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LOCAL

OK College gets \$28-million for green tech facility

By SCOTT TRUDEAU

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After hints of a major funding announcement for Penticton's Okanagan College, the mystery was unveiled Wednesday with \$28 million for the construction of a new Centre for Excellence in Green Building Technology. Hundreds of people, including students and various city and town council members from the South Okanagan clustered outside the Duncan Avenue campus to hear Bill Barisoff, MLA for Penticton-Okanagan Valley, Rick Thorpe, MLA for Okanagan-Westside, OK College representatives, president Jim Hamilton and board of governors chair Janet Shaw, deliver the good news.

"This \$28 million is truly another great step for Penticton and the South Okanagan," said Barisoff, noting that the money is divided three ways, with \$9.1 million coming from the province, \$13.5 million from the federal government and \$5 million from the college.

The project consists of an 8,500-square metre, two-storey multi-purpose facility, approximately triple the size of the present campus. It will be capable of accommodating an additional 800 students, including 520 new students in programs such as, geo-thermal, H-Vac, power lineman, life cycle site management, refrigeration mechanics and electrical and plumbing apprenticeships.

As well, expect 20 spaces for students in a new applied conservation technician program in association with the En'owkin Centre, 41 more students in the college's human kinetics program and 22 in the special education assistant program, and room for 50 students in university transfer arts programs. The facility also makes room for the 165 full-time students enrolled in trades training at other city locations which are being leased by the college. A gymnasium, fitness room and rooftop running track will compliment health courses offered and will provide additional recreational facility capacities in the city, and there will be a 200-person cafeteria.

Other advantages for the new centre come in its reliance on alternate energy sources for heating and cooling, and that it can be featured for the use of B.C. forest industry products in green buildings, allow for expansion of the existing library and provide special space for its practical nursing and residential care aide programs.

Thorpe said the Okanagan is one of the fastest-growing areas in B.C., and with the new UBC-Okanagan and expansions to trades facilities at OK College, it is becoming an educational hub, allowing more students to get their college and university educations in close proximity to home.

"We know that when folks get educated closer to home there's a good chance we're going to have clusters around those educational institutions and we're going to have job opportunities," he said.

At total of 304 jobs will be generated, 278 directly from the facility's construction and 26 full-time positions upon its completion, which is estimated for sometime in 2011. Construction is slated to begin in June.

Shaw said the centre will provide incredible opportunities for students in the South Okanagan area now and in the future.

"The Penticton campus has expanded significantly over the past few years, and the addition of this new facility will provide the space to accommodate even more growth and new programs," said Shaw. "Utilization of sustainable building technologies and processes, as well as alternative and renewable energy sources will ensure the centre meets LEED goal standards while supporting national, provincial and regional commitments to sustainability in carbon neutrality."

Funding came on the heels of an announcement in Victoria earlier Wednesday by Tony Clement, minister of industry of Canada and Murray Coell, minister of advanced education and labour market development for B.C. of more a \$455-million investment into 29 projects at post-secondary institutions provincewide.

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