

Dorm buzz

Sign-ups near 80 percent for LMC housing

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BENTON TOWNSHIP — The grand opening is less than two weeks away, but all signs suggest Lake Michigan College's first student housing unit is off to a flying start.

That was how LMC's vice president of student services, Clint Gabbard, characterized interest in Beckwith Hall, which the college will dedicate at 11 a.m. Friday, July 11, on its Napier Avenue campus.

"By then, we hope to be well on the way to that magic spot where it's break even," Gabbard told board members meeting last week. "The applicants tend to be good applicants — by that, I mean they are academically eligible, or are going to be in a program that can help them along. It's an exciting time."

LMC President Bob Harrison said the latest figures he's seen showed 125-150 students registered at Beckwith, whose 188 units feature fully furnished private bedrooms.

"I'm not sure of the exact numbers, but we're moving right along. We expect a busier time in July and August. But if they're eager to be in there, they shouldn't wait (to register)," Harrison said. "So we're very excited."

LMC is developing the Beckwith project with Student Suites of Independence, Mo., which designs student housing for community colleges.

Other aspects of the design include a beach volleyball court, courtyard, disc golf course, lounges and study spaces.

The total estimated cost is \$8 million, which the college is financing through bonds. The bonds will be repaid from student housing fees over 30 years.

In other business, the board authorized its legal team to create a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation for its commercial teaching winery, which will be the centerpiece of its new enology and viticulture program, scheduled to start this fall.

The college originally expected to develop the program's legal structure through the LMC Foundation.

However, LMC scratched that idea after the Michigan Liquor Control Commission suggested that going through the foundation would still align the program too closely with the college, Harrison said.

"It gets back to the legal structure for alcohol control in Michigan. It's a very complex structure," Harrison said. "We're able to open the temporary winery and make wine. Where it gets complex is the distribution of it, doing tastings, and that type of thing."

The resulting agreement will come back for board approval at a future meeting, said Harrison, who still expects the new program to start on schedule this fall.

In personnel, LMC's dean arts and sciences, Chris Spradlin, introduced the board to the college's new director of music, John Owens.

Owens's background includes extensive high school and college music teaching experience, as well as stints as a drummer at Disneyland and for the U.S. Army Band. He grew up in San Diego and is working on his doctoral dissertation in music education at Kent State University.

"He is all but (in the) dissertation (stage) at this point, and just has some neat ideas for our music program. We're excited to have him," Spradlin said.

In other academic items, Gabbard said he expects to join Spradlin and Leslie Kellogg, dean of technology, health science and business, in looking at ways to expand credits for prior learning.

"We are at a great point where we're going to take that on and market it soon," Gabbard said. "To be able to say to someone, 'You've learned a lot — just because it hasn't all happened in the classroom doesn't mean that we can't award credits.'"

For example, LMC could help create portfolios that faculty members to endorse — which may help in attracting more adult students, Gabbard said. "We need them, because they're a critical part of many of our programs," he said.