

Samaritan's Purse plans shared: Officials told to expect hundreds of jobs



Samaritan's purse truck

Samaritan's Purse, based in Boone, is expanding its operations in Wilkes County. The organization has tracts of land in Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro.

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Government and business leaders in Wilkes County said they were told Wednesday that Boone-based Samaritan's Purse could create hundreds of jobs here as it expands in Wilkes in the next few years.

Leaders of the Wilkes Economic Development Corp. (EDC), the governments of Wilkesboro, North Wilkesboro, Wilkes County and others met with Samaritan's Purse representatives in Boone to discuss the Christian disaster relief ministry's plans for expanding in Wilkes.

Samaritan's Purse representatives talked about building new facilities on property the organization owns off Edgewood Road just outside Wilkesboro and along N.C. 268 East in North Wilkesboro.

Sterling C. Carroll of Boone, a Samaritan's Purse board member, and his wife, Lois E. Carroll, donated 136 acres of cutover timberland and two smaller parcels off Edgewood Road to the ministry in November 2014.

Samaritan's Purse bought 21 acres along N.C. 268 East in North Wilkesboro from Lowe's Companies Inc. in February 2014. Lowe's removed the company's former headquarters building on the property before it was sold.

The North American Disaster Relief operations of Samaritan's Purse are based in a former Coca-Cola bottling plant building on N.C. 268 East in North Wilkesboro. This was donated to the ministry.

At Friday's EDC Board of Directors meeting, EDC President Dan Little said the group was told Wednesday that within two years, Samaritan's Purse will create about 200 jobs in Wilkes, with the average salary in the high-\$30,000 range.

It was also stated that all of Samaritan's Purse's future growth will be in Wilkes County, said Wilkesboro Town Manager Ken Noland.

The group was told that if Samaritan's Purse's current growth rate continues, as many as 600 could be employed within five years as the ministry expands, said Little.

In October, Franklin Graham, founder and president of Samaritan's Purse, mentioned expansion plans when he spoke at the dedication of the Samaritan's Purse Mission Aviation Services Hangar at the Wilkes County Airport.

"We will begin to move some of our departments down here so as they grow, we've got room to grow," he said. "We're run out of room in Boone, so this is where we're going to expand."

Little said that in addition to the two properties Samaritan's Purse already owns in Wilkes, the ministry is seeking additional property to be used for warehouse space.

"They said that within six months, they will likely break ground on additional warehouse space in the area off N.C. 268," Little said. "They're currently renting warehouse space in Lenoir, and they're looking to consolidate that in Wilkes. "So they're actively looking for warehouse space," he said.

Those who attended the EDC meeting Friday were positive about the planned expansion.

"The one thing I really took away from the entire meeting was their impression of Wilkes, and our existing work force," said EDC Board Member Bart Hayes, a North Wilkesboro commissioner.

"They really liked the work ethic in Wilkes County. They said that so far, from a business standpoint, the people in Wilkes have been good to work with. I've always said that I want Wilkes to be a place where it's friendly to do business—this kind of drives that point home," said Hayes.

EDC Board Chairman Vaughn Hayes said that upon asking Graham what kind of assistance Samaritan's Purse wanted from Wilkes, "I was taken aback by what little he asked for," he said. "He asked for government help, and access to the Edgewood property."

"We need to start now in trying to get better access," he added.

In addition to Little and Vaughn Hayes, representing the EDC Wednesday in Boone was Board Member Eric Kramer. Representing Wilkes County were Commissioner Eddie Settle and Manager John Yates. From Wilkesboro were Mayor Mike Inscore, Councilman Russ Ferree and Noland. From North Wilkesboro were Mayor Robert Johnson, Manager Larry South and Hayes. Also present from Wilkes were Phil Stephens and Larry Stone.

Graham, along with Samaritan's Purse Chief Operating Officer Ron Wilcox, and several board members represented Samaritan's Purse. Sterling Carroll, who donated the land near Edgewood Road to Samaritan's Purse in November, was among board members present.

