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SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

World of Energy to host annual Festival of Trees

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK
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SENECA — The World of Energy will host its fourth annual Festival of Trees Dec. 1-30. Nearly two dozen trees will be on display, decorated by local businesses and organizations for the public to view.

Tree viewing takes place Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. at Duke Energy's World of Energy education center at Oconee Nuclear Station.

Visitors are asked to vote on their favorite tree, and the winning organization will receive a $1,000 grant from Duke Energy to donate to their registered charity of choice. A tree-lighting ceremony is planned for 5 p.m. on Dec. 1, with live music by the Seneca High School Madrigals.

This is Oconee Heritage Center's second time participating in the event. Director/curator Leslie White said the center didn't win the grant last year, but that's not the only reason for participating.

"Obviously, the opportunity for much-needed funding is a big motivation, but we also enjoy the chance to use the Christmas tree to share and celebrate Oconee's history and heritage," she said. "If we win this year, we will likely use the funds to help create a nice display case for the Keowee canoe, which is finishing its preservation process here at the Oconee Heritage Center."

YouthLink is joining in on the festivities for the first time this year. With roots in Oconee and several other South Carolina counties, YouthLink is a nonprofit organization with a mission designed to empower youth by giving them greater access to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education and other community engagement activities.

YouthLink director of development Msiba Dalton said she's thrilled to have a tree representing the organization in the Festival of Trees.

"We want to use our invitation to display our organization's mission, and hopefully spark a conversation about the importance of supporting STEM education and local youth development," she said. "If YouthLink wins the $1,000 prize for best tree, we will use the funds to continue to fund our Leadership Academy, STEM Academy, Strategies for Success Workshop and YouthLink 360 Athletics programs, which are always free for our youth participants."

Also, as part of the holiday festivities, Santa Claus will visit the World of Energy from 1-3 p.m. on Dec. 10. Children can visit with Santa, and parents are encouraged to capture the memories with their camera. No reservations are required.

All holiday activities at the World of Energy are free and open to the public. The center is an official Toys for Tots drop-off location, so those visiting are encouraged to bring a new, unwrapped toy for the drop box.

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