

LOCAL

New conference center expected to attract business and higher learning

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The Cleveland County Commission, Cleveland County Schools, and Cleveland Community College have announced plans for a new, state-of-the-art conference center which will be built on the community college campus in Shelby.

It is the first time in county history that three agencies have worked together on a project that will benefit business, education and job training.

Without the help of CCS and CCC, Commissioner Ronnie Hawkins said that the county would have been unable to vote for the building of the conference center.

The \$13-15 million building hasn't yet been named as the project is still in the designing phase, according to Commissioner Johnny Hutchins. He also said that the 20,000 sq. ft. facility will most likely be two stories high.

"We need something to showcase Cleveland County," Hawkins stated. "As I was telling a few people, I would rather people come here to see what we've done instead of going some place else and seeing what others have done."

One of the major attractions for the Commission and their

partnering agencies is that the facility is a continuation of the Early College High School. There will be more room to accommodate current and future students.

"With that program having to be established on the college campus, we're looking to incorporate an early college high school within this new facility with state-of-the-art classrooms," Hawkins said.

"Right now with the funds that we put back for the Early College program, there's going to be enough to fund it with borrowing the money to build it (conference center); so we're going to be alright as far as the funds go," Hutchins stated, adding that he spoke with County Manager David Dear who assured him that even if the Commission Board loses part of their revenue source, the funds for the project are already factored in.

"It won't be a tax burden on the people itself," Hutchins said.

And it has been the people in Cleveland County who have been concerned about the rising unemployment rate.

The conference center will also host companies who wish to train potential workers.

"We have work force development, economic development offices and meeting rooms in the facility so that

we can not only re-train, but train the work force there through the community college," Hawkins said.

He and Hutchins both feel that this is an achievement to address the economic concern in Cleveland County.

But the biggest achievement for the commissioners is that they are meeting the need for the county to have a large facility in which teacher conferences, proms and industry showcases can take place.

"We all kind of did some thinking about what we would like to see the future of Cleveland County (to) look like. One of the projects that I wanted to try to work with the community on was to try to get a conference center to try to come to Cleveland County. There's really no facility that the public or industry can use to have things like the Chamber of Commerce Banquet," Hawkins stated.

"There's no place in the area for businesses to have anything that they can get together for any type of promotion," Hutchins said, adding that it can also be utilized as a coliseum area.

It is big enough, according to Hutchins, that a car dealership would be able to showcase their latest model vehicle. A large entry way is built into the design.

It is also spacious enough to seat up to 1,000 people.

The three agencies haven't set a date for a ground breaking yet. But it appears as if the hopes for the future conference center are just as large as the dream for one.

Petition stirs up spirits for mixed beverage sales

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Citizens for Progress, Kings Mountain businesses and residents have placed copies of a petition supporting mixed beverage sales at four local companies - including Parker's Amoco - where registered voters can sign their names.

The petition, which has to be approved by the Cleveland County Board of Elections before and after signatures are collected, got the okay from the BoE on October 7. If approved, the petition will result in a referendum for citizens to vote on mixed beverage sales.

Council members at last month's meeting, voted against a referendum that would have called for an election on whether or not to allow mixed beverage sales in KM. After their decision, Citizens for Progress decided to bypass the city by circulating a petition of their own.

It is because of that, that former Mayor Scott Neisler said that it is not a coincidence that the petition started on the anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain in the Revolutionary War.

The petition will be reviewed by monitors such as Neisler and Adventures-in-Advertising owner Gregg Johnson. They have 90 days to gather 35% of the names from the 6,700 registered voters in KM.

On Monday, Citizens for Progress' leader and lawyer Gina Collias, reported that they have collected 340 names. Neisler said on Tuesday that the list exceeded 400 names. However, Johnson had stated that while those numbers may sound high, they are not enough.

"We will have to go through and make sure that the signature is the valid signature for the person being registered to vote," said Johnson. "When word gets out I'm sure there will be a lot

more signatures."

Even if the petition gets the ultimate goal of 2,345 names, the process Johnson says, is still complicated. In addition to checking signature validity and voter registration, monitors also have to ensure that the person is a KM resident.

Neisler reported that one business owner has his own petition with 600 signatures. It has not gone through the Board of Elections for valid approval, and it is not known how many of those names are registered voters.

That is why Collias and Johnson both say that they hope to place another request for a mixed beverage referendum back on the October 28th City Council meeting agenda.

"I would like to see them (council members) do the right thing," Collias said. "This is an economic issue!"

Collias said that her big concern in the midst of a national recession is that KM businesses who have closed (including Grapevine, Spectrum Yarns and car dealerships) have left behind unemployed citizens. One restaurant could bring as many as 40 jobs. Johnson said that council members need to consider the fact that the county unemployment rate has risen to 9%.

There is even a third way in which LBTD could be allowed. Citizens from KM who support it could take the issue before the county Board of Commissioners. But, if the county were to accept full responsibility for ABC sales then the generated tax revenue that the cities would otherwise receive, would go to the county.

Johnson said that he hopes to spread the word about the petition, especially in the event the referendum is voted down again by council.

Days before Halloween night, the October 28th meeting is expected to raise the spirits of Kings Mountain for a second time.

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Display Ads - 12 p.m. - Friday
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12 p.m. Monday

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12 p.m. Monday

OBITUARIES

5 p.m. Tuesday

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POLICIES

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- Letters to the editor must be signed and include address and phone number. Thank you letters are required to be placed as paid personal notes.

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