

Clark College stays grounded in tough times

75 years & counting

By HOWARD BUCK
Columbian staff writer

Launched during the Great Depression in October 1933, 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 types. Enrollment in autumn 2008 surged 6 percent above the previous year, to more than 13,000 full- and part-time students.

That fits 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 satellite campus in east Vancouver near 192nd Avenue, due to open this September.

The Clark Center at Columbia Tech Center is designed eventually to serve 1,000 students near the 192nd 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.

Miles away on a Salmon Creek hilltop, Clark's initial satellite is a thriving center of learning, a successful partnership with Washington State University Vancouver.

The Clark Center at the WSUV campus serves hundreds of Clark students, and houses the popular Clark nursing program. With WSUV's upper-division courses, the two schools have partnered 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 job 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 other workforce agencies there. Boosting that effort is a \$188,000 state Opportunity Grant designed to help cover costs of tuition, books and supplies for low-income



Yi Rao, 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.

TROY WAYRYNEN/The Columbian

students who enter high-demand careers. The grant has served more than 400 Clark students in the last two years. More information is available on the college Web site:

www.clark.edu/admissions_fin_aid/fin_aid/opp_grant.php.

Basic skills classes are taught elsewhere off-campus, including local high schools, Vancouver's Open House Ministries, 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 schoolers who meet academic standards earn college credit by attending regular Clark courses, in the school's 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 20 slots.

On the drawing board is a \$30 million science, technology, engineering and math classroom building on the western edge of the main Clark campus. Expected to open by 2013 or 2015, it would host several

more medical programs.

Clark recently added slots for its welding program. A new, Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program will soon assist GED or ESL students who get specialized job training for welding and early childhood education professions. I-BEST classes offer extra academic support for those in high-demand job training. Currently, I-BEST helps students who pursue certification as nursing assistants or office assistants.

Expanding students' regional op-

CLARK COLLEGE

■ The community college at 1933 Fort Vancouver Way serves students taking academic, vocational or adult-education courses. Annual tuition, for a student taking a 12-credit load over three quarters, is \$2,645.40. Call 360-992-2000. On the Web: www.clark.edu.

PENGUIN TRACKS

■ Clark offers online admissions and registration service. For new students, first use: www.clark.edu/quickstep. To learn more about Corporate and Continuing Education courses, including a catalog and class openings, use: www.at-campus.net/clark.

■ Hundreds of adults enroll at Clark each quarter for popular Continuing Education, Mature Learning and Travel Studies courses. Options range from senior fitness to guided overseas tours to learning Mandarin Chinese. Mature Learning students (age 55 and older) get a 70 percent discount on class tuition rates.

■ Clark began operating as a small, private two-year school in 1933, first received state funding support in 1941 and became a full-fledged community college in 1967.

■ Clark has heavily recruited international students in recent years, especially in Asia. By autumn 2008, 79 international students were registered, an increase of 12 percent from 2007.

tions, Clark has signed co-admissions agreements with WSUV, Portland State University, Marylhurst University and Concordia University. The schools' teamwork means hassle-free registration and service for transfer students. Some can reserve upper-division slots while they use advising, library and other resources of either school.

Clark has further ties with Eastern Washington University. Without leaving town, students can earn EWU bachelor's and master's degrees in social work and technology, and a dental hygiene bachelor's degree, with instruction from EWU faculty here.

What's more, Clark has actively embraced Web-based "eLearning." In fall 2008, more than 1,300 students, or one in 10 Clark students, took at least one eLearning class. The number of credits offered was 471, a six-fold 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 70 percent of students were women; about one-third of eLearning participants have children.