

Clark College grant will expand classes for retirees

Alice Perry Linker
staff reporter

Classes in preparing good food and making good wine will be among the offerings to students older than 50 through a pilot program planned by Clark College.

A \$70,000 grant to the college launches the "Plus 50 Initiative" that will allow retiring baby boomers to return to school for enrichment programs and, in some cases, to learn a new skill.

The Vancouver-based college is one of five "mentor" colleges selected by the American Association of Community Colleges to work with 10 "demonstration" colleges to develop programs that will appeal to the nation's largest demographic.

As a mentor college, Clark will send representatives to a training session in Washington, D.C.,

to present programs about "what we're doing" to other community colleges, said Tracy Reilly Kelly, continuing education program manager.

Reilly Kelly said the college plans to increase the enrollment in classes such as nursing assistant to help provide jobs in the expanding health care field. By partnering with worker retraining programs, the college will increase the openings in the nursing assistant and other health care programs and provide scholarships to those who need help with tuition and other fees, especially for those over 50, she said.

"We'll help people over 50 get into these programs; give students a leg up," she said. "We want to develop more health care programs. Health care jobs are in high demand."

The Plus 50 Initiative will provide workshops and seminars "devoted to student success," Reilly Kelly said. "We're looking at every aspect."

The Plus 50 Initiative will not replace the college's mature learning program, she said, but will enhance the offerings to older students.

In addition to offering classes to retirees and those near retirement, the college will offer programs for business owners to help them retain experienced employees, Reilly Kelly said.

"We intend to provide corporate training to help businesses address the impending problem of losing the immense brain trust of current executives

in their 60s as the baby boomers retire," she said.

Some classes, like cooking and wine-making, will be offered to those who want to enhance their post-retirement activities, she said. The cultural offerings may include literature, philosophy and entrepreneurship. The curriculum has not been set, Reilly Kelly said, but is expected to be introduced next fall.

The college expects to open a branch at the Columbia Tech Center in 2009. The new campus will have high tech facilities for teaching continuing education classes. According to a press release from the college, the campus will have a new kitchen classroom where classes in wine-making, cooking

and agriculture will take place.

Community College of Spokane is also a mentor college. Others are Cape Cod Community College, West Barnstable, MA; Central Florida Community Col-

lege, Ocala, and Century College, White Bear Lake, MN.

Information about the program is available at the college's continuing education department, 992-2939.