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State agency visits

By **MATT SANCTIS**
Staff writer

GREEN SPRINGS -- WSOS officials met Wednesday with representatives from a state agency that helps provide funding and resources for organizations that assist low- and moderate-income families.

James Klein, chief executive officer of the Ohio Community Development Finance Fund, toured the Jordan Family Development Center in Bowling Green before visiting the Stricker Family Center on South Buchanan Street in Fremont and the Barney Quilter Camp in Green Springs.

Joyce Huntley, a spokeswoman for WSOS, said the agencies have worked together for about 10 years. The fund is an Ohio nonprofit organization that helps small businesses and community-development organizations find funding for projects, including grants and loans.

"What we want to do is try and figure out how we can add value to the kinds of things they (community-development organizations) want to do," Klein said.

Previously, the organization has worked with WSOS for an expansion at the Stricker Center and provided small grants for the Head Start program. Klein is touring WSOS and similar organizations throughout the state to determine how his agency can help and which projects would be the most beneficial.

Klein said the agency manages a roughly \$87 million budget, the majority of which is used to assist in projects focused on child care facilities, affordable housing and economic-revitalization projects.

Deb Martin, director of community development at WSOS, provided a brief tour of the Barney Quilter Camp. One project discussed as a possibility is a program in which WSOS would train employees to begin careers as water and sewer operators.

However, Martin said the proposal is only in its earliest stages and no action has been taken so far.

"For us, this is the place we like to be in the discussion," Klein said.

Martin said if it works, the program would be held at a WSOS facility and would provide training for young students and individuals further along in their careers to begin work as water and sewer managers. She said many employees in that field are beginning to get closer to retirement, and there are few qualified replacements. Ideally, those employees would work locally once their training is complete, Martin said.

"Ultimately, we'd like to work with some of the local communities to set up internships," Martin said.

It is unclear what role, if any, the fund would provide in the project, but Klein said he plans to attend a meeting in October in which local WSOS officials will meet with community members to begin discussing the proposal.



Charlie Longton/News-Messenger

DEB MARTIN, WSOS director of Community Development (from left); James Klein, CEO of the Ohio Community Development Finance Fund; and Benjamin Kenny, WSOS development coordinator tour Barney Quilter Camp in Green Springs Wednesday.