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Seven S.C. Entities Receive National Transparency Awards

Columbia, S.C. – Seven local government entities in South Carolina recently received national awards for online transparency.

The group of seven – two cities, two counties and three school districts – received Sunny Awards from Sunshine Review, a national nonprofit that advocates government transparency.

Issued annually, the Sunny Awards honor the most transparent government websites in the nation.

The South Carolina entities receiving the accolade for 2013 are: the **cities of North Charleston and Rock Hill; Aiken and Anderson counties; and the school districts of Beaufort County, Pickens County and York County 3 (Rock Hill)**.

"The winners of the Sunny Awards are cities, counties and school districts that proactively share the public information that empowers citizens and keeps government accountable to the people," Michael Barnhart, president of Sunshine Review, says in an introduction announcing the plaudits. (http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/2013_Sunny_Awards)

The seven South Carolina winners were among more than 1,000 government websites evaluated and graded by Sunshine Review.

In that process, Sunshine Review editors examined content available on the sites based on a 10-point checklist. The criteria included details pertaining to budgets, meetings, lobbying, financial audits, contracts, academic performance, public records and taxes.

Sunny Award winners are the sites that received an "A" grade.

This is the fourth year Sunshine Review has bestowed the awards. The group announces the winners each year during "Sunshine Week," which was March 10-16 this year.

"Sunshine Week is a national initiative to promote a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information," says the website of the National Freedom of Information Coalition.

(http://www.nfoic.org/sunshine-week-2013)

S.C. Comptroller General Richard Eckstrom, who pioneered government spending transparency in the Palmetto State, says the seven Sunny Award winners in South Carolina are helping to set the example for the rest of the state.

In 2008, Eckstrom created the S.C. Fiscal Transparency Website (http://www.cg.sc.gov/fiscaltransparency/Pages/default.aspx), which was among the first of its kind in the nation.

The site initially featured the details of state spending. Since then it has been expanded to include the state's federal stimulus funds, all school districts in South Carolina, and other information useful to the public such as monthly reports on state purchasing card usage.

Links to the transparency portals of many local governments in the state also are featured on the S.C. Fiscal Transparency Website.

The county links are: Aiken, Anderson, Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester, Edgefield, Greenville, Horry, Pickens, Richland and Spartanburg.

The municipal links are: Aiken, Cayce, Charleston, Chesnee, Columbia, Georgetown, Greenville, Greenwood, Elgin, Irmo, Myrtle Beach, North Charleston, North Myrtle Beach, Simpsonville, Surfside Beach and Traveler's Rest.

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