

Grants may boost business in Clare

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Small business entrepreneurs in Clare County could soon benefit from two federal grants aimed at boosting the economy.

United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development secretary Thomas C. Dorr said that Clare County and the Middle Michigan Development Corp. each received a \$99,500 economic development grant in an effort to improve quality of life in Clare County.

Middle Michigan Development Corp. will use its grant to fund a feasibility study to determine if there is a need or market for a business incubator in Clare County, MMDC Director of Development Kathy Methner said.

A business incubator is a facility that allows businesses to start at a low cost, providing overhead, space and other services needed for a business to start, Methner said.

"We're looking to see if there is a niche in Clare County to support (a business incubator)," Methner said.

"We're pretty excited about moving forward."

A business incubator in Clare County, if deemed needed, could help manufacturing, agriculture or other businesses, Methner said, adding that the county's Small Business Initiative Council is helping in the project and that MMDC hopes to work with the Mid Michigan Innovative Center in Midland if there is a need for a business incubator in Clare County.

Clare County's grant, which will be administered by the county's hous-

ing commission, will be used to support the Enterprise Community's revolving loan fund for small businesses, EC Executive Director Ed Kerr said.

"We're pretty excited," he said of the grant -- the second Rural Development funding the EC has applied for and received. "I'm pretty pumped up right now."

While the EC had established a revolving loan fund for small business owners -- particularly those who have difficulty in securing traditional

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funding because of past credit problems or because the proposed venture is considered risky -- the grant will help the county continue to offer small business loans to others, Kerr said.

The idea behind the loan fund is to offer money to small business owners deemed by the EC review board to be a great idea with a good business model, Kerr said.

When those businesses are successful, the loan is paid back to the county, which in turn can offer more loans to other would-be small business owners, Kerr said.

Clare County and MMDC were two of several entities across the U.S. to receive the grants.