

MIDDLETOWN

Grant will fund renovation of firehouse

Money for the \$675,000 grant comes from the Philadelphia Park Casino in Bensalem.

By CHRIS ENGLISH COURIER TIMES

Chris English can be reached at 215-949-4193 or cenglish@phillyburbs.com.

A big pile of casino cash will save firefighters a lot of fundraising.

The Bucks County Redevelopment Authority recently announced a \$675,000 grant to Middletown that will go toward the renovation and expansion of the township's William Penn Fire Co. substation on Bristol Oxford Valley Road.

Money for the grant is coming from Philadelphia Park Casino in Bensalem. The authority gave out \$2.6 million in casino grants to several municipalities that border Bensalem, and the Middletown grant was the largest.

"We're thrilled, absolutely," said William Penn member Barney Wheeler, chairman of the fire company's building committee. "Now we can move forward and finally get this thing done. It will increase firefighting capability in the township and give our people a firstclass facility, which they deserve. We've been operating out of what is essentially a two-car garage."

The 1,745-square-foot substation was built in 1963 by members of the company, said Wheeler. A 5,476-square-foot addition, estimated to cost \$875,000, will have three vehicle bays, an engine room, office and storage. The existing space will then be converted into a recreation room, multipurpose/exercise room and storage.

The plan is to leave one of the new vehicle bays open for use by ambulances, police cars, snowplows or other township or emergency service vehicles that might need it, said Wheeler.

The fire company had raised about \$100,000 of the needed \$875,000, a lot of which had already been spent on engineering fees and other preliminary work, he said. With the big boost from the casino grant, Wheeler hopes construction can start early next year and be finished by the end of 2008. One of the conditions for this year's casino grants was that they fund projects that could be "substantially completed" by the end of 2008, said the county authority's executive director, Bob White.

Middletown supervisors Chairwoman Lisa Pflaumer said the township will seek grants and explore other options to help cover the remaining cost of the fire company project.

"We will not leave them hanging," she said. "We're extremely pleased to be able to expand fire services in the southern end of the township, the Levittown area. We're hoping to complete the project in a timely manner so the company can deliver services in a timely manner to our residents."

Since the grant is going to Middletown, the fire company project must be publicly bid, White said. The township will not be given the money in a lump sum but will be reimbursed as it submits project invoices to the authority, he added.

White said the grants were voted on by the authority's five-member board of directors, which consists of Chairwoman Patricia Bachtle, former state representative Tom Corrigan, Raymond Chapman, Anthony Maniscola and Tom Courduff.

"The communities were very careful in the selection process, submitting to the authority what they considered their most important and useful projects," said Bachtle, who is also the county prothonotary.