

3-16-05 McDowell News

# A place to work and a place to play

County's long-term goals include retirement community, rec facility

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McDowell County may someday have a new retirement community, which could provide senior citizens with everything from independent living to full-time health care. And the existing Lake James State Park could become a county-owned recreational facility.

These were just two of the long-range economic development issues discussed by the McDowell County Commissioners Monday. County Manager Chuck Abernathy, who is also the economic development director, said these and other projects could take years to develop before becoming a reality.

However, he said he wanted to bring these issues to the board's attention as a way to diversify the local economy. The board of the McDowell Economic Development Association has looked at these projects for the past two months.

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## County commissioners look toward the future

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Abernathy said the county could try to recruit new state agencies, such as prisons and juvenile detention centers. Although no other prisons are planned at this time, a regional laundry facility could be located at the Marion Correctional Institution.

This facility would provide laundry services for state prisons in this section of North Carolina. Abernathy said it could create about 20 state jobs and use a lot of water from the city of Marion.

Another prospect for McDowell would be a new retirement community. Givens Estates United Methodist Retirement Community in Asheville is looking at placing a satellite facility in McDowell and other counties in western North Carolina.

"The facilities offer seniors a range of living options that begin with independent living apartments and end up with nursing care provision," said Abernathy, adding this is very preliminary.

Representatives of Givens Estates recently met with local officials about the idea. School Board

member Phil Tate is also on the board of directors for Givens Estates.

"It may not bear any fruit but there is an interest," Abernathy said.

County officials also talked about the future of Lake James State Park. A new and larger state facility will be constructed on the Burke side of the lake.

During a recent meeting of the McDowell Chamber of Commerce, Abernathy talked with Chamber Executive Director Rod

Birdsong and N.C. Rep. Mitch Gillespie about what will happen with the existing park. State officials have made no decision about what to do with the park.

At that meeting, Gillespie said the county could probably get some state money to examine different options related to its future use. He said he would pursue this if county officials asked for it.

"It seems wise to us to plan for this and not be reactive when the state decides what it would like to do with the current facility," Abernathy said.