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Lack of staff closes cannery

September 13, 2009 12:36 am

By PORTSIA SMITH
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The Lloyd Boxley Cannery in Caroline County is temporarily closed.

County Administrator Percy Ashcraft said he is looking for three part-time hires to run it since the former operator and manager, who are married, quit last month.

The closing has put a damper on what the Board of Supervisors had hoped to promote as a regional operation.

But a new idea floated by an area nonprofit could get the regional effort started if the county can come up with the money.

Lindsey Williams is the community food program coordinator for Quin Rivers, a nonprofit, regional community-action group based in New Kent County. She said the organization received stimulus money that they plan to use to create and fill area food pantries and provide fresh produce to homeless shelters.

But she said when produce is left over, it often goes bad and has to be thrown away.

"The idea is to get the cannery up to state distribution standards," Williams said, so the food can be canned instead of wasted. "That way we can fill the pantries with produce that has been locally grown and locally preserved."

Currently, the cannery is only allowed to can foods for personal consumption, not public distribution. Ashcraft said the building needs renovation to fix wall problems, exposed pipes and several other items to bring it up to code.

"The cannery has been a stepchild of county government," Ashcraft said. "We've never utilized it as a county department and it's caught up to us."

In the month the cannery was open this year, fewer than two dozen used it. The cannery has brought in



John Brown works in the Lloyd Boxley Cannery in Caroline County, which closed last month when he and his wife left the operation.

only \$458 in revenue in the last two fiscal years.

The cannery, located off U.S. 301 in Milford, costs about \$17,000 a year to operate two days a week.

That's money the county didn't have in this year's budget until an escrow account being held at Union Bank and Trust with \$17,969 became available. That account was created by former cannery operator Lloyd Boxley, and remained there upon his passing in 2005.

Williams said if the cannery is brought up to the standards they need, it could provide opportunity for people to learn a life skill.

"We can teach this to people of all ages, of all economic statuses, of all genders to grow their own food, preserve their own food and ultimately be self-sufficient," she said.

Ashcraft said he likes the idea Williams has proposed, or the idea of turning the cannery into a county food bank.

"If it can have a dual use, it can be a better use," Ashcraft said. But that decision would be up to the Board of Supervisors.

At the Sept. 22 Board of Supervisors meeting, Public Utilities Director John Bory-schuk is expected to give an estimate on how much the cannery renovations may cost, and see if the supervisors want to proceed.

Representative from the George Washington Regional Commission may be touring the facility later this month. Supervisors Maxie Rozell and Bobby Popowicz mentioned the status of the cannery at an earlier commission meeting and heard that there may be some regional support there also.

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