

Hardeeville charter school gets 26 acres of land for new academy

Sherry R. Brunson
Jasper County Sun

Royal Live Oaks Academy is headed to a new home.

According to the Hardeeville-based charter school's Les Wicks, "the prominent Gray family" of Hardeeville donated about 26 acres of land to the school on John Smith Road, which is about 1,000 feet north of the city offices and athletic facilities and where the charter school plans to build a 62,000-square-foot school.

"We're excited, the city of Hardeeville is excited and we hope you're excited," Wicks said. "We will build a beautiful facility and we will own it 100 percent."

Wicks said it is expected to take approximately 18 months for the facility to be ready — in time for the 2015-2016 school year.

"The Gray family said it would be glad to donate the land because the school is what the county needs for development to grow," Wicks said. "We expect it will take about six months to do the fundraising, get

a drawing from architects and planning, and then about a year to build the facility."

The building will have numerous moveable walls in order to change the room purposes and also it will be very science and arts-based with modern technology.

"We are very project based, or hands-on, in our teaching methods and use 'muscle-based memory' teaching techniques, not just memory-based learning," Wicks said. Currently, the school uses the facilities of the old

Hardeeville school, which it leases from the Jasper County School District.

Royal Live Oaks signed a 10-year, \$1.4 million lease for the campus in 2011.

Wicks said the school plans to honor all leases.

According to Wicks, there are about 500 students at the academy with a 50-student waiting list.

The school receives state and federal funding, but no money from local property taxes.

The school currently has kindergarten through ninth grade and a grade is

added each year.

"Our students all wear uniforms and we also provide breakfast, lunch and a snack for our students," Wicks said.

"None of the children pay for any of the meals because we want the students to all be equal — no rich or poor — just children who want to learn. We want all of the kids to succeed."

The news comes shortly after the Jasper County school board voted not to sell the academy the old Hardeeville Elementary building.

"I'm pleased to hear that

the Jasper County School District solved their funding needs and doesn't need our money," Wicks said.

In 2003, Wicks and his wife determined to move to the county after seeing a presentation about "The Corridor of Shame," which speaks about the underfunding of rural school districts along the I-95 corridor.

The school recently received a good growth rating on its state report card. Its absolute rating was below average.