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Duplin commission welcomes new business, grants

KENANSVILLE -- The Duplin County Board of Commissioners welcomed a new business to the county Monday morning, approving the sale of a five-acre parcel of land in the Southpark Industrial Center to Veteran Fire Inc. for \$30,000.

Veteran Fire, a full service fire protection company that sells, installs, services and inspects fire extinguishers, restaurant and corporate fire suppression systems and exit and emergency lighting systems, was founded in Wilmington by Chuck Reimel in 2004.

"He's expanding into the Raleigh market, so it makes sense to come to Duplin, halfway between the two," Duplin County Economic Development Commission Director Woody Brinson said.

The plan is build one new structure in the industrial park and employ four to five people initially, but the company does plan to expand.

"We're really on a strong growth trend," Reimel said.

No incentives were given to the company, but Brinson added, it could be eligible to apply to the county's revolving loan fund

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for a low-interest loan to help in the building process.

In other good news, the commissioners learned that the Sheriff's Office has received a \$75,000 grant to help with gang prevention programs. It does require a 25 percent match, but that will come from the sheriff's existing budget.

With six gangs confirmed in Duplin County, gang prevention has been one of the Sheriff Blake Wallace's -- and the board's -- top priorities.

"Public safety is one of our primary concerns," chairman David Fussell said.

The board also agreed to accept two other grants.

One was for \$8,000 for the county Health Department to help combat minority health problems, especially diabetes.

The other was a performance grant for \$19,000 for the county Emergency Management Department, which supervisor Craig Forlines wanted to use for salary increases. That use, however, was delayed as the commissioners decided they needed more time to examine the pay raise process and whether they would be able to afford such salary levels next year, without a guaranteed grant.

And finally, the commissioners heard a presentation from county convention and visitors bureau director Rob Wells about the need for a tourism development advisory board.

Such a board, he explained, would be different from the one overseeing the Duplin Events Center.

"We're separate departments and that's



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something we want to look at. There's a difference between tourism and the events center. This is an opportunity for tourism people to have input in making tourism decisions," Wells said.

The seven-member board, if approved by the commissioners -- they deferred consideration until their next regular meeting -- would be made up primarily, of county business owners and those people involved in some way in the tourism industry. It would help make decisions on county marketing and how tourism dollars should be spent.

Such a board would be a precursor to a future tourism authority that is mandated by the state once the county reaches \$200,000 in occupancy tax collections.

By [Matthew Whittle](#)

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