



Opening of Faulkner State health building nears: Ceremony for \$7.3 million facility set for Friday

Published: Tuesday, August 10, 2010, 8:40 AM



Russ Henderson, Press-Register



Kate Mercer/Press-Register

Faulkner State Community College's new \$7.3 million, 45,000-square-foot Allied Health and Natural Sciences building is set to open Friday on the college's Fairhope campus.

FAIRHOPE, Alabama -- After 18 months of construction, Faulkner State Community College officials will soon open the doors of a new \$7.3 million Health and Natural Sciences building on the college's Fairhope campus.

The three-story building will expand the college's nursing programs from the main Bay Minette campus to the school's Fairhope campus, Faulkner officials said.

"It's a beautiful building, and one we can be proud of for many reasons," said John Borom, director of Faulkner's Fairhope campus.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned for 10 a.m. Friday at the building, which faces Bancroft and Johnson streets in downtown Fairhope. Classes will begin the following week.

According to plans, it will be the first structure in Alabama's two-year college system designed according to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, he said. The design will save the college an estimated \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year on energy costs, Borom said.

The 45,000-square-foot building is not yet LEED certified, but will undergo several tests in the coming weeks to gain that certification, said Jim Fitz-Gerald, the college's dean of administrative services.

"Every room and every hallway has a motion sensor. When no one is there, the lights will go off," Fitz-Gerald said. Meanwhile, the well-insulated building's heating and cooling system will be controlled by a computer system at the college's Bay Minette headquarters, he said.

The building's construction was paid for through a \$4.6 million tuition revenue bond issue by the state Board of Education and \$2.7 million left over from other projects in which costs were lower than anticipated, Fitz-Gerald said.

The building's first floor will accommodate labs and classrooms for biology, chemistry, physics, biology and microbiology courses, as well as a new student center, he said.

The student center, called the Sun Chief Den after the school's mascot, is equipped with a double-sided fireplace, two 52-inch flat-panel televisions and a vending area for snacks. It includes an outdoor dining area with concrete tables and chairs, he said.

The second and third floors will include labs and classrooms for nursing and allied health courses, Fitz-Gerald said.

Originally, the facility's third floor was to house an all-new cinematography program to help develop Alabama's film industry. But the development of a film program fell by the wayside as the state's school system faced a funding crisis, Fitz-Gerald said.

The building's original price tag was \$14 million.

"Then proration hit. We were concerned about the budget, so we made the building smaller," Fitz-Gerald said. The original plan was for a 52,000-square-foot building, but 7,000 square feet were removed from the third floor, he said

Also, bids for construction came back "significantly lower than we expected," Fitz-Gerald said. "We must have hit the market just right."

State, county and local politicians are expected to attend the Friday [byr: Aug. 13 :]ceremony, as well as representatives of the building's designers, Walcott Adams Verneuille Architects, and its construction contractor,

Stuart Construction of Bay Minette, said Sara Godwin of the college's office of community relations.

"We had a good source of income for this project," said Fitz-Gerald, referring to the college's rise in enrollment this year.

Enrollment at Faulkner State increased nearly 18 percent compared to spring 2009, due in part to rising unemployment and increased competition for area jobs, Godwin said. For the spring semester, more than 4,100 students began taking classes, compared with 3,477 students in spring 2009.

For more information, contact officials with Faulkner's Fairhope campus at 251-990-0420.

© 2010 al.com. All rights reserved.