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## Willie Says ...

Hello again! Turn to page 6A to read comments on proper boating procedures, the new Police Chief, and President Bush. Also, find out why someone is giving me a hard time...



## World News



**Quake in Japan kills at least nine people, causes fire, radioactive leak at nuclear plant**

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## State News



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# Brakes applied to billboards

By **BRETT McLAUGHLIN**  
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WALHALLA — County planners have approved sending an ordinance to the County Council aimed at regulating billboard advertising in the county.

However, bait shop and flea market owners can rest easy tonight knowing that the Planning Commission has secured their right to roadside signage ... providing it's not too big.

Assured by new language that private owners would be able to advertise their businesses, Planning Commission members unanimously approved a measure that, if adopted by the Council, will prohibit billboards bigger than 75 square feet on any two-lane roads in the county. It would also prohibit signs from 50 to 75 square feet from being closer than 1,300

feet on two-lane roads.

The law also says that no billboard visible from a four-lane road shall be erected within 1,300 feet of an existing billboard on the same road.

In response to concerns that tabled the ordinance last month, planners added language exempting any sign of less than 50 square feet from regulation.

In response to a recent plethora of billboard permits being issued by the county, council requested planners to draft a law. So intent were they in getting the measure in effect that they passed a first reading of the ordinance in name only, nearly a month ago.

A second reading of the ordinance is scheduled for today's council session.

Also Monday night, Planning Commission members tabled action on a measure establishing vesting rights. The

group has been poised to act but delayed passing the matter because of last minute concerns expressed by Advocates for Quality Development (AQD).

Linda Lovely, president of that organization, said lawyers for the group had reviewed a draft vesting ordinance and raised a number of concerns. Chief among them was language that would allow for conditional approval of development plans and inclusion of a section that AQD argues is unnecessary.

In written comments, AQD said "conditional approvals open up a Pandora's Box for potential lawsuits."

In comments to the Commission, Lovely said inclusion of a section that mirrors state vesting law "creates a lot of ambiguity" with other provisions in the proposed local ordinance.



File photo

**"Signs, signs, everywhere are signs..."** It's more than a song in Oconee County as billboards have sprouted along most major thoroughfares, prompting County Council to seek ordinance action.

Action on a vesting ordinance is expected at next month's planning meeting.

# Duke dams 'safe'

By **JON ROBERTSON**  
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SENECA — In the midst of a dam fortification process in South Carolina, Duke Energy says all of its dams, including those on Keowee and Jocassee lakes, are safe.

"They've always been safe," said Duke spokesperson Marilyn Lineberger. "We've never experienced any problems."

Duke authorities announced that three earthen dams the utility owns are safe, the Associated Press reports. The dams, all in Burke County and built in the 1910s, are being fortified to match a set quota of sustainability.

In the early 1990s, Lineberger said, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) released heightened standards for all United States dams. In response, Duke Energy conducts seismic stability evaluations so that dams would sustain under the worst recorded earthquake in the southern region, the 1986 quake that hit Charleston.

See DAMS, page 5A



Erin Scott/Staff

**Sean Norris from TRC conducts** an archeological survey on a Lake Keowee resident's lot. In May, Duke Energy began requiring lake homeowners to pay for archeological surveys before placing any riprap rock along their shoreline. The requirement stemmed from an agreement Duke made with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to protect Cherokee artifacts from being damaged or destroyed. During a typical survey, Norris will dig a hole using a shovel and dump dirt into a sifting box, looking for artifacts like arrowheads. TRC requires one hole for every 50-foot radius of property. Norris said he rarely digs more than two holes on residential properties.

Duke Energy has said it will eventually pay to survey the entire shoreline, but Norris does not expect the project to begin until October 2007. In the meantime, individual residents must wait to install protective riprap or pay \$1,000-2,000 for a dig-and-sift archeological survey.

# Satterfield starts as West Union's temporary clerk

By **ERIN SCOTT**  
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WEST UNION — A live voice answered the West Union Town Hall telephone Monday for the first time in almost a week. The voice belongs to temporary clerk Vickie Satterfield, a former Walhalla city administrator and former director of Oconee County's Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department.



Vickie Satterfield

Satterfield, who replaced fired clerk Cecilia Atkins, did not have much to say on her first day.

See CLERK, page 5A

# Sewer, economic projects cloaked in secrecy

By **BRETT McLAUGHLIN**  
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WALHALLA — There may be more news in what isn't said on Pine Street today, than what is said.

Even before today's 3 p.m. public meeting, the Oconee County Council will meet in executive session with the county's "Sewer

Transition Committee." The latter is a group of three sewer commission members charged with facilitating the Commission's transformation into an autonomous authority with no strings attached to county government.

The existing Sewer Commission appointed the group, which consists of Chairman Ron Knoer and members Scott

Parris and Rhett Smith.

The transition panel is working with a draft agreement joining the cities of Seneca, Walhalla and Westminster to the authority. A copy of that agreement has been given to the cities by Sewer Commission legal counsel Lowell Ross, who has recommended that the Commission adopt the agreement before the cities act on it.

The transition group's only prior meeting was also an executive session. The agenda for today's County Council meeting states that the two groups are meeting to discuss "legal/contractual" matters.

Two other somewhat clandestine items appear on today's County Council agenda, both related to economic development.

The council has scheduled a second reading for an ordinance that provides a fee in lieu of arrangement for a development known only as "Project Phoenix Plus." The council is also being asked to act on a resolution authorizing an "inducement agreement" for another project with a firm known only as "Project Sentry." The latter agreement indicates that, if a fee in lieu of agreement is eventually approved, it would be contingent upon an investment of not less than \$30 million.

A number of other second and third ordinance readings are also scheduled for what will be County Administrator Dale Surret's first meeting since starting his job July 9.

- Those readings are:
- third and final for a road naming and addressing ordinance;
  - third and final for an ordinance eliminating the recreation commission and replacing it with a parks, recreation and tourism commission;
  - third and final for an ordinance amending the local accommodation tax ordinance; and
  - second for an ordinance extending the fee in lieu of agreement with Johnson Controls.

The county's Road and Transportation committee will take up several road issues at an earlier 2 p.m. session.



Erin Scott/Staff

**Central resident and retiree Bobby Stancell waits** for customers at his roadside fruit and peanut stand on Hwy. 93 between downtown Central and Southern Wesleyan University. Stancell has been selling local produce in the area for a few years now, and although he said business is slow during hot days when people would rather stay in their cars, he enjoys the summertime hobby. According to Stancell, his produce stand offers "the tastiest watermelons you've ever had."

# S.C. gas prices cheapest in the nation

By **ANNA JO BRATTON**  
 Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Nebraska has edged Michigan to take the dubious honor of having the most expensive gas in the nation, and South Carolina was rated the cheapest, according to a nationwide AAA gas price survey.

At \$3.33 on Monday, the average price for a gallon of regular unleaded gas in Nebraska was down a penny from Sunday. Michigan, which ranks No. 2, was at \$3.32.

AAA gives South Carolina the cheapest gas ranking, at \$2.83, followed by New Jersey, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama, all between \$2.83 and \$2.90.

That puts Nebraska at 28 cents above the national average — \$3.05 — and the pain at the pump has some people cringing.

"I don't fill it up," said Susan Heitmann of Omaha, who was pumping gas into her older pickup at a west Omaha gas station. "I just go up to a certain dollar amount."

The truck has two tanks, she said, so she's used to watching the numbers on the

pump spin higher and higher.

"I don't care which one it is — I pick the cheapest," Heitmann said.

Flooding at a southeast Kansas oil refinery earlier this month is the main culprit

See GAS, page 3A

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