

Revenue picture brightens for Lake Michigan College

But better economy means fewer students

By **RALPH HEIBUTZKI**

H-P Correspondent

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Programs designed to boost student success are a big focus of Lake Michigan College's 2014-15 budget, which will otherwise look similar to last year's levels.

LMC board members unanimously adopted he

budget, which calls for \$31.5 million in revenue and expenses, at Tuesday's meeting. The fiscal year starts Tuesday.

Highlights include funding for launching the baccalaureate degree in energy production and distribution, and development of LMC's new enology and viticulture program—which are both starting this fall.

“Our commitment is to continually evolve what we offer to move our students and the community for-

ward,” LMC President Bob Harrison said in a news release. “In what is a relatively flat budget compared to last year, we have found ways to adjust our operations to fit the changing needs of our region, and while delivering fresh and relevant choices to our students.”

Other features include funding to create two active learning classrooms for business instruction and an open computer lab and outdoor improvements

at the Napier Avenue campus, the release said.

Overall, the new budget reflects a 2 percent decline in revenue from the fiscal year ending Monday.

However, the college expects to offset declines in tuition and fees with a 1 percent increase in property tax revenue – which is good for \$149,000 – and a slight increase in state revenue of \$185,000, the release said.

Both developments come as welcome surprises in

what's generally been a flat revenue landscape for the last few years, Harrison said after Tuesday's meeting.

“That's a good sign for the housing market, that we're seeing property valuations go up – which is a reflection of people buying new homes. We're seeing additional monies from the state, so that's always appreciated. One percent is one percent,” he said.

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Going into fall, LMC expects a slight enrollment decrease from last year, which reflects current economic trends, Harrison said.

“When unemployment goes up, so does community college enrollment. When unemployment goes down, community college enrollment goes down,” he said.

The college based its budget on a net count of 3,100 students – as well as 1,000 high school students who take dual enrollment classes at their local institution, and LMC, he said.

On the flip side, the college expects to see fewer adult learners over the short run.

“Adult students who have been with us for training are going back to work, so they aren’t able to continue their studies, or they have to cut back. That’s all very, very traditional post-recession, post-recovery trends,” he said.

Harrison said he expects the college to keep looking for ways to save additional money by waiting to fill open positions, and taking advantage of instructor retirements.

Such policies helped the college stay ahead of its expenses by about 6 percent this year, LMC’s vice president of financial services, Kelli Hahn, told board members.

The college expects to continue budgeting for routine capital items like facility repair and replacement projects, as well as upgrading classroom and lab equipment, and computer technology, the release not-