

Clark College set to enter a new era

A sparkling gem in Clark College's educational tiara prepares for its first rush of students on Sept. 21. It is a remarkable 70,000 square-foot complex rising to four stories at 18700 S.E. Mill Plain Blvd., a short distance west of Camas. This is a significant eastward reach of the college toward prospective learners in the Columbia River Gorge from Camas-Washougal to Stevenson in Skamania County — and as far as western Klickitat County. It shortens travel time for eastern Clark County residents as well.

There is much more. Known officially as Clark College at Columbia Tech Center, this site could, in time, grow to equal the 101-acre main campus at 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, near downtown Vancouver.

The brick building makes extensive use of glass panels. Its vistas include partial or full views (depending on the floor level) of Mount Hood to the east, and Mount St. Helens to the north. The structure will house 18 classrooms, eight science and computer labs and a 3,420-square-foot multipurpose conference center. A privately owned artificial waterfall, pond and greenspace are next to the building's east end.

The Corporate Learning Center features a circular kitchen classroom and multipurpose room that can accommodate 400. Initial class offerings in the center this fall include certificates or degrees in business or administrative support; basic skills; an associate

of arts transfer; power utilities technology (using rooftop training aids); classes to complete high school graduation, science, math and English composition, and others. The first semester will include 400 to 800 students, with room to grow to 1,100.

The roof on the four-story building boasts an array of solar panels and two wind-powered turbines. Four kilowatts of power can be generated to energize less than one percent of the building, said Jim Watkins, project manager for the college. An experimental roof garden may be planted in boxes, and a small observatory is a distant hope.

Room to grow

The Columbia Tech campus can grow to add another 40,000 square-foot building on the existing 10-acre site. Clark's president, Bob Knight, said the college has negotiated the right to buy additional property, if expansion is justified.

The center builds on the educational strength and flexibility of Clark's main campus offerings. Clark already has a co-admissions agreement and learning site on the campus of Washington State University Vancouver. Other partnerships are with Eastern Washington University, Concordia, Marylhurst University and Portland State University.

Features of the building reflect 21st



century technology and environmental needs. Sunscreens can be lowered to turn back the glow of a warm spring day; natural lighting and electrical lighting are controlled to admit maximum light at minimum cost. Surface water in the 400-vehicle parking lot is drained into bioswales, islands of vegetation. It does not leave the property.

Personal safety is highlighted by Areas of Rescue Assistance (ARAs) on the second, third and fourth floors. They offer two-hour protection and safe haven for disabled students in case of fire, or other disaster, until firefighters or medics arrive.

If one or more people threaten from outside, all doors can be locked with the push of a button. Parking lot security includes cameras, lights and loudspeakers, monitored from the main campus. LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — certification will be sought for the building.

The price tag? \$29 million, appropriated by the state Legislature in 2007 for the 2007-09 biennium. Predesign funding was granted during the 2003-05 biennium. The Clark College Foundation purchased the site for \$1.4 million, and expects to provide \$335,000 in July for equipment, according to Lisa Gibert, foundation president.

Groundbreaking for Columbia Tech Center occurred on a rainy Nov. 19, 2007, with construction continuing through 2008, while Clark celebrated its diamond jubilee, and into 2009.

Oct. 1 — Clark's 76th anniversary — will be the dedication date for the Center. It is a gigantic leap for a community college that began 75 years ago in a modest abode called Hidden House.

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