

Clinch-Powell region to receive \$250,000

By: *JIM ZACHARY / News Editor*

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Rural communities in Hawkins County will soon be receiving thousands of dollars and have an opportunity for much more.

Vice President Al Gore announced Tuesday that the Clinch-Powell region was awarded \$250,000 in federal dollars and is eligible for its share of \$150 million in grants during the next 10 years.

Clinch-Powell, which includes rural areas in Claiborne, Grainger, Hancock, Hawkins and Union Counties, has been designated as a Rural Enterprise Community by the U.S. Government.

The five-county region is one of 20 new rural Enterprise Communities selected by the federal government. The Hawkins County communities, which include an area which extends from the county line in the Clinch Mountain area to Striggersville and southwest paralleling Highway 11W, entered the competition for dollars in July, 1998.

Four community leaders, former county executive Doug Price, Rogersville Hawkins County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Nancy Barker, Clinch Project Chairperson Nancy Bell and Industrial Developer Ronnie Price, joined community leaders from the remaining four counties under the leadership of Lindy Turner and the Clinch-Powell Rural Community Development Council in order to vie for the funds.

To qualify for the competition, participants were required to draft a 10-year strategic plan for developing a better community.

More than 1,300 surveys were completed and numerous public meetings with residents in the Clinch-Powell region held in order to develop the plan.

In Hawkins County, public meetings were conducted at Caney Creek Park, July 20, and Clinch School, July 23.

In a prepared release, Vice President Gore said, "The Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities Initiative creates successful partnerships between all levels of government, private business, community groups and local residents to bring new life to inter cities and rural communities suffering from hard economic times.

"These Zones do exactly what their name says -- they empower people willing to work hard to improve their lives and build better futures for their children."

The programs are designed with the intent that local community leaders, rather than the federal government, determine how the funds will be spent.

Turner told The Review, "While we did not receive full funding as an empowerment zone, this is great news for the region."

According to Turner, one of the most important and immediate benefits to Hawkins County would be the availability of wage tax credits.

Industries located in the Phipps Bend Industrial District, which is included in the zone, will now meet qualifications for the tax credits.

Industrial Developer Price said, "This should be an important tool in industrial recruitment.

"The availability of tax credits will make Phipps Bend even more attractive to industries considering locating here.

Price added that he was also excited about the fact the industrial district will now receive priority in grants and loans for funding infrastructure improvements. The industrial board is currently seeking funding for the development of a small industry park at Phipps Bend.

As a result of the rural enterprise community designation, the entire Clinch-Powell region will receive special consideration for other federal assistance programs, including new tax-exempt facility bonds and tax incentives for employment programs.

According to officials, the federal grants and tax incentives are intended to be used to attract new businesses and help existing businesses expand, create and retain jobs, increase the supply of affordable housing, reduce crime and clean-up pollution.

According to Turner, decisions have not yet been made regarding how the funds will be dispersed and the amounts to be distributed to each county. She added that additional meetings will be required to implement projects and begin making grant applications.