Visitors are reflected in an interior glass wall inside the newly opened main Gaiser Hall concourse at Clark College. The $10 million remodeling project brings most student service offices under one roof again in the longtime campus hub.

Clark College reopens its heart

By HOWARD BUCK
Columbian staff writer

So long, plywood walls, plastic sheeting and awkward detours.
Clark College celebrated the return of its campus hub on Friday, formally reopening the east hall of Gaiser Hall following a $10 million makeover.

Student eligibility, registration, advising and financial aid, cashier, counseling and career services are back together again, conveniently housed in a two-story concourse.

"I like it. It's real nice, compared to the building that was here before," said Maria Kornechuk, 19, of Ridgefield, turning in financial aid forms for fall term, when she enters Clark's nursing program.

That would be the dark and cramped original Gaiser Hall, opened in 1958. Now comes an airy 21st century wing that contains passive and active heating and cooling elements, including beams chilled with cool water and radiant concrete slabs.

LSW Architects hopes to earn the silver level of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certification for the green features, Clark officials said.

Running Start program students Kevin Reddington, 16, left, and Gleb Sukhovolsky, 17, both of Vancouver, compete in the Battle Arena during Clark College's year-end "Spring Thing" celebration on Friday, staged near Gaiser Hall.
stop signs may turn profit

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Gaiser:

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Ongoing Clark students, including those in Running Start, will more likely be granted (they no longer must wander through parts of the Penguin Union Building (Gaiser’s western half) to trek across Port Vancouver Way to the “T” Building for vital services.

Room with a view

“It’s a one-stop shop,” said Rachel Rants, vice president of student affairs. “It makes a huge difference in a student’s life, to be able to go and find everything in one place.

Clark trustees will meet in a new Community Room on the second floor, also open for group use. Guests will have a gorgeous view of the leafy campus through a south-facing glass facade.

The renovation began in December 2006 and was essentially completed by March. School officials chose to wait until after spring break to vacate the scattered offices back from their temporary homes.

Clark christened the Penguin Union Building, a major addition that also cost $10 million.

More work ahead

The PUB continues to house the campus Welcome Center for visitors and prospective students, plus popular lounge areas and the “fireplace room” used for intimate public gatherings.

Last September, a newly expanded Clark bookstore opened at the north end of the new concourse.

This summer, workers will make $650,000 worth of upgrades in Gaiser Student Center, the large hall used for music, theater and speaking events. They will enlarge the stage, re-tile the floor and improve lighting and audio systems.

A rebuild of Gaiser Hall’s last original portion, the culinary arts program kitchen and student cafeteria, is four to six years away, officials said.

Seattle Veterans Affairs hospital

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is visiting Seattle today to tour the VA hospital, part of the VA Healthcare System, according to Pelosi’s office.

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County taking its time

In May, Ecology officials warned the county by certifying a mail that it had missed a 15 deadline for submitting a draft ordinance and other documents detailing how it intends to comply with the new state stormwater standard. It warned the county would face possible penalties if it did not submit a final ordinance by Aug. 18. Clark County commissioners wrote back this week saying they would adopt a final ordinance on their own schedule, in December.

We regret missing the timeline, but the extensive outreach and public participation will give us a better stormwater ordinance to present to the county in December,” they said.

At issue is Clark County’s financial disagreement with the state about the stormwater runoff standard new construction should have to meet in so-called Phase 1 municipal storm sewer systems — those owned or operated by the county, King and Snohomish counties and the cities of Seattle and Tacoma.

The state requires stormwater runoff under the federal Clean Water Act to control the flow of polluted water and sediments into the ocean and other waterways. The new state standard, which replaces a 1992 rule, sets a stormwater discharge from development in those Phase 1 urban areas should not exceed the current standard, adding millions of dollars to the cost of new homes.

But Clark County argues that much of its land was open fields and meadows until recent development began after World War II. Commissioners are considering adopting a less stringent standard that would allow for a benchmark in watersheds; less than 40 percent of the land is forested today, and aerial photos show it was that way since 1955.

The discussion is more than theoretical. In a power point presentation, Golem said the benchmark in the state’s urban area basin would be lower.

We serve constituents when they are having problems with state agencies,” he said. “There’s nothing to stop us from saying this negatively affects our constituents.

But Ecology is being pushed from the other side as well. Bill Moore, head of the agency’s stormwater unit, said its new Phase 1 rule and a separate Phase 2 rule that applies to stormwater runoff in Vancouver and other smaller jurisdictions are both being challenged by two Seattle Sound environmental groups, which argue that the rules are not tough enough.

“We know the water in our urban waterways is degraded,” Moore said. “We have the science.”

“I don’t argue the science,” Golem said. “It’s very sound. I think what the target should be. We need a more balanced target.”