

Upstate Forever set to honor conservationists

By **CARLOS GALARZA**
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TAMASSEE — Upstate Forever, an organization that promotes sensible growth and preservation of the region's natural treasures, will honor a North Carolina couple Saturday that generously funded efforts to preserve natural landmarks in Oconee and Pickens counties.

The organization is recognizing Alice and Fred Stanback of Salisbury, N.C. as "Land Conservation Champions" during Upstate Forever's 2008 Annual Awards to be presented Saturday at the Piedmont Forestry Center in Tamassee.

The Stanbacks have donated millions of dollars for land conservation projects, including a challenge gift of \$300,000 for the Stumphouse Mountain project last year and \$1.1 million for the recent acquisition of the Nine Times tract in Pickens County.

Other award winners include Todd Usher, "Sustainable Communities Champion"; the Save Our Saluda (SOS) grassroots organization, "Clean Water Champion"; and Mike Caston, "Outstanding Public Servant."

Usher is the founder of

If you go

What: Upstate Forever 2008 annual meeting

When: 10 a.m. today

Where: Piedmont Forestry Center, 130 Piedmont Nursery Road, Tamassee

Admission: Free

Information: (864) 250-0500, ext. 21

Addison Homes, LLC, a seven-year-old company that has become an industry leader of green and energy efficient certified homes. Usher also works closely with Greenville Habitat for Humanity to inject his green technology in all of the organization's new homes.

Save Our Saluda was formed this year in response to serious threats facing the North Saluda River. SOS is focused on the long-term protection and improvement of the Saluda watershed.

Mike Caston, executive director of the SJWD Water District in Spartanburg, is receiving his award in recognition for his efforts over a five-year period on behalf of the Berry's Pond project. The property is a site of significant con-

servation and historical value at the boundary of Greenville and Spartanburg in the watershed of one of the water district's reservoirs.

Caston was a key figure in working out acceptable terms with property owners, obtaining a state grant and convincing his own commission to fund the project.

In light of deep state budget cuts that will hamper future state conservation grants, Upstate Forever recognizes that the role of committed individuals and organizations will be pivotal going forward.

Saturday's annual meeting starts at 10 a.m. at the Piedmont Forestry Center, which is tucked away in the scenic Cheochee Valley in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Families are invited to attend and child care will be provided.

The free event includes lunch and entertainment provided by local bluegrass band Conservation Theory. For the more adventurous, guided hikes (choice of easy, moderate and strenuous) will be offered a short drive away at the Nine Times property. Those planning to hike should bring appropriate footwear and a bottle of water.