

LMC launches first 4-year program

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BENTON TOWNSHIP
— The moment's been on the horizon for awhile, but Lake Michigan College can now grant four-year degrees.

Students can start enrolling this fall in the college's energy production and distribution management program, for which they can earn a bachelor of applied science degree, which marks a historic moment for LMC, President Bob Harrison said.

"Not only is this the first bachelor's degree we have ever offered, but this is also the first bachelor's degree offered by any college

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or university in the state of Michigan specifically focused on meeting the work force training needs of the energy production and distribution industry," Harrison said in an LMC news release.

Wednesday's announcement follows the Higher Learning Commission's approval of LMC's request to offer the program – which focuses on teaching industry-specific business practices and operating methods, the release noted.

Board members on Tuesday briefly recognized the team that helped develop the program at the college's Bertrand Crossing campus near Niles.

"It's a big deal for us, so we're pretty excited," Harrison said.

LMC developed the program with help from Indiana Michigan Power's D.C. Cook Nuclear Plant, Palisades Nuclear Power Plant and Consumers Energy.

The college reported

that about 55 percent of the industry's current energy professionals will leave the industry or retire in the next decade.

"Students win by having access to high-skilled job training in a promising industry," Harrison said. "Our energy partners win by having a greater talent pool from which to draw."

LMC now becomes only the second of Michigan's 28 community colleges to offer a baccalaureate-level program, which the Michigan House of Representatives made possible in 2010. It passed legislation allowing community college's to offer bachelor's degrees in cement technology, culinary arts, energy production and marine technology, the release said.

State representatives Bob Genetski, Aric Nesbitt and Al Pscholka all joined in championing the bill – along with former state Rep. Sharon Tyler, and State Sen. John Proos.

"We thank our legislators for their leadership and belief in the power of community colleges,"

Harrison said.

Graduates will earn credentials for numerous industry-related jobs – such as plant operators and shift leaders – to work in alternative energy, fossil fuel and nuclear plants, the release said.

The program gives graduates the option to enter related fields, like power plant construction or utility company sales and management.

The baccalaureate degree builds on the college's energy production technology associate program, introduced in 2008 to give students entry-level skills needed to work in the industry, the release said. More than 100 students have graduated from the program.

Students who have earned the associate's degree can now begin junior level coursework, according to LMC, which also awards credit for previous industry and military experience.

Anyone interested in learning about the new program should call David Blumberg at 926-2124.

Movement is continu-

ing on the college's enology and vitology program, for which the board authorized Harrison to start discussions about its proposed legal structure with the LMC Foundation.

The college hopes to start offering the program this fall.

Harrison said he can't go into specifics until he completes the talks.

"To get licensed with the state of Michigan, we have to set up some different legal structures through our foundation. Until we've gotten their OK, it's not anything definite," he said.

Pearson Construction of Benton Harbor has started renovating the Mendel Center's east side. The board awarded the job to Pearson last month for a \$215,000 estimated cost, with work to finish by July 1.

LMC is continuing its search for an instructor to lead the program.

"We've had a couple interviews, but have not made a selection yet. We've got a couple more steps to go through before we can make an offer," Harrison said.