

BENTON TWP.

LMC reaches new milestones during 2014

Student housing, expanded course list raise college's profile

By RALPH HEIBUTZKI
HP Correspondent

BENTON TOWNSHIP — It's been a big year for Lake Michigan College, with brick and mortar projects grabbing a lot of public attention.

But the work that goes on behind the scenes is equally important.

That's how LMC President Bob Harrison sums up a year that saw the institution construct its first student housing complex, significantly expand academic offerings and prepare for major upgrades of its main campus on Napier Avenue.

"We've had a busy, busy year," Harrison said. "It's been a challenging year, and an interesting year. We're addressing some of the issues, and we're working hard to overcome them."

Still, there's no question that the construction of Beckwith Hall, which the college dedicated in July at an estimated cost of \$8.3 million, has helped to raise LMC's profile significantly, Harrison said.

The college anticipates an occupancy of 127 students toward the 188-unit maximum capacity for the spring 2015 semester.

"We've started getting deposits for next year already. It's done what it was intended to do," Harrison said. "Typically, the profile is recent grads of one, two or three years ago. They come from all over our area high schools. It's given our coaches one more thing to offer high-caliber students."

All about the academics

For all the excitement that Beckwith's construction has created, none of it would matter without the academic offerings to back it up, Harrison said.

In May, the college awarded 488 degrees and certificates to 473 students — including 453 associate degrees, 23 certificates of achievement, and 12 Level I certificates.

"We had a great year, commencement-wise. We tend to think about projects, but there's a lot of day-to-day hard work that goes in," he said.

Major academic developments include nine program approvals, led by LMC's first baccalaureate program, which held its first courses this fall. That allows the college to offer a bachelor of applied science in energy production and distribution management.

The program "takes the college's existing associate degree in energy production to the next level," according to a highlights list prepared by LMC.

The Higher Learning Commission also approved an associate's degree in enology and viticulture, which LMC will begin offering next fall with an initial class of 10 to 15 students, Harrison said.

"We tend to think there's a potential to help the industry grow. With wine, there's a spinoff effect into the tourism and hospitality industries," he said.

Construction has been completed for the winery that students will use, the curriculum is ready, and the college has hired winemaker Michael Moyer, of Walla Walla, Wash., as the new program's director. He'll start in January.

"He's got a master's (degree) in enology and viticulture. He's taught for seven years with a program like this, and worked as a winemaker in private industry," Harrison said. "We're really delighted to have him come."

Investing in the future

In October, the LMC board

approved an application for a \$16.9 million state capital outlay grant. If approved, it would cover the cost of major upgrades of classrooms and lecture halls at the Napier Avenue campus, and to the heating, ventilation, cooling and air-conditioning system.

The mechanical systems project carries an \$3.4 million total estimated price tag and has occupied the college's wish list for a long time, according to Harrison.

"That'll bring about a quarter of a million dollars in savings on energy costs," he said.

A successful application would require LMC to match half the funding. The college's application is currently ranked third on the state's approval list, which now awaits action in the next legislative session.

"We're going to keep pushing on it," Harrison said. "This grant was originally submitted about six years ago. A quarter of a million dollars a year starts to add up to real money, so the savings are significant," Harrison said.

Moving toward Napier Avenue

The year ended with a bang with the LMC board approving the sale of the M-TEC Center at 400 Klock Road in Benton Township to Whirlpool Corp.

The sale is part of a plan to house all manufacturing technology programs at the Napier Avenue campus.

As part of that effort, the college is applying for \$1.5 million to \$2 million in Michigan Economic Development Corp. funding to build a new technology center. The project is expected to support the creation of 260 area jobs in three years.

The board's decision comes down to logistics and a discussion with area employers about what the future of manufacturing will look like, in Harrison's view.

Student head counts bounce between 200 and 400 at M-TEC, and 500 to 700 at the Bertrand Crossing and South Haven campus, Harrison said.

Since the bulk of LMC's 3,500 students are at Napier Avenue, it makes sense to create a facility to serve that campus, he said.

"That's driven by our desire to help manufacturing grow, and also, to attract more students into the programs. Having a center here on this campus allows us to have something that students can see," Harrison said.

Here are some additional academic and non-academic highlights of LMC's last 12 months:

- Completed construction of enhanced student amenities, including a concession-restroom facility, fire pit, gas-fired grills, site security lighting, and volleyball court.

- Consolidated new Health Education Institute programs (certified nursing assistant, medical assistant, phlebotomy) in renovated facilities at Napier Avenue.

- The Red Hawk men's and women's basketball teams both competed in national tournament play.

- The Red Hawk women competed nationally for a third consecutive year, finishing seventh. They also won the regular season league title and posted a 26-5 record.

- The men were NJCAA District 9 champions, and made to the national tournament for the first time since 2005. Three players also made the All-Tournament team, while Doug Schaffler was named "Coach of the Year."

- Raised \$330,344 at the Winner's Circle Auction, making it the second largest of the 24 auctions held so far. Since 1989, the event has raised \$3.9 million for scholarships.