

It's official



Michael Bavero/The Daily Item

Gary Murphy, center, owner of Mountain Valley Inc. a company headquartered in Daytona, Md., speaks during a press conference announcing his purchase of the Laurelton Center for \$1.6 million on Friday. Also pictured are Union County commissioners William Haas, left, and John Showers, and State Rep. Russell Fairchild, R-85 of Lewisburg.

Laurelton Center finally gets new owner

By Eric Mayes
The Daily Item

LAURELTON — Laurelton Center has a new owner. Gary Murphy accepted the keys Friday afternoon from state Rep. Russell Fairchild, R-85 of Lewisburg, at a brief ceremony on the front steps of the old administration building.

"It took a long time but we got here," Mr. Murphy said. "I

STATE PROPERTY

Sold to Mountain Valley Inc. for \$1.6 million

look forward to being a member of the community. I'll need your help to make it all it can be."

He and Mr. Fairchild announced the sale at a press

briefing opened to a few honored guests who were ushered onto the grounds of the center only after being announced and passing through a manned gate.

Mr. Murphy purchased the property for \$1.6 million under the name Mountain Valley Inc, a company headquartered in Daytona, Md. Gov. Ed Rendell signed papers clearing the way for the sale a few weeks ago, fi-

nal documents were signed Friday morning in Harrisburg.

The sale ended almost a decade of false starts after the state closed the facility, which since the 1930s had been a home for the mentally retarded. It closed in 1998 when residents were moved into smaller group homes. Since

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that time, three sales agreements have fallen through. Two would have turned the 342-acre complex, which includes 52 buildings, into resorts. The third, an offer by Woodward Camp, would have transformed the property into a sports camp and preparatory school. It was scuttled after contaminated soil was found on the property and the company got into a dispute with the state over clean-up.

Mr. Murphy plans to open a small business development center, a bed and breakfast and

a dude ranch. What residents are unlikely to see is a casino, he said.

Responding to rumors that the property might at some point be open to gaming, Mr. Murphy said that was never his intent. Though he would like to bring gambling to the property state law prohibits it, he said, so it will not be tolerated. He continued by adding: "Would I like to see it out here? The answer to that is different. Yes, I would, I believe it would help this community."

State legislators made a mistake in not allowing gambling in rural areas, he said, adding

that it was their job to fix that mistake if they chose to.

Looking at what would come to the property, he was unable to specify exactly how many jobs the projects he envisions might create.

"I really can't answer that," said Mr. Murphy, explaining that he hoped to draw several small businesses to the property and would know more when plans solidified.

For the same reasons, he said he couldn't guess when work would start at the center or when the project would be fully developed.

"One step at a time, that's

how I move," he said. "(Work will be done) as quickly as it can."

Of one thing he was certain, the community would be involved throughout the development process.

"I'm basically just a guest here," he said.

Mr. Murphy, who told reporters he tended to shy away from the media because of his Intelligence background, also owns a 500-acre family compound in Kentucky. He compared Laurelton to that property and said he planned to maintain Laurelton in the same way he manages it. He

assured his neighbors that he would keep the property as pristine as he can.

Citing the fact that the choice to sell the property to Mr. Murphy was made by a citizens' task force, the property was returned to the tax rolls and the state got a decent price, Mr. Fairchild lauded the sale as a success for the com-

munity.

County commissioner William Haas, also said he was pleased with the sale: "Hopefully it will bring economic development to western Union County."

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