

LMC plotting manufacturing tech upgrade

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BENTON TOWNSHIP — Every little bit helps when you're trying to make improvements, which is why Lake Michigan College is seeking a federal grant to upgrade its manufacturing technology program.

LMC board members have agreed to apply for money from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

LMC President Bob Harrison said the college is reaching a critical point with its manufacturing technology program in which about 200-300 students are enrolled at M-TEC in Benton Harbor, he said.

"When we're looking at renovations or changes to support instruction, we'll always look for grant applications," Harrison said. "Hopefully, we'll have some sense of whether they're interested in funding it by the end of the summer."

Harrison said he's still working out amounts and specifics with LMC's management team.

"We'd target this more toward equipment and classroom space — (uses) that

clearly indicate how they'd support the manufacturing industry," he said.

The application is due by June.

A successful application would ease potential strain on the college's budget, Harrison said, but there's a bigger purpose behind it.

"Manufacturing is still a big part of the local economy, and right now, all the manufacturers are expressing frustration at not being able to find the right people with the right skills," Harrison said. "Those same conversations are going on daily. In fact, I'm getting calls from Kalamazoo, looking for (qualified) people" for manufacturing jobs.

The college is further waiting to hear about a \$16.4 million grant it's seeking from the state for facility improvements at its flagship Napier Avenue campus, as well as its Bertrand Crossing and South Haven sites.

The state is promising to cover the costs of a successful application. If no word comes down by May or June, then the college won't expect to hear anything until after the November elections, Harrison said.