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NEWS & EVENTS

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OE Building Gets New Name, Look

After a year of classroom shuffling, construction dust, and curiosity about the facelift that the sterile hallways were destined to receive, WCC's Occupational Education building opens for full operation this fall. Many things have changed. Some of them are obvious, while others are not.

In July the Board of Trustees renamed the building the Larry L. Whitworth Occupational Education building in honor of WCC's retiring president. An event to rededicate the building will take place this fall.

Students and visitors also will notice the unique design elements in the once drab hallways and study areas that bring new vibrancy to the place. These changes are both practical and whimsical.

Practicality begins at the building's main entrance in the updated lobby/study area. This new casual space with comfortable seating in gray and rich mahogany is perfect for small group discussions before or after class. The tables and chairs adjacent to it are great for spreading papers out for review, scrolling through Facebook, or enjoying a quick snack between classes.

A touch of whimsy is found in the two hallways that connect to the lobby. Colorful graphic elements now showcase the programs taught there. For example, in the north corridor eyes go immediately to the ceiling, where lighting outside the radiography classrooms illuminates the area through opaque panels that look as if someone tossed an armload of x-rays onto them.

In the south corridor in front of the heating, ventilation and air conditioning classrooms is a section of exposed ceiling. It is fitting for a program that features the complex, behind-the-scenes mechanicals that buildings need to maintain temperature and air quality.

The unexpected is found between the welding and automotive classrooms, which run along the corridor at the end of these two hallways. That is where a new mezzanine-level study area has been built for students who take classes in that portion of the building.

Most Changes Are Hidden

Most of the changes in the 29-year-old vocational/technical facility are underground, above the ceiling, in the classroom, or on the roof. Upgrades to the electrical and heating and cooling systems will reduce the College's energy consumption in the years to come.


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These upgrades include 140 geothermal wells to heat and cool the building. A new roof combines a reflective, energy-efficient material and a live vegetative system to help maintain the inside temperature. A rooftop solar panel heats water for the building. The environmentally sustainable elements in this facility are part of a large ongoing effort to make WCC carbon neutral by 2050.

Thanks to the renovations, radiography students return this fall to a much larger lecture classroom and three enlarged x-ray suites, according to Connie Foster, director of the radiography program.

"Since we were able to expand the lecture area we will be using OE 121 as a combination lecture and lab space," said Foster. "The renovations also allow us to expand our computer capacity in the lab, which makes it nice, too, because we're computer based. We were able to get a new piece of equipment, an overhead x-ray unit, which allows us to teach trauma procedures. And we are getting a new portable x-ray machine so students can do portable x-rays on campus. We also added a new patient room. We're so excited about the space."

Space was also added to the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning program. The equipment-filled lab is now large enough to organize mechanical systems in well-defined areas, which makes the space much more efficient.

"The renovations have been great for us," said Les Pullins, who chairs the department. "Now we have all of the 90-percent furnaces along one wall. We've got the 80-percent furnaces over there. We've put the air-to-air heat pumps together. And we've got enough space to add more equipment."

The new geothermal system has a special place in the lab, and it has become an important part of the HVAC curriculum. According to Pullins, the new system, which loops through the lab with bright purple pipes, is expected to expand the program's energy audit class. Basic geothermal operations also are likely to be added to the introductory HVAC classes. And the technology used by the new rooftop solar panel, part of a hybrid system that heats water in the building, will be incorporated into classes.

Changes have also occurred in the dental assisting, welding, automotive, and environmental sciences classrooms. Foster and Pullins agree that it's great to be back in familiar spaces again.

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