

# Harrison makes his pitch for LMC millage

By JOHN MATUSZAK  
HP Staff Writer

ST. JOSEPH — Lake Michigan College's capital millage request, to be on the ballot Nov. 8, is an investment in Southwest Michigan's future economy, President Emeritus Bob Harrison told the Berrien County Board of Commissioners on Thursday.

Harrison made the case



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for supporting the college's 0.48-mill, 10-year levy that would raise \$40 million for building and facility improvements, and asked for individual endorsements from commissioners. He made a similar presentation to the

St. Joseph City Commission on Monday.

The millage, which cannot be used for operating expenses, would cost the owner of a home with a market value of \$100,000 two dollars a month, or \$24 a year, Harris said.

This is LMC's first capital millage request, and the college hasn't had a new operating millage since 1996. Projects are to be

supported through the \$7.5 million collected through the capital campaign, along with \$8.5 million in state grants and other college investments, in addition to the \$40 million from the millage.

LMC's current millage of 1.78 is the 25th lowest of Michigan's 28 community colleges, Harrison said.

More than 7,000 students attend LMC classes

every year, with 25 percent of the students age 25 and older.

Two-year institutions are playing a larger role in the state's job training and employment picture, he said.

One study showed that, by 2020, 70 percent of Michigan's jobs will require college or training after high school. But in Berrien

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County only 37 percent of working-age residents have at least an associate's degree. In Van Buren County the figure is 29 percent.

Lake Michigan College officials propose to help close that skills gap by modernizing more than 50 classrooms, along with upgrading lecture halls and technology and equipment.

On the drawing board is the Edward Todd Business Education Center and the Wine and Culinary Education Center, which would be the Midwest's only commercial teaching winery. This would support the hospitality and tourism industry in the region, Harrison said.

Improvements to the Mendel Center, which sees 100,000 visitors a year, and in safety and security systems also are planned.

LMC hasn't been resting on its laurels, Harrison said. Between 2013 and this year, the college has added a bachelor's of applied

science in energy production program, in conjunction with the area nuclear power plants. The first residence hall was added to the Napier Avenue campus.

Early and middle college classes have been offered through 50 high schools since 2009, allowing almost 9,000 students to take courses tuition-free, saving families \$12 million on the cost of higher education.

The new Hanson Technology Center opened this week, teaching such programs as robotics and 3-D printing. LMC offers employer services through custom work force training, apprenticeships, internships, job postings and career fairs.

Now is a good time to build because construction costs are expected to rise but current interest rates are low, Harrison said. Also, they believe that the high voter turnout anticipated for the presidential election will play in their favor.

And there's a big payoff, Harrison said, noting that for every \$1 invested in higher education, there

is a \$6.80 return to the economy.

Contact: [jmatuszak@TheHP.com](mailto:jmatuszak@TheHP.com), 932-0360, Twitter: @HPMatuszak