

Rally in the Valley to offer bikes, BBQ, beer

Event to raise funds for conservation work

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

This year's Rally in the Valley is set for May 19. Each year's rally draws participants from all over the country.

BY JASON EVANS
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WALHALLA — An event next weekend will give attendees a good time while benefiting conservation work in the Upstate.

Rally in the Valley is set for May 19 at Lake Jemiki near Walhalla.

"This is the seventh Rally in the Valley we've done," logistics coordinator Andy Smith said.

The rally features two bike rides — a 60-mile one that rides at 8 a.m. and a 30-mile ride that begins at 9 a.m.

"We'll have a barbecue, hearty salad and sides lunch that starts at 11:30 a.m.," Smith said. "We'll have music starting at that time that'll go until 2 p.m. We'll also have craft beer provided by Oskar Blues."

Tunes will be provided by B.J. Callahan and FNKY Music and Dave Desmelik.

There will also be a variety of vendors at the rally.

"People will have an opportunity to shop," Smith said. "This makes our event a bit different from just a bike ride or bike race. It's more of a festival atmosphere."

Online registration is open until Thursday. Registration is \$50 for riders and \$25 for "folks who just want to come out and not ride and just enjoy the event."

On the day of the rally, registration goes up to \$60 for riders and \$30 for spectators.

Children under 6 will be admitted for free, while children over 6 will be admitted for half price.

Register at oconeeforever.org.

The rally draws riders and attendees from all over.

Online registration is open until Thursday.

Registration is \$50 for riders and \$25 for "folks who just want to come out and not ride and just enjoy the event." On the day of the rally, registration goes up to \$60 for riders and \$30 for spectators.

"We get folks from Idaho, from Montana, folks from Florida, Atlanta and Greenville, a surprisingly big range," Smith said. "A majority of the participants come from more than 50 miles away."

Lake Jemiki, the location of the rally, is "a beautiful spot," Smith said.

"People love to come to our area, ride their bikes and see how beautiful it is," he said.

Rally in the Valley is a fundraiser for Upstate Forever's work in Oconee County, Smith said.

"Upstate Forever has protected over 25,000 acres in the Upstate, primarily through conservation easements around 114 properties," he said.

Oconee Forever is a volunteer group.

"We focus on historical, scenic, agriculture and natural resources, on conserving those," Smith said. "We do that through education and identifying properties that have those resources."

Upstate Forever has protected 3,200 acres in Oconee County, including the 53-acre Oconee Town site.

"That's the Cherokee Village that's going to become part of the state parks system," Smith said.

"Oconee Forever was instrumen-

tal in negotiating the conservation easement for that transfer of land to occur."

Oconee Forever plans to donate more than \$10,000 to the trails at Stumphouse Park, Smith said.

Officials cut the ribbon on the new 4 miles of trail at the park on Tuesday.

"Oconee Forever started through an effort to save the Stumphouse area from development," he said.

In 2007, the city of Walhalla put a conservation easement on 440 acres.

"The trail is the fruition of those conservation efforts," Smith said.

To learn more about Oconee Forever, visit oconeeforever.org or email oconeeforever@gmail.com.

Volunteering is a great way to get involved with the group and its work, Smith said.

"We'd love to have volunteers for the rally and volunteers to work with us on our projects and initiatives in Oconee Forever," Smith said.

Rally in the Valley promises to be a fun event.

"The music's great," Smith said. "It's a beautiful setting. It's very enjoyable for everybody."