



PHOTOS BY CALEB GILBERT | THE JOURNAL

Seneca Rotary Club president Danielle Leeper, left, presents a check for the Oconee County Sheriff's Foundation to, from left, Sheriff Mike Crenshaw, Lt. Mark Lyles and foundation board members Evie Hughes and Gene Williams.

# Seneca Rotary gives \$5,000 each to DARE, lifejackets



**BY NORM CANNADA**  
THE JOURNAL

**SENECA** — Two local programs are getting a little extra help with needs from a local service organization.

The Seneca Rotary Club presented checks for \$5,000 each to the Oconee County Sheriff's Foundation and the Oconee Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department during a meeting last week at South Cove County Park.

Club president Danielle Leeper said the \$10,000 total to the two organizations is double the dollar amount of grants last year. The money came through special donations from Seneca Rotary Club members that were matched by the Rotary International Foundation.

"Typically, each year we get a \$2,500 grant, and then we put in another \$2,500," Leeper told The Journal after Thursday's meeting. "But since our members did so well (making donations) the previous year, we were able to get a \$5,000 matching grant, giving \$10,000 (in total grant funds)."

**DARE TO EXPAND TO MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

Oconee Sheriff Mike Crenshaw accepted the grant to the Oconee County Sheriff's Foundation and said the money would be used to expand the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program, helping to add a middle school DARE program to the elementary program already in place. Sheriff's office foundation members Evie Hughes and Gene Williams attended the meeting along with Lt. Mark Lyles, who oversees the DARE program.

Lyles said the money will fund training and certification of school resource officers, who teach DARE. Crenshaw added it may



**Seneca Rotary Club president Danielle Leeper, left, presents a check for the Oconee County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department to, from left, department director Phil Shirley and High Falls County Park superintendent Liz Johnson.**

help speed the addition of middle school and later high school DARE programs in the School District of Oconee County.

"Originally, we were thinking it would be maybe a three-year plan, but with this funding available — we didn't have the county funding — we'll be able to go ahead and get all of our SROs (school resource officers) certified and be ready to start the middle school instruction," he said.

"We've done one pilot class at one middle school this year," Crenshaw added. "Our plan will be that hopefully, next year, every elementary and middle school will get it, and then we'll probably look at the following year with the high school."

Crenshaw said the new DARE program has been in place at the elementary level for a few years and is different than the original program.

"The revamping of the program, part of it is called 'keeping it real,'" he said. "It's no longer just the 'just say no to drugs' program. It truly talks about choices kids make, personal choices. It talks about bullying, anti-bullying, talks about self-esteem. We see a lot of issues with teenage suicide. So this curriculum addresses that, and it's trying to engage kids to become problem solvers and help their community."

**MORE LIFEJACKETS AT THE PARKS**

Oconee Parks, Recreation and Tourism director Phil Shirley accepted the Rotary grant on behalf of his department, and High Falls County Park superintendent Liz Johnson also attended.

Shirley said the money would be used to buy U.S. Coast Guard-approved lifejackets that visitors can wear while at the local parks.

"We utilize all the way from infant to adult life-jackets, and they vary in cost from \$20 to \$50 to get Coast Guard-approved lifejackets," Shirley said. "We'll go through and do an inventory of what we have in stock — what's our biggest need — and be able to get those ordered and supply this year for all of our customers coming out to our parks. There'll be some at each park and each lake location. ..."

"It provides for someone that may not be prepared an opportunity to get a life-jacket. It provides someone who shows up and their kid wants to go swimming unexpectedly to be able to be safe and enjoy the water. It's been a very well used program. And we're super excited to be part of this initiative to get us more lifejackets."