

'A special day to grow jobs'

City of Bluefield receives \$2 million grant for Commercialization Station

By CHARLES
BOOTHE

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BLUEFIELD — The City of Bluefield is receiving a \$2,040,000 grant for its Commercialization Station on Bluefield Avenue.

Rep. Evan Jenkins (3rd District) joined city officials and others Thursday afternoon to make the announcement

at the station, located in the former headquarters of the Bluefield Regional Transit Authority.

"What a great day to be in Bluefield," he said. "This is a special day to grow jobs."

A matching grant of more than \$500,000 will be included from the Shott Foundation, he added.

The \$2 million grant

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Staff photo by Eric DiNovo

In front of an audience of city officials and other dignitaries, Rep. Evan Jenkins announces that the city of Bluefield is receiving a \$2,040,000 grant for its Commercialization Station on Bluefield Avenue, Thursday .

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is through the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) with funding that was included in the POWER initiative, a strategy to help communities struggling to cope with the impact of the loss of coal-related jobs.

Jenkins is on the appropriations committee, which earmarks which agencies receive those federal dollars. He said he works closely with the EDA and thanked the agency for providing the funding.

Jenkins said job creation is the goal of the station, a business incubator aimed at helping entrepreneurs.

"Good jobs solve a lot of problems," he said.

Jenkins said the station project, which was spearheaded by the city's community and economic

development director, Jim Spencer, took a vision then put the "pieces of the puzzle into place."

"We always want to be a partner with you in these efforts," he said. "Let's make an investment, and this is what it is. Thank you for allowing me to work with you."

Jenkins said Mercer County, like many counties in this region, has "taken it on the chin (in economic woes)," and it takes local officials having a "clear vision" and working together to make it happen.

"You are all awesome," he said, also praising the Shott Foundation. "It's an honor to work with you. We will work with you every step of the way."

Del. John Shott, with the Shott Foundation, said the grant may be historic.

"I can't ever recall a day when we had an amount like this coming

to Bluefield," he said. "The spigot (of federal dollars) has finally opened for us."

Shott pointed out three other foundation board members in attendance, Frank Wilkinson, Chandler Swope and Smokey Shott. "We are all really excited about this," he said.

Bluefield Mayor Tom Cole could not attend the announcement but through a pre-recorded video said Spencer started working on this project right after he was hired last year, and found the space and pursued the funding.

"We are excited about the opportunities this brings to our region," he said.

Bluefield City Manager Dane Rideout said the station project was the "brainchild" of Spencer.

"This is a homerun," he said of the grants, adding that it took a vision followed up with action. "That's powerful."

"This is not about a sin-

gle entity," he said. "It's about a partnership. This will train people (and provide jobs) so they can stay here. This is absolutely phenomenal."

Spencer also emphasized that partnership.

"Economic development is a team sport," he said, calling Jenkins "our D.C. champion."

Spencer said many partners are involved in helping not only bring the station to fruition, but to provide the resources necessary to make it work.

Those partners include the Center for Applied Research & Technology (CART), Bluefield State College, TechConnect West Virginia, Concord University, American National University, AEP, Mercer County Technical Education Center, the Development Authority of the Great Bluefield Area, the Robert C. Byrd Institute, E.L. Robinson

Engineering and others.

"It's all of us working together," he said, urging those in attendance to speak about the station to anyone having a business idea.

"It's a manufacturing and technology center," he said, with the overall purpose of moving ideas and innovations into the marketplace.

One start-up business, Autonomous Radio Controlled Equipment, is already operational inside of the center.

The announcement took place in a large bay, and Spencer said three other bays at the station are available.

"We want to fill them up as soon as possible," he said, adding that anyone can visit the website mybluefield.org to learn the details of how to get started and possibly locating a business in the center.

An incubation application is included on that website.

Spencer said services provided by all of the partners involved in the station include incubation, office and production space, business networking, grant assistance, business coaching, funding, incentives, workforce training, manufacturing processes, technical support, business planning and entrepreneurship training.

Spencer said the money will be used for electrical upgrades, lighting, doors and other improvements to the 60,000-sq.-ft. structure.

Communities cannot sit back and do nothing about creating jobs, he added.

"We need to be aggressive in economic development," he said. "This is a great day."

— Contact Charles Boothe at cboothe@bdtonline.com