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Empty fire station will soon house FSU medical students

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THE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Special to the Chronicle

Citrus County commissioners on Tuesday paved the way for a partnership with Florida State University that they hope leads to more physicians practicing locally.

The board voted 4-1 to spend up to \$30,000 retrofitting the former Fort Island Trail fire station to house four FSU medical students who will be shadowing physicians and other medical professionals in six-week intervals.

The first group of four students will move in on Aug. 1.

Commissioner Jeff Kinnard, a chiropractor who has led the effort on the board's behalf, believes the program will open the possibility of medical students returning to Citrus for their practice.

The plan has changed somewhat since first initiated in October.

County officials thought then that FSU medical students based in Orlando would be living in Citrus County for one year. The county offered one of its neighborhood stabilization program houses in Citrus Springs rent- and utility-free.

The only caveat was that the students would need to meet income guidelines because the house was purchased with federal grants to rent to low-income residents.

Officials later learned students would be staying only for six weeks, then departing, to be replaced by another group of four students for six weeks.

Rather than face the paperwork of qualifying new sets of students in a short time, the county turned to the fire station, which is vacant.

The station has two bathrooms and two bunk rooms that will be converted to a pair of shared bedrooms. Members of the medical profession behind the FSU project will furnish the new apartment. Students will not pay rent, but they will pay for utilities, County Administrator Randy Oliver said.

Commissioner Jimmie T. Smith voted against the initiative, saying he opposed the use of county funds to retrofit the fire station.

Kinnard said the program has tremendous possibilities for Citrus County, which faces a shortage of medical professionals.

"Are they going to fall in love with Citrus County in six weeks? I don't know if that happens, but it gives them exposure to the community," Kinnard said Wednesday. "The doctors will make an impression on the students and these students will make an impression on these physicians."

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Jeff Kinnard
Citrus County Commissioner