

By SABRINA GARRETT

The Wilson Post

An Industry Alliance Partnership meeting hosted by the Joint Economic & Community Development Board presented “an exciting” proposal for higher education in Wilson County on Wednesday.

Tennessee Board of Regents Vice Chancellor for Tennessee Technology Centers James King said that they are “ready to get going” when it comes to being a funding partner for a technology center in Lebanon. The center would be located in the former Wilson County Career Technical Center facility and offer more opportunities for high school graduates and locals interested in making a career change.

“The last few years have been quite interesting in higher education. For years, there was a thought that the only way to be successful in this country was to have a (four-year) college degree. There are a lot of people out there that have degrees and are struggling,” King said.

Meanwhile, technology centers are placing about 80 percent of their graduates in jobs. “There is a demand, right now, for technical jobs,” he added.

King said the technology center would be designed to meet the needs of industry in the Wilson County community – so that graduates could train for and find work close to home. “It is an exciting proposition. These people usually stay in the community – they don’t just get an education and leave,” he continued.

One of the reasons Lebanon is so attractive to the Tennessee Board of Regents when proposing this venture, is because of the availability of the former Wilson County Career Technical Center building, located off of Tennessee Boulevard, behind the old Lebanon High School. King said that if they had to ask for government funds to build a brand new facility – it could be done – but would take much longer.

“We would not be doing this if I had to go to the governor and say I need \$16 million to build this facility. He might say ‘yes’ but it would take 10 years to get on the list,” he said. “We have funds that are waiting to be spent. Our goal is not just to move in – we want to make it look like any other higher education facility. We will do some building renovation.”

King hopes these renovations will be completed within six months – with their first class beginning in the fall of 2013, if not sooner. “Some programs we could start up by the summer or spring. My goal would be to be fully running by next fall – that is pretty quick.”

JECDB Marketing and Communications Manager Tammy Stokes said that the Wilson County Board of Education has approved the proposal for the use of the Wilson County Career Technical facility and a legal document is in process.

“The window of opportunity to do this project is short as the demand for these funds are long and will be used on other projects,” she said.

JECDB Executive Director G.C. Hixson thanked King for being present at the meeting and for his commitment to the project. “It is important for us to have these training classes out there to meet the jobs of the future.”

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