

Tunnell: Call center training almost a reality

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A new workforce training program is one step closer to becoming a reality in Lancaster County.

Keith Tunnell, president of the Lancaster County Economic Development Corp. (LCEDC), says his organization has located a building for the proposed workforce readiness training program that will prepare area residents for jobs in the call center industry. Tunnell said the training will take place in the former Thaxton Building, a two-story, 13,000-square-foot building on S.C. 9 Bypass. He said there had been discussions about locating the center in Kershaw, but he wanted to make sure the training was close to where a majority of the unemployed live in Lancaster.

“This building was chosen due to it already being wired and ready to go as a call center training facility, which means we can furnish it and start the classes quickly without any cost or need for wiring, Internet, etc.,” Tunnell said.

The lease for the building still needs to be approved by Lancaster County Council. If approved, it will last for one year, with the program being evaluated monthly.

“We’ll then make a decision to either extend the lease or move the training to another facility if it proves to be successful,” Tunnell said.

A task force that includes representatives from the Workforce Investment Act, York Technical College, LCEDC and local businesses has been looking for ways to fund the training program and facility.

The WIA Board will vote on its proposed budget this week, which includes \$500,000 to fund the program. A portion of this money comes from stimulus funds approved by the S.C. Department of Commerce for use in supporting job training.

Tunnell also approached County Council on June 1, along with Ernie Green, dean of Off Campus Centers for York Technical College, hoping to receive \$75,000 in funding from the county.

Tunnell said the new building will include space for the training program, which has been developed by York Tech. There will also be space for the WIA, as well additional space for future classes and training if needed.

Tunnell said the center could be completed and furnished within the next four to six weeks, with training hopefully beginning in July.

“We started in March. To have this up and running by July I think shows the strong support in the community and the state,” Tunnell said.

Who qualifies for training?

The economic development corporation has identified a large candidate pool for training in Lancaster County, all of whom are WIA certified. These are people who have lost their jobs due to layoffs or closures. He said there are between 600 and 700 WIA-certified people in the county, and expects they could train all those people within one year.

“Anyone who has lost their job due to layoff or closure can go to the OneStop (unemployment office) and get WIA certified,” Tunnell said. “Once certified they will be able to get into these training courses at no cost.”

The program is also available to those who are employed, though they will be assessed and have to pay for the amount of training they would need. The full 128-hour course would cost \$559, though that cost would drop depending on a person’s level of experience.

Tunnell said it’s possible some people would only require the minimum 36-hour course.

“No one will be turned away,” Tunnell said.

The program’s curriculum will include courses explaining the mechanics of a call center, the essentials of customer service and database training.

As for when a call center could be coming to Lancaster County, Tunnell said the development corporation is still in talks with an interested business.