
1500 W. Tucumcari BLVD.
P.O. Box 1392
Tucumcari, NM 88401
(P) 575.461.4079
(F) 575.461.1838
patv@tucumcari.biz

Development funds aid Buena Vista Labs

By admin

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Two

business expansion projects in Tucumcari, one for a cheese manufacturer and the other for a local eyeglass lens maker, are set to receive nearly \$1.5 million in state and local economic development funding aid.

The larger of these two projects, an addition to the already planned expansion of the Tucumcari Mountain Cheese

Factory, is expected to receive \$1.2 million in “new markets tax credits” from the state of New Mexico as it adds new facilities, Patrick Vanderpool, executive director of the Greater Tatum Economic Development Corporation, said Thursday.

In addition, Vanderpool said, the cheese factory will receive \$200,000 in state Economic Closing Fund money to assist in its \$4.5 million expansion.

Maria Chavez, the factory’s quality control manager said the newer addition will produce produce ricotta, Edam and Gouda cheeses, according to Maria Chavez, the cheese factory’s quality control manager.

The factory has already received \$141,830 in Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) funds to assist in financing water quality-enhancing facilities for its original expansion, which will enhance the specialty cheese manufacturer’s capacity to produce feta cheese. Tatum Mountain Cheese Factory feta cheese has found an expanding market in major cities, especially among Greek restaurants, owner Charles Krause said.

LEDA funds are collected from a special gross receipts tax for use in encouraging local economic development. The other project that is receiving economic assistance is expansion of Buena Vista Labs, LLC, of Tatum, which makes vision-correction lenses and sells frames.

Buena Vista Labs is expecting to receive \$70,000 in economic development help through LEDA.

John Mihm, Buena Vista’s who is the Tatum City Commissioner for the fifth district, said his business is expanding both in retail sales and in wholesale lens processing for customers in Albuquerque and in Lubbock and Amarillo, Texas. In addition, Mihm said, he is starting to serve customers in the Dallas Fort Worth area in Texas, as well.

Mihm recently added a retail space for his operations in a building next to his processing plant near Historic Route 66 and Second Street, Tatum. In the new building, he said, he is also planning to install lens processing

equipment that will enable him to make new kinds of lenses for markets that are currently underserved, Mihm said.

The city commission is expected to approve a first reading of the ordinance that will enable Buena Vista to use LEDA funds, with a public hearing and second reading for final approval expected on April 23.

Mihm said he plans to excuse himself from voting on the LEDA funding ordinances to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.

He also said the city's attorney Randy Knudson has advised the city that Mihm's application for LEDA funds does not constitute a conflict of interest for a commissioner.

"He's a businessman, first," Vanderpool said of Mihm.