Clark College stays grounded in tough times

75 years & counting

By HOWARD BUCK
Clark vanguard

Launched during the Great Depression in October 1935, Clark College is as relevant as ever. The community college offers students a path to higher education degrees, and just as importantly, professional certification programs and hands-on training for job seekers of all ages. Enrollment in autumn 2008 surged 6 percent above the previous year, to more than 13,000 full- and part-time students.

That is a longstanding pattern: When the U.S. economy falters, community college enrollment soars. To meet that challenge, Clark continues to grow, on and beyond its Central Park neighborhood main campus near downtown Vancouver.

Anticipation is high for Clark's first satellite campus in east Vancouver near 19th Avenue, due to open this September.

The Clark Center at Columbia Tech Center is designed eventually to serve 1,000 students near the 19th Avenue corridor and foster more job training partnerships with nearby high-tech firms. It will host general education courses, professional and technical training, and basic and adult classes, and have science and computer labs and a large conference room for community use.

Miller Creek on Salmon Creek hilltop, Clark's initial satellite is a thriving center of learning, a success with Washington State University Vancouver.

The Clark Center at the WSUV campus serves hundreds of Clark students, and boasts the popular Clark writing programs. WSU's upper-division courses, the two schools have arranged to make an in-county, four-year college track a viable option.

Clark also is scouting another north county location for a future branch campus. Already, Clark serves hundreds of students in its Town Plaza center in the McLoughlin Heights neighborhood. Town Plaza is geared for specialized training, Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language.

Town Plaza also is home to a Pathways Learning Center. This new center expands resources for students and customers of local agencies there. Boosting that effort is Clark's recent Community Outreach grant designed to help cover costs of tuition, books and supplies for low-income students who enter high-demand careers. The grant has served more than 100 Clark students in the last two years. More information is available on the college's Web site: www.clark.edu/admis-
sions_fin aid/final_aid/erp/grant.php.

Basic skills classes are taught elsewhere off-campus, including local high schools, Vancouver's Open House, Multinatios, WorkSource in Stevenson and WorkSource Columbia Gorge in White Salmon.

A leg up

Clark helps Southwest Washington high school students get a leg up on college studies. Each quarter, about 1,000 high school students who meet academic standards can earn college credit by attending regular Clark courses, in the schools' Running Start program.

Clark has a highly regarded nursing program. Three quarters each year, 48 nursing students begin a two-year degree track. A diagnostic imaging program launched recently has drawn a flood of applicants to meet high demand. Clark adds 18 new student slots each quarter, due soon to rise to 24.

On the drawing board is a new health sciences, technology and engineering and math-biology building on the western edge of the main Clark campus. Expected to open by 2013 or 2014, it would house several more medical programs.

Clark recently added slots for its welding program. A new, Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (IBEST) program will soon admit ESL students who get specialized job training for welding and early childhood education professions.

IBEST classes offer extra academic support for those in high-demand job training. Currently, IBEST helps students who pursue certification as nursing assistants or office assistants. Expanding students regional op-
tions, Clark has signed co-admissions agreements with WSUV, Portland State University, Marylhurst University and Concordia University. The schools' teamwork means baseline for registration and service for transfer students. Some can reserve upper division slots while they use advising, library and other resources of other schools.

Clark has further ties with Eastern Washington University. Without leaving town, students can earn EOU bachelor's and master's degrees in social work and technology, and a digital baccalaureate degree, with instruction from EOU faculty here. What's more, Clark has actively embraced Web-based "e-learning." In fall 2008, more than 1,300 students, or one in four Clark students, took at least one of EOU classes. The number of credits offered was 74, a sixfold increase from 2005.

Online tutorials, telecourses, discussion board messages and hybrid use of classroom and alternative instruction helps students fit courses around work or family responsibilities. In fall 2008, about 11 percent of students were women, about one-third of all learning participants have children.

Yi Tao right, a visiting student from Zui Yi, China, teaches the art of writing the Chinese language to Daniel Lee, a Clark College Foundation member, during a kickoff for International Education week at Clark College.