

Commission approves \$40K in tourism funding

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Accommodations tax grant money hasn't slowed down in Oconee County, as demand for recreation continues to be high throughout the summer.

The Oconee County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Commission recently approved \$40,000 in grant money from accommodations tax revenue after receiving more than \$50,000 in eligible requests.

Typically, the commission awards \$30,000 per grant cycle, but the account had enough money in it to award \$40,000 between seven local organizations and events.

"The work we've been doing with the host-compliance software to

where we're identifying and bringing into compliance all the short-term rentals has been successful," county PRT director Phil Shirley

said. "We're seeing those



Shirley

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MONEY APPROVED

Museum of the Cherokee in S.C.
Research room — \$5,000

Discover Upcountry Carolina Assoc.
Advertising — \$8,000

Walhalla Oktoberfest
Advertising — \$6,000

Main Street Walhalla
Marketing — \$7,000

Foothills Farmstead
Three storage units — \$2,000

Seneca Half Marathon and 5K
Advertising — \$8,000

Devils Fork State Park
Improve picnic table pads — \$4,000



FILE

A request from Devils Fork State Park at Lake Jocassee was among seven in Oconee County approved for accommodations tax funding this week.

FUNDING: 'Just trying to enjoy some sort of recreation'

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numbers pay dividends into the local accommodations tax."

Shirley said any hotel, campground or short-term rental in Oconee County is required to pay the tax.

Accommodations tax is charged when someone stays in a hotel or campground or rents a lake house. A percentage of the tax goes back to Oconee County, and state law requires that money be used to enhance tourism.

"We had a number of noncompliant folks, and the majority of it was just that they didn't know," Shirley said. "A lot of them were paying the state and didn't realize there was an additional piece for the county. It has been educational to

let them know that they needed to become compliant."

Travel booking company VRBO has worked with the county to pay the tax directly, Shirley said.

Even with the coronavirus pandemic affecting budgets around the country, July was the second-busiest month on record for Oconee County, and August isn't far behind. Masks are mandatory inside county facilities.

"People are just trying to enjoy some sort of recreation," Shirley said. "That's the easiest mode right now — being outdoors. I know state parks, all of our parks — everybody is full. We've been enjoying some success there."

The recommendations will go before Oconee County Council at a Sept. 15 meeting.

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