Lompoc leaders anticipate economic boost

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Specifics of the potential economic impact of the Allan Hancock College Public Safety Training Complex are still unknown, but the center may bring a great amount of growth to the city of Lompoc, according to economic development workers and Hancock College officials.

The college has projected that the complex, set to open for classes in January, may bring about 5,850 attendants to Lompoc in 2014. The projections are based on classroom size and number of courses, and college officials expect both factors to increase in the next few years.

Economic Development Director Teresa Gallavan said such estimates mean the city, and its local retailers, need to be prepared for more people coming to Lompoc.

"People will be staying here, eating here and spending their money here," Gallavan said. "We want to drive those visitors and tourists (here)."

The Economic Development Committee held a workshop entitled "Revenue Opportunities for Lompoc Businesses" on March 18. Jenelle Osborne, vice chair of the committee and organizer of the workshop, said the goal was to educate local businesses about the complex's potential. The committee hoped retailers would be inspired to devise strategies to attract students to their businesses, Osborne said.

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"The students will come here for three day windows, or for as long as nine weeks," she said. "They will stay in the local hotels because the college doesn't have a living facility. On top of that, there are opportunities to start businesses."

Osborne said she and the Economic Development Committee want to encourage new startups and intend to work on a contract to build a hotel with a conference room. The committee has also encouraged existing businesses and restaurants to offer deals to the students, she said. That way, they won't have to travel to Santa Maria or Santa Barbara to seek recreation during their time off, Osborne said.

"The complex is one of those hidden gems that we need to grab a hold of," Osborne said. "We need to research what additional businesses can be supported by those attendees. We want to capture the students' day-in and day-out activities here."

David Senior, Hancock College's public safety director, said the potential of the Public Safety Training Complex is beyond comprehension, but the complex will be looking at controlled growth.

"That means we don't offer so many classes beyond what we have the staff to offer," Senior said. "We only want to bring in the best instructors."

Senior said he believed the complex will benefit the community overall, though he could not give solid numbers.

"We are really excited to get the process going, and right now there are so many variables," he said. "We are trying to do it right for the students, the college and for the city of Lompoc."