a canopy of mountain laurel or rhododendron to several breathtaking waterfalls or you can be experiencing a major adrenaline rush while you are rocking down a world-class whitewater trip down the Chattooga River," he said.

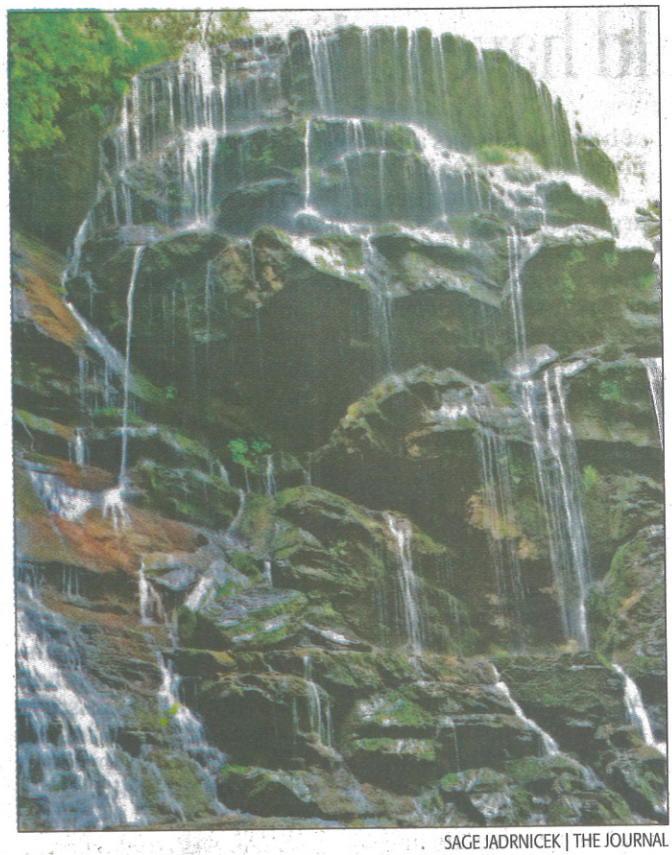
Sloan, the president of the Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau, added that Walhalla is a point of entrance for the Palmetto Trail.

"Walhalla is already a biking destination," he told The Journal. "At present, there are a few organized bike rides out of the city, but the Palmetto Trail will make this town a major biking and tourism destination."

Sloan said the purpose of Mountain Lakes CVB is showing the world that Oconee County is "a true wilderness and adventure destination."

"Walhalla plays a major role in that message as it is the gateway to the mountains, the waterfalls, forests, rivers, whitewater rafting and four seasons of some of the most incredible scenic hikes in the world."

To vote for Walhalla or another town, visit blueridgeoutdoors.com/top-towns/.



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Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau president Ken Sloan said the area's concentration of waterfalls, including Yellow Branch Falls, pictured here, is one reason why Walhalla should win the South's top small town in Blue Ridge Outdoors magazine's Top Adventure Town 2016 competition.

justin@upstatetoday.com | (864) 934-5583
Follow on Twitter @jlcampbell90