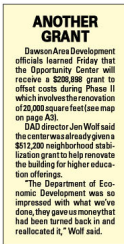


Opportunity knocks

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 02 September 2010 20:39 -



Wolf: Development of former Wal-Mart building benefits county.

About a year ago, the Dawson County Opportunity Center in Lexington was in the planning stages.

Today, eight Lexington Public Schools preschool classrooms and a cafeteria buzz with activity in the former Wal-Mart building.

A Parenting Learning Center offers parenting skills while English as a Second Language takes place in another classroom. There's also day care and space left over for computers and testing.

During Phase 2, Central Community College will move from downtown Lexington to the former Wal-Mart building to offer distance learning and nursing classes and have an industrial lab by the first of the year.

Nebraska Health and Human Services will build a service center in the Opportunity Center that will create 50 new jobs in the third phase of the center's development.

Dawson Area Development director Jen Wolf is excited about the types of training and educational opportunities available to county residents.

"People won't have to drive to Kearney, Grand Island or Hastings for some of things they do now," Wolf said. "The Opportunity Center also opens up classroom and meeting space to host

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state or regional associations.”

Wolf said they hope to have a Workforce Development office relocate to the Opportunity Center as well as the Lexington Chamber of Commerce and Visitor’s Center.

A DAD office may open in the building in addition to incubator space for start-up businesses.

Although they probably won’t be permanent tenants, there is room for post-secondary offerings through the University of Nebraska at Kearney and the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture.

She said the Dawson County Sheriff’s Office will probably use classroom space for regional training.

“Anyone in the county who needs space for training can utilize the center,” Wolf said, noting that arrangements can be made through CCC.

The City of Lexington owns the 64,000 square-foot building. Lexington Public Schools has space reserved for alternative education.

Wolf noted that the preschool in the new building, offered through Lexington schools, moved from Tyson Fresh Meats, Inc. once the building became available and the district renovated space.

“Timing is so important,” Wolf said, noting that former Tenneco employees and anyone else can retrain and upgrade skills at the center.

Tenneco of Cozad, a shock absorber manufacturer, is scheduled to close at the end of 2010.

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Paulsen Inc. of Cozad completed Phase I of the project while Simon Contractors of North Platte is working on Phase II.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services will do Phase III when it builds a new service center in the Opportunity Center.

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