

COA nets \$200K grant for aviation center

By Peter Williams

The Daily Advance C

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

College of The Albemarle's Aviation Technology Training Center has received another \$200,000 in grant funding from the Golden LEAF Foundation.

COA President Kandi Deitemeyer announced the grant during the college's Board of Trustees meeting Tuesday.

Currituck County is paying to build the \$6.8 million aviation center near Currituck Regional Airport, but COA is responsible for equipping the facility and hiring the staff to operate it.

Golden LEAF, which is funded with money from the state's settlement with the tobacco industry, has already provided COA with \$830,000 for the aviation center. The latest Golden LEAF grant will be used for big-ticket items like aircraft engines, said Suzanne Rohrbaugh, COA vice president for workforce development and continuing education.

"Golden LEAF has been a good partner for us and we've tried to be good stewards of the money they've provided," she said.

COA receives money from the state of North Carolina each year for equipment, but aviation is a specialized field and requires costly equipment, Rohrbaugh said. That's why COA sought the Golden LEAF grant.

Elton Stone, head of COA's aviation program, agreed that Golden LEAF's support has been vital to the project.

"They have been of great help. I don't think we could have done anything without them," he said Wednesday.

And more help could be coming.

"When an applicant gets repeated awards from the foundation, it's a sign they are doing a good job of doing what they said they were going to do," said Dan Gerlach, president of the Rocky Mount-based Golden LEAF Foundation. "We're supportive of the aviation program and it's likely our board will consider it again when our next grant cycle starts July 1. I wouldn't be surprised see the college apply for that money when it is available."

An official groundbreaking ceremony for the Aviation Technical Training Center is set for March 8, but preliminary site work is already under way.

Deitemeyer said she recently attended a meeting in Currituck County and saw bulldozers moving earth at the site. She said she was shocked how far along the project is.

“It was good to get Currituck County mud on my high heels,” she joked at Tuesday’s trustees meeting.

The Currituck aviation center should be complete by early 2013. When it opens, COA’s machining class will be moved from the main campus in Elizabeth City to the center. A drafting program will also be relocated to Currituck. Later that year, the college’s aviation sheet metal program will also move to the Currituck site. Stone is currently working with six students enrolled in the program.

The aviation sheet metal class is a two-year program which COA plans to have certified by the Federal Aviation Administration. Graduates are projected to earn \$22 an hour, based on U.S. Labor Department estimates.