

Open for business(es)

HCC Tech Center welcomes students and industries

By Jonathan Watkins
Gleaner correspondent

A longtime dream was finally realized at Henderson Community College with the opening of the William L. Sullivan Technology Center at the beginning of the Fall semester in 2008.

“This center has been a vision since the early 1990s and to see it become a reality is truly great,” said Dr. Patrick Lake, president and CEO of HCC. “It has exceeded our expectations in every way.”

At the developmental stages of the project, the new center was called the Tri-County Technology Center, referring to the three counties it would eventually serve: Henderson, Union and Webster. However, it was later renamed the William L. Sullivan Technology Center in honor of the former state senator, who is also one of the founding fathers of the local community college.

Construction of the 55,000-square-foot facility - which is located between the Academic Technical building and the Fine Arts Center of the Henderson campus - began in the fall of ‘006, shortly after the Kentucky General Assembly earmarked approximately \$13.1 million for the project.

The new facility was built using the latest innovations, such as geothermal technology, making it one of the most energy-efficient buildings on campus.

After nearly two years of construction, HCC actually took ownership of the building late last spring. Faculty and staff then began a “military-type operation” to prepare the technology center for classes in late August, according to Lake.

“There was a transitional phase that required weeks of moving and situating,” he said. “There was also maintenance work to be completed.”

Fortunately, this operation was a success, and the Sullivan Technology Center was prepared to welcome students for the fall semester of 2008.

According to HCC's president and CEO, the three-story facility provides a number of different spaces for a variety of programs, including technical training and instruction, “soft skills” training and even a Success Center for both HCC students and the community.

The new Tech Center includes several spacious, high-bay areas with tall ceilings for technical-training programs, such as Industrial Maintenance Technology, but it also contains more traditional classroom spaces for “soft-skills” training in nursing, supervision, management and other fields.

But even though some of the center's classroom spaces are more traditional, they boost several modern features. For example, all classrooms are wired to take advantage of the latest technologies, and two of the rooms have tiered seating which can hold up to 60 students. Some of the technical-training classrooms also have specially-designed features, such as additional electrical outlets and access to the building's utilities for study and practice.

The Sullivan Technology Center is also designed to adapt to the demands of area businesses and industries, Lake said, by providing “just-in-time” training to meet the needs of the region's private sector.

“We tried to incorporate as much flexibility as possible into the building design,” Lake said. “We want to be as responsive as we can with short notice.” River View Coal was the first area industry to utilize the new Tech Center, holding a job fair in late July of 2008.

“The entire facility was used to accommodate the different phases of the job fair,” including orientation and testing.

That event attracted more than 800 potential employees to the Tech Center.

Pamala Wilson, who is dean of community and economic development at HCC, added that the “just-in-time” space was used in the fall semester for a health fair, which was coordinated by the nursing department.

Wilson said the health fair brought together nursing, dental hygiene, clinical lab tech and ag tech students and promoted volunteerism from within the college, in addition to providing a service to the general public.

HCC plans to host focus groups with area businesses and industries to learn how the “just-in-time” space can best be used to meet local-training needs, as well as to improve awareness of this new space.

Besides the technology center's multifunctional space, Lake said he is most proud of the Sullivan Success Center, which is housed on the second floor of the new Tech Center and was dedicated in memory of Elizabeth Dorsey Sullivan, the late wife of William L. Sullivan, during the building's dedication ceremony in October.

This area is designed to be a “one-stop shop” to meet the needs of both students and community members.

The Sullivan Success Center is made up of several components: 1) a Basic Adult Education Center, where local adults can obtain GED training, 2) a Learning Skills Center, where HCC students can receive college tutoring and other assistance, 3) a Career Connections Center, which serves as a tool for both prospective employers and employees, 4) an Assessment Services Center, where students can take placement exams, as well as professional exams, and 5) an Advising Center, where students can receive assistance with academic planning or discuss any challenges they are encountering at HCC.

“How many campuses offer all of this in one place?” Lake asked.

And the Success Center seems to be a hit with students and community members.

“There are so many students using the services that it has been a challenge keeping up with the demand,” Wilson said.

She added that students are reacting very positively to other areas of the new Tech Center, as well.

“I hear students say, 'I come over here just to study,' or 'This place is so amazing,' “ Wilson said. “Students really seem to be enjoying it here.”

One of the most popular new hangouts in the facility for students has been the Cyber Café, which is an informal environment complete with wireless Internet access. There are also four computer stations housed in the café.

“There are always at least one or two students taking advantage of this space,” Wilson added.

Another heavily-utilized area in the new facility is the center's state-of-the-art board room, complete with audio-visual equipment and teleconferencing capability. This board room has been used by not only the College but also community groups, such as the Henderson-Henderson County Chamber of Commerce.

“Private businesses can rent (many of the spaces) in the building,” Wilson said. “However, we do not charge nonprofits to use our facility.”

Wilson added that she hopes many people from within the community will “come out and see what we have to offer.”

To date, she estimates that more than 2,000 people have used the new facility for classes, training or assistance in the Success Center.

Lake said he has “received a lot of positive feedback” about the Sullivan Technology Center.

“It is truly a wonderful addition to our campus,” he said.