

THE NEWS EXAMINER

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Leaders thrilled by plans to locate 4-year college here

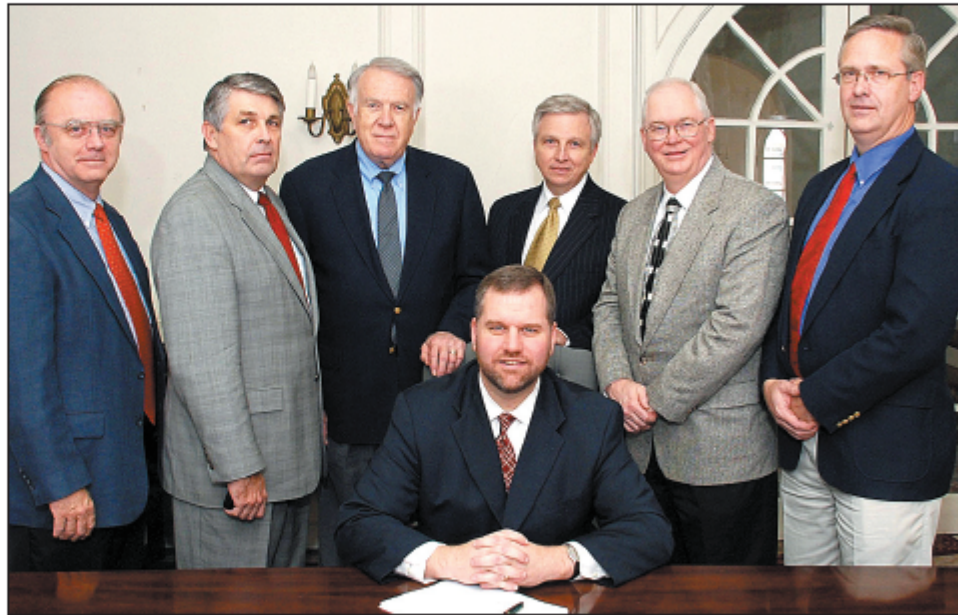
BY KATRINA CORNWELL
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Free Will Baptist Bible College has inked a contract to buy 66 acres in Gallatin near the fast-growing Big Station Camp Boulevard for its new campus.

Relocation of the 65-year-old college to the new site - which is more than seven times the size of its West End Avenue campus in Nashville - will bring new choices to those seeking a four-year college degree in Sumner.

Free Will is a four-year institution, while Volunteer State Community College offers tracks for associate's degrees and programs to earn bachelor's degrees through partnerships with area colleges and universities. "We look forward to FWBBC being in Sumner County. The college would bring the kind of facility to the county that we want," County Executive Hank Thompson said, in a press release.

"We know that FWBBC officials and Volunteer State Community College leaders have dis-



Free Will Baptist Bible College leaders posed for this photo after signing a contract to buy land near Big Station Camp Boulevard for a relocation of its Nashville campus. Seated: Matt Pinson, president. Standing (from left): Sandy Goodfellow, director of plant operations; Mark Johnson, campus relocation project consultant; Milton Fields, vice president for institutional planning; Greg Kettelman, provost; David Williford, vice president for institutional advancement; Jon Forlines, vice president for student services and dean of students. SUBMITTED PHOTO

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cussed ways they could complement each other. FWBBC would be a great addition to our community, which we would welcome with open arms."

A timetable for construction start-up has not been set, but the college already has financing in place to buy the property and will be talking with donors and friends about help in offsetting the still undisclosed land costs.

"As you can see, we have a lot of work to do in the next few years," FWBBC president Matt Pinson said in a press release. "We have our current campus to sell, a new campus to design, buildings to construct, funds to raise, and most important, we have students to teach."

FWBBC expansion

The move to the larger campus site in Sumner across the street from Station Camp High School, Knox Doss Middle School and Station Camp Elementary School, which is under construction, means the Bible college won't have to cap enrollment or curtail new programs, Pinson said.

"We will have room to construct adequate buildings for instructional needs and to house students," he said, in a press release.

In addition, the site provides the space to design a campus to fit current and future needs, build outdoor sports facilities for students and provide plenty of room for parking.

Warren Nichols, president of Vol State, expressed support for

the Bible college's decision to relocate to Sumner.

"We are looking forward to working with the college on education initiatives and enhancing the lives of the resident and the service area," Nichols said.

The city's population growth is expected to surge in the next five years as the area economy continues to attract high-end shops, malls, jobs, health-care facilities and an array of restaurants and housing developments.

"Gallatin welcomes Free Will Baptist Bible College," Mayor Jo Ann Graves, said in a press release. "This is truly a historic and exciting time for our city and communities around us."

"FWBBC will bring us a great college with a tremendous, rich tradition of education and community service. It will change our city for the better, and we could not be more pleased."

Economic opportunities

The relocation is also expected to enhance the growth boom here and facilitate additional economic development.

The new campus will front on Bison Trail to the south and Station Camp Creek to the west, and is in the center of Sumner County's booming economic growth corridor, often referred to by officials as the "golden triangle" between Nashville and Long Hollow Pikes.

It is less than a mile from the \$18 million Sumner Regional Healthplex-Wellness center, which has an early 2008 target completion date.

"This is such a unique project in that it enhances economic development so much by all that Free Will brings to our community, and that it is in and of itself a great eco-

nomics development win in terms of investment and job creation," said Clay Walker, executive director of Gallatin's Economic Development Agency.

"As an ED professional, you will seldom get the chance to work on something this special, and I feel very fortunate to have had this experience."

"It also represents a community development aspect," Walker continued. "We're a city of 25,000 that has Vol State and Free Will Baptist College. It differentiates us from other communities. They will help us grow other businesses, too."

Johnny Hayes, chief executive officer of Forward Sumner Economic Council, a private/public partnership created to spur economic development here, talked about the impact the college would have on the area.

"The college will be a wonderful addition to our community and will provide benefits to our citizens that transcend the pure economics of the project. While the jobs and the new buildings and the use of the land are great, it is the presence of the students that really makes me excited."

"Dr. Nichols deserves a big pat on the back. Vol State recognized this as something that will enhance their offerings and not infringe on their territory. It speaks to the caliber of the people at Vol State," Walker said.

The city's economic development guru was also complimentary of the level of cooperation he shared with Hayes.

"Having been here more than two years now, I have had many opportunities to work with Johnny, so it was no surprise to see once again just how effective he can be,"

Walker said.

"Egos were certainly checked at the door for this project as we utilized every asset and resource we had to bring this project to fruition in such an ambitious timeframe."

Walker said.

Recruitment to Sumner

The college's plans to sell its Nashville campus and potentially relocate to Sumner recently hit a snag when the first buyer backed out in March.

Mark Johnson, the college's full-time relocation consultant, announced at that time the college's continued plans to sell the Nashville-based campus and relocate the 400-student college.

The college's administration and trustees became convinced then of the need to proceed and secure the Gallatin site.

"It did not take much time before Free Will had selected the Downs property as its preferred site and began negotiating with the

property owner. In the meantime, the city and Forward Sumner divided duties and worked cohesively to make the transition as seamless as possible for our client," Walker said.

The decision to relocate the campus came in June 2006 following a six-month feasibility study. At that time, college officials projected that it would cost about \$30 million to buy land, build a new campus and relocate.

Terms of the land deal with owner Dan Downs have not been disclosed because of a confidentiality clause in the contract, which will not be finalized until all required city approvals can be obtained through the planning process.

"Free Will Baptist Bible College will be an asset to our community providing a Christian education for our future leaders," Downs said, adding the county would be fortunate to have both two-and-four-year colleges here.