

Keowee Key group focuses on Oconee charities

BY NORM CANNADA
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SALEM — A partnership between the Keowee Key community and local nonprofit organizations in recent months is working to increase awareness of needs in Oconee County and encourage more giving to charitable organizations in the county.

The Keowee Key Community Partnership started last fall after a survey revealed residents in the community donated 100,000 hours of volunteer time to local charities, according to partnership chair Jon Bachman.

“The thought came about ‘If we can donate 100,000 hours, what happens if we start adding dollar signs to those numbers?’” Bachman asked. “‘What kind of impact could we have on the residents of Oconee County?’”

The effort began almost a year ago with one partner — Tri-County Technical College — and a scholarship program was set up. So far, four scholarships have been awarded to students who are either employees or family members of Keowee Key residents or Oconee County students.

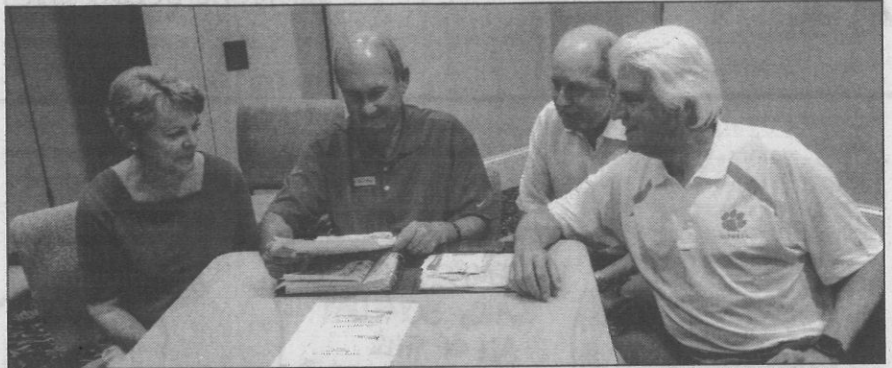
The partnership added three other organizations in the first few months — the Tamassee DAR School, Ripple of One and the Keowee Fire District.

In the first nine months of the effort, donations to those charities topped \$47,000. Since then, five other organizations have been added — the Foothills YMCA, Safe Harbor, the Oconee Memorial Hospital Foundation, Collins Children’s Home and Habitat for Humanity. The money donated stays with the chapter of those organizations in Oconee County.

The partnership signs a memorandum of understanding with participating partners, who agree to report the number of donations and amount of total donations from Keowee Key residents quarterly. The partners do not give out the donors’ names.

“We don’t know who donates, and that’s by design,” said Rick McRae, a member of the leadership team for the partnership.

“It’s up to the individual residents when they make a donation who



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From left, Amy Zarra, Jon Bachman, Phil Walkenshaw and Jeff Woodard are part of the nine-member leadership team of the Keowee Key Community Partnership.

they want to donate to,” Bachman added. “We’re not trying to tell them where to donate. The resident makes a donation directly to the charity, and any money goes from the member directly to the charity. We don’t want to get involved in how they spend the money. We want to make sure residents are aware and know how to make a donation.”

Leadership team member Phil Walkenshaw said at least one partner has received an added benefit.

“There’s already a success story for the Keowee Fire District,” he said. “They have found an anonymous donor to match up to \$10,000 of gifts made by Keowee Key members to buy needed things — not capital expenditures — to buy new coats, breathing apparatuses — it’s for whatever they need.

“These are new funds that have never been available to them before,” added Amy Zarra, another member of the leadership team. “This is a totally new way for the fire district to think about raising money.”

Keowee Key has about 1,700 homes, and leaders of the partnership said the partnership is still working to let the members of the community know about the program and partner charities. Bachman said he hopes the total amount given to all nine partner organizations by the end of the year will reach \$100,000 for the first five quarters of the program.

“I think there’s going to be a snowball effort here as we add more partners,” he said. “Hopefully, it will get bigger and bigger. We’re saying to

our members, ‘If you donate to your alma mater, by all means, continue to donate to your alma mater’ or, ‘If you donate to your church, keep donating to your church. Just think about maybe spending a little bit extra and donating to these charities.’”

Zarra said the partnership is an attempt to see what Keowee Key is doing in the county.

“We’re trying to measure it. We know it’s out there,” she said. “We know people give in the community, we just have never had a way other than the survey to begin to measure it. We care about where we live. We want to promote organizations in our area.”

Jeff Woodard added there is another benefit to being able to measure giving.

“The more we can quantify, the more ammunition to go for matching funds,” he said. “It’s going to help.”

“We’re trying to create increased awareness of the nonprofits that exist in Oconee County that could use our help,” added McRae. “We’re not here just to measure. We want to increase the size of the pot.”

The first partners came from members in the community who had some relationship with a partner. In recent months, partners have resulted from the partnership contacting those charities or the charities making contact with Keowee Key.

“We’re fortunate,” Bachman said. “Some others are not as fortunate. These charities are out there to try and assist them, and we’re trying to assist those charities. Hopefully, other communities will follow.”