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Believe in West Virginia Program outlined for commissioners

By PAMELA BRUST

PARKERSBURG - Wood County commissioners heard a presentation Monday on the Believe In West Virginia Leadership Foundation, a faith-based nonprofit program operating out of Charleston that is attempting to create job opportunities and supports church and nonprofit organizations serving the needy.

The program also sponsors an educational outreach project called Silver Ring Thing, which promotes abstinence to teens.

"Our vision is to have a plan that will provide opportunities for our children and grandchildren so they can have gainful employment that will allow them to support and sustain their families right here in West Virginia," said John deBlecourt, executive director for the Believe in West Virginia Program.

The program has partnered with West Virginia University on the school's patents in clean coal technology and on the development of future products that could create job opportunities.

"We have to turn these into practical products. Our goal is to create jobs through clean coal technology," deBlecourt said.

Commissioner Rick Modesitt said people need to work together to bring about socio-economic change in the state.

"We hear a lot of talk, but we really need to make changes and get moving in that direction," he said.

Modesitt noted the state, like the nation is seeing a trend away from manufacturing jobs to retail/service work.

"A lot of people are willing to work, but it's just not affordable to take the minimum-wage, lower-wage jobs," deBlecourt said, noting one of the program's projects is working with WVU on an alternative coal-based pitch agent.

"There is also a foam-based product, which is blast and fire resistant. It could be used in the side doors of cars as a collision protectant and in protective vests," he said. "There are a lot opportunities for these products and could create good-paying jobs."

Commissioner Bob Tebay said according to statistics from the Wood County Development Authority, there have been 1,900 manufacturing jobs lost in Wood County since 2000.

The foundation director said his organization has also partnered with a Cross Lanes businessman who donated warehouse space to house donations from retailers.

"These are surplus products that retailers/businesses prefer to give away. We make them available to nonprofits, churches for those in need they may be serving," he said.

The storehouse currently has some food items including boxed milk, children/school items including markers, McDonald's toys, ink jet paper, paper plates, notebook binders, binder pages and other items. There are some personal care products, and some building materials. Items are available on a first-come, first-serve basis and must be picked up at the Cross Lanes storage location.

While recent donations have been down somewhat due to ongoing disaster relief efforts in the Gulf, deBlecourt said, the organization has seen more than 100,000 pounds worth of items come through the warehouse.

"We believe there is someone somewhere that can use the items, and many times retailers/businesses are just looking for someplace to donate surplus merchandise," he said.

The commissioners were told there may be a handling fee, and donations are sought for the service based on the budget of the organization receiving the items, in order to help make the program self-sustaining.

The Silver Ring Thing provides a program emphasizing abstinence help address the rising rate of sexually transmitted diseases in pre-teen, teens in the state, according to deBlecourt.

For more information on the program, storehouse, or Silver Ring Thing project contact deBlecourt at (304) 552-7601, or email him at johndbwv@believeinwv.org. The program Web site is: www.believeinwv.org.