

Manufacturing the future

LMC to open doors Tuesday on Hanson Technology Center

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HP Correspondent

BENTON HARBOR — On Tuesday, the next generation of manufacturers will get a glimpse of Lake Michigan

College's vision for their education — and the region's future.

That's when LMC's Hanson Technology Center officially opens to the public

at the college's main campus along Napier Avenue. The opening for the \$12.1 million center comes after more than a year of planning and construction. Fall classes start Sept. 6.

Visitors to Hanson will encounter a bright, modern space that's designed to spark collaboration and creative thinking — a point driven home by its open floor plan, said Ken Flowers, dean of career and



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work force education. “It piques your interest: ‘Hey, what are they doing over there?’ That’s the mentality that we thought of when we were putting this (building) together,” Flowers said during a preview Friday. The public open house is 2-6 p.m. Tuesday. “You can think of the whole thing as a fab lab,” said Chad Dee, the center’s new director. “That’s always been the terminology I’ve struggled with — this whole building is a fabrication lab. That’s what this (building) was designed to do.” Flowers, Dee and other staff will be available to

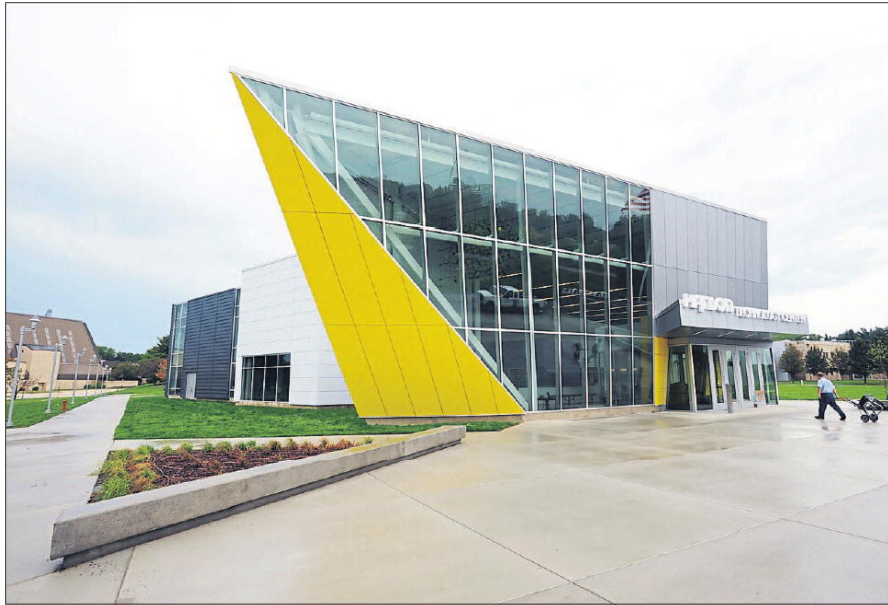
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The new Hanson Technology Center on the campus of Lake Michigan College in Benton Township will house a variety of LMC programs, including engineering, skilled trades, welding and energy production.

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answer questions Tuesday from prospective students about the manufacturing technology classes and careers in the field.

Private donations were used to partially offset construction of the new center, which is named in honor of industrialist Merlin Hanson and his wife, Carolyn.

The new center allows LMC to house all its manufacturing technology programs – including energy production, engineering, mechatronics, machine tool, skilled trades, and welding production – under one roof.

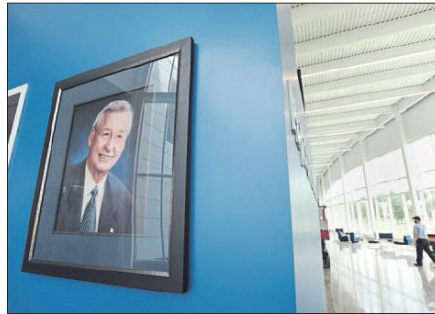
Besides the fab lab, major aspects of the new building include a virtual manufacturing floor – with state-of-the-art CNC, and robotics equipment – as well as a simulation classroom.

Hanson replaces the M-TEC Center along on Klock Road, which closed in December 2014.

“I opened that building, and I was the last original M-TEC employee when I helped close it down – which gives me a really unique perspective,” Flowers said.

Whirlpool Corp. bought the M-TEC building from LMC.

Although it served its purpose well, initially, M-TEC’s drawbacks became more apparent over time – which LMC then worked to



A portrait of Merlin Hanson hangs in the community space at the new Hanson Technology Center at Lake Michigan College. Hanson, a prolific Southwest Michigan industrialist and philanthropist, contributed much of the money used for building the center.

eliminate in designing the Hanson building, Flowers said.

“We had siloed labs, and an inefficient use of space. Plus, we didn’t get the critical mass of students. People did not think that it was (part of) LMC,” Flowers said. “That’s not why you build a brand new building.”

By contrast, on-campus students can walk over from Beckwith Hall, or take I-94 or U.S. 31, if they’re coming from out of town, which will make a big difference in terms of attracting people, Flowers said.

Hanson’s layout is designed to maximize a space that’s only 3,000 square feet larger than M-TEC, which was about 40,000 square feet, Flowers said.

That feeling is reinforced

by its high ceilings, massive hallways, and large, open windows, which allow visitors to peer into – or out of – Hanson at any time, and see what people are doing there.

“It’s just been a lot more thought through,” he said.

Whiteboards are featured throughout the building, which helps to drive home the concept of an accessible, collaborative environment, Flowers said – as well as the 9-by-16-foot touch-screen featured in the simulation classroom.

The touchscreen idea came from Cook Nuclear Plant, which uses them to connect employees remotely from different areas, he said.

To promote a stronger connection with students, the faculty offices have been located right next to

each major classroom area.

“At M-TEC, if the faculty went to the office, they had to leave the lab, which was quite a ways away. This (approach at Hanson) promotes interactivity a little bit more,” Flowers said.

The center benefited from a \$1.2 million federal technology grant which LMC obtained about four years ago – and used to buy about \$500,000 in new equipment, Flowers said.

Much of those efforts focused on the welding lab, whose equipment was 15-18-years old, he said.

LMC is working with Eagle Technologies to upgrade its program logic control space, which means buying more equipment for that area, during the next few months, Flowers said.

“We’re not done yet,” he said.

Flowers and Dee are seeking a new manager to run the fab lab, for which they’re interviewing someone on Monday.

Amid all this activity, however, Flowers and Dee say they always want to make sure there’s one constituency they’ll keep in mind first.

“We’re just excited about Sept. 6, and we’re ready for the students to see it, and utilize it,” Dee said.

“That’s what I keep telling everyone,” Flowers said. “The real show is on Sept. 6. And those are the people that we want to impress, really.”