Dietterick still pursuing college

BY LADONNA BEEKER
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SENECA — There may still be a chance for Virginia College to open a campus in Seneca as the city administrator continues his persuasive efforts following an area technical college president's opinion of proprietary colleges.



Dietterick

Tri-County Technical College President Ronnie Booth submitted a letter to the S.C. Commission on Higher Education on April 25 calling for-profit colleges, such as Virginia College, for the "unwise, uneducated and undiscerning." Following the letter, Education Corporation of America Executive Vice President Roger Swartzwelder pulled Virginia College's pending application with the Commission to amend its state license to include a Seneca campus.

Now, Seneca officials hope not all is lost with Virginia College.

"We have seen a groundswell of support for Seneca and Virginia College in response to Mr. Booth's letter to the Commission of Higher Education," City Administrator Greg Dietterick wrote in an email July 6 to Tom Moore, Education Corporation of America CEO. ECA operates Virginia College campuses.

Talks with the S.C. Commission on Higher Education board chairman have shown a positive lean toward Virginia College's idea for Seneca and reflects no negativity on the college's future business plans in South Carolina, Dietterick explained.

"The (commission) chairman assured (state officials) that the application to open up a Seneca campus will be approved if Virginia College wishes to put it back on the agenda," Dietterick wrote to Moore. "And that Virginia College is not in a negative position, nor would it every be in the future."

Also, Virginia College appears to have received Workforce Investment Act (WIA) federal funds for job training for the Seneca campus.

Dietterick previously told The Journal that when Virginia College agreed to locate a satellite campus in the former adult education building beside Gignilliat Center, the college started exploring the idea of training individuals to work on Proterra's electric buses that are scheduled to be in Seneca in 2013.

On April 25, Seneca and Oconee County officials purchased the former Propex site in Seneca for $2.5 million. Currently, Johnson Controls uses a portion of the building for storage and shipping. Altera Polymers is occupying another small portion of the building.

Dietterick introduced Altera to Proterra. Altera develops pellets for materials, which can be used for the electric buses' interior. Virginia College planned to coordinate with Proterra to create a curriculum to educate people on electric vehicles and have the buses housed at the Propex site.

In addition, Virginia College was going to offer associate degree programs for business administration, criminal justice and network engineering, in addition to a certificate program for medical assistants, at its Seneca campus.

SEE COLLEGE, PAGE A7

COLLEGE: '... this is about freedom of choice ...'

FROM PAGE A1

The new campus would be a satellite location from the college's Greenville campus.

"The city of Seneca hopes that Virginia College would reconsider and open a Seneca campus," Dietterick wrote to Moore, adding he understood the college's decision to pull away following the negative situation. "... However, this is about freedom of choice, and not letting one individual dictate the community's future. It is also an opportunity for Seneca and Virginia College to grow together, an opportunity to work with Proterra and develop a possible electric vehicle institution in the future, not only for buses, but for all electric vehicles."

Moore responded to Dietterick via email July 9, adding college officials would discuss the matter that week.

"I am really struggling with the letter from Booth and how he can hold such an opinion about us in the absence of any facts," Moore wrote, adding he would be in contact with Dietterick.

As of press time Thursday, Dietterick had received no further correspondence from Moore.

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