

A collaborative effort to increase the Alleghany Chamber of Commerce's involvement in economic development for the county has led to a move to retain the services of Chamber Executive Director Larry VanHoose.

It was announced earlier this month that VanHoose had decided to take a position in Virginia dealing with economic development for five entities in Southwest Virginia. Those include Grayson, Galax, Carroll, Smyth and Wythe counties.

However, when the story on his departure came to light, an effort was launched to explore a cooperative initiative to keep him on board and help expand economic development in the county and town. When local officials realized that the need for health insurance was a big part of the reason for his departure, the county stepped up to help provide that with the financial support of some of the other entities involved.

In moving forward, the Alleghany Board of Commissioners voted on Monday after a brief closed session to discuss personnel to partner with the Alleghany Tourism Development Authority and the Chamber to provide a benefits package that included insurance coverage and a competitive salary package.

The Town of Sparta has been invited to join in the economic development efforts, but has yet to take official action on the matter, said Mindy Hall, Chamber Board chair.

Hall said the TDA, Chamber and County government have all approved moving forward with sharing the cost of providing the necessary insurance coverage and pay package to retain VanHoose, who has agreed to stay on.

While at the Chamber, VanHoose has been working on tourism, marketing and economic development over the last two years, said Hall. "Larry's efforts to promote tourism in the county for the Chamber have brought us economic development benefits, putting us on the radar for economic development entities in North Carolina," she said. "These efforts provided a segway for us all to work together to retain Larry to continue his efforts."

Hall said that the local group looked at Mitchell County, which has taken on a similar collaborative effort in order to promote economic development.

The Chamber has always provided administrative support to the TDA, and TDA Chair Steve Mason described the expanded effort as four interconnected circles, represented by the TDA, Chamber, and Town and County governments. "Rather than four stand-alone entities, we're stronger together," Mason said.

VanHoose said, "I was leaving to oversee economic development in five counties in Virginia, but Alleghany felt there was need for someone to do that here with oversight from the county and possibly with the collaboration of the town." He said with this effort, everyone's overall cost for economic development can be mitigated.

Hall also noted that continuity is a goal for the chamber as well. "I am grateful for the opportunity to work with everyone to help retain the current staff," she said.

Hall said moneys from the Economic Development Alliance, a fund set up through fundraising efforts done by the chamber under the leadership of former Chair Ricky Brown, are being utilized as the Chamber's portion of the effort.