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Development authority goal: Attract business, keep workers in county

by Ashley Fuller
afuller@cherokeetribune.com

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The Development Authority of Cherokee County this year is focused on job creation efforts.

One of the agency's this year is beginning its white collar strategy, which was developed to attract more jobs to the county.

Development of the strategy started last year with the help of Del Boyette of Boyette Levy economic development consultants. The strategy includes identifying the types of white-collar jobs the county wants and attracting companies that offer those positions.

Authority Executive Director Misti Martin said the goal is to bring in companies that will hire local residents and reduce the number of people commuting out of the county for work.

An early step in the process is a possible name change for the authority. One name that has been suggested is the Cherokee Business Development Office.

"Hopefully, that will come about this year," Mrs. Martin said about the name change. "It will tweak the way we market ourselves."

The authority board on Monday tabled until its February meeting taking action on the next step: conducting a workforce/labor analysis.

A big accomplishment for the authority in 2009, according to board members, was acquiring about 55 acres off Highway 92 in southwest Cherokee County for the site of a future business park.

Mrs. Martin said the project is now in the preliminary layout design phase. A timeline for construction has not yet been set.

"We want to see if we can turn it loose and let people see it," board member Skip Spears of Canton, co-owner of Bagwell & Spears, said about attracting businesses to the new park.

Board member Robert Logan of Canton said developing the Highway 92 park is a top goal for the year.

"Our bottom line goal is to bring new jobs and improve the tax base," said Logan, a retired Georgia Power executive.

The authority isn't done searching for more property to house new employers.

"We will continue to look at opportunities to expand," said authority Vice Chairman Steve Holcomb of Ball Ground, Cherokee president for United Community Bank. "We are looking in high-traffic areas. Land value is depressed right now."

Mrs. Martin said another accomplishment for 2009 was the announcement by ProCom, which manufactures gas space heaters, gas fireplace systems and gas log sets, that it would relocate its Georgia operations to the Canton-Cherokee Business and Industrial Park.

The company is renovating the 84,000-square-foot site in Canton to meet its needs, and will continue to operate at its Smyrna plant through the winter, Mrs. Martin said.

ProCom will start out with 20 employees in Canton, but has the potential to grow to 60 to 75 employees.

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