

# HAPPY 50<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY 'God's country'

PHOTOS BY CALEB GILBERT | THE JOURNAL

A banner hangs on the rails of a deck outside a celebration of South Cove County Park's 50th birthday Tuesday.

## South Cove County Park marks 50 years of recreation

BY LAUREN PIERCE  
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Seats were filled by residents, Oconee County officials and those who've played a part in the stewardship of South Cove County Park as the park celebrated its 50th birthday Tuesday.

County parks, recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley said the park was first leased to the county on April 25, 1973, by then Duke Power Company.

"Besides being 67 days before I was born, it was a day of significance for Oconee County to offer public parks and access to the newly developed Lake Keowee project," he said. "Today, exactly 50 years later, we celebrate the



Above: Rangers go through the serving line at Tuesday's celebration of South Cove County Park's 50th birthday in Seneca. Left: Commemorative T-shirts line a table at the event.

signing of the South Cove lease with Duke Power Company — highlighting the hard work, the dedication, the passion and the success of so many who have paved the way for us to be standing here today."

Shirley called the late 1960s and early 1970s a pivotal time for Oconee.

"Lake Hartwell was less than 10



# PARK: 'It's hard to imagine a nicer facility'

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10 years old, Chattooga River gained designation (as a wild and scenic river), I think, in '74 ... and Duke Power Company dammed up the Little River and the Keowee River to make what we know as Lake Keowee today," he said. "So there was some very important decisions in front of the PRT commission back in the early '70s, and those decisions have proved to be extremely beneficial to our generation, to the one before us, and we hope for many to come."

After a lively rendition of "Happy Birthday" led by county administrator Amanda Brock, Shirley took the time to recognize "pioneers" of South Cove — making sure to thank the original PRT Commission members, some of whom were present, and Oconee County's first parks, recreation and tourism director, Ben Sullivan.

"I didn't know he lived right up the road," Shirley jokingly said of Sullivan before introducing him.

Sullivan said he was "very green" when he was appointed director at 27 years old in



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**Oconee County's first parks, recreation and tourism director, Ben Sullivan, speaks during South Cove County Park's 50th birthday celebration Tuesday.**

1976. He thanked the original commission members and the county for hiring him.

"I couldn't have worked with a better bunch of people. ... It's been wonderful to see this area grow. ... I got a lot of work promoting tourism, because in the '70s, tourism was the No. 1 industry in South Carolina," Sullivan said. "It's hard to imagine a nicer facility than South Cove Park. It is just drop dead. ... It's God's country out here. ... I congratulate everybody that's come after me."

Past commission mem-

bers who were recognized include John Little, Duke Cleveland, Ray Stephens, Rhett Evatt, Joel Harris, Dick Plyler, Ernest "E." Riley, Jim Spearman, Mildred Spearman, Rosemary Bailes, Mike Wallace and Shane Smith.

"As we continue our research and work to identify all we can, we will be placing a plaque in the recreation building of each park recognizing these pioneers who laid the foundation so we may be standing here today," Shirley said.

He also recognized current

commission members and past and present park staff.

Other county officials in attendance included county Councilman John Elliott, attorney David Root and planning director James Coley.

## ABOUT SOUTH COVE

South Cove County Park is a 40-acre park nestled alongside Lake Keowee in Seneca, offering lakeside camping and a variety of day-use facilities, including fishing, boating, pickleball, tennis, playground, picnic areas and rentable shelters.

The parks serves more than 150,000 visitors annually, Shirley said.

"That's a tremendous number. We serve over 250,000 people through our park system," he said. "That's a lot of folks that get served in Oconee County. We have over 15,000 camping nights here in South Cove. South Cove is very close to becoming a self-funded park, which means we bring in all the revenue we need to operate it, and we brought in about a half a million dollars the last couple of years, and we're getting close."