Clark College set to open new branch

A sneak peek at the school’s new east Vancouver location

BY PAUL LEONARD | of the VBJ

For a school founded in the middle of the Great Depression, it was fitting that Clark College debuted its newest location last week in east Vancouver during another prolonged — albeit less cataclysmic — economic downturn.

An estimated 1,100 visitors stopped by for the new Columbia Tech Center’s open house last Saturday afternoon, with residents from as far away as Camas coming to check out the facility and its new offerings.

Columbia Tech Center joins Clark College’s 101-acre main campus in downtown Vancouver’s Central Park. With 2008 enrollment hovering around 10,000 students, the school celebrated its 75th anniversary last year.

At the event, attendees lined up to learn more about the center’s power utilities program, its new cooking school and continuing education classes, according to Clark College spokeswoman Barbara Kerr. “We’ve have been gearing up for this for months,” Kerr said. “And it’s really gratifying to see people as excited as we are.”

Many prospective students from east Vancouver and the Camas-Washougal area were eager for a continuing education option closer to home. “It helps that it’s 15-minutes away from my house, especially since I don’t have a lot of time between work, home and school to spend driving around,” said Camas resident and part-time student Teresa Palley.

The $30 million, four-story building, built to exceed silver LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)

Marlaine Renton teaches Zumba, a new Latin music-inspired workout, in Columbia Tech Center’s new fitness classroom with Clark College mascot, Oswald, at last Saturday’s open house event. CTC is scheduled to offer its first classes for students Sept. 21.
"I think it's one of the best facilities I've ever seen," said Chef Rick Browne, the author of "The Best Barbecue on Earth" and host of the PBS series "Barbecue Americas," who will teach a Holiday Grilling class at CTC this fall.

According to Browne, his classroom will have room for 26 students to sit down, with more space for students to stand and watch as he grills Christmas and Thanksgiving appetizers, side dishes, entrees and — surprisingly — dessert.

Browne’s classroom, like many others in the new building, is a “smart” facility equipped with a camera, recording equipment and high-speed wireless Internet access. "There are so many possibilities with the technology offered in the classroom that I don't think we've figured out exactly what to do with it yet," he said.

Though the new branch offers many business-centered programs, there were plenty of other activities for guests at last Saturday's event, including painting instruction, an apple pie-making demonstration and an appearance by Clark College’s penguin mascot Oswald.

"It was great to see the looks on people’s faces," Kerr said. "I think a couple of people really got excited about the kinds of programs we offer."