

Construction begins on Lane Community College's Downtown Campus

New academic building, student apartment building to benefit downtown economy

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Lane Community College held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new Downtown Campus Friday, officially kicking off the construction of a 90,000-square-foot academic building and an associated 87,000-square-foot student apartment building.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley joined LCC President Mary Spilde, Lane Board of Education Chair Tony McCown, Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy and Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber's Education Policy Advisor Nancy Golden for a ceremonial dirt-tossing into the open pit where the new campus will soon stand.

"The building itself will be a living and learning lab for our students. It will teach — it will be a building that teaches. It will be a building also for our business community," Spilde told KVAL regarding the project.

The expansive project, located at 10th Avenue and Charnelton Street, is one of the most pricey downtown construction projects to date, trumping the \$70 million, 260,000-square-foot Wayne L. Morse U.S. Courthouse built in 2006, as well as the \$34 million, 164,000-square-foot neighboring public library.

The \$33.1 million classroom facility will showcase LCC's energy management programs, and the housing structure — with an estimated price tag of \$20.3 million — will provide students with urban living spaces as an alternate to daily commuting.

LCC's construction timetable calls for initiating construction this spring and opening the new buildings' doors by fall 2012.

The site location, once home to a Sears building, was briefly considered for the controversial Oregon Research Institute office building currently taking shape in the University's Riverfront Research Park.

Construction efforts have been met with praise from downtown revitalization advocates, who view the center's 30 state-of-the-art energy management classrooms as an ideal use of the defunct space that has been considered an eyesore for years. The new campus will also be a boon to the downtown local economy, and business owners hope more students in the area will also mean more customers.

The city has taken particular pride in the project's job creation — 300 or more during construction — and LCC has said the new campus will bring with it 40 to 45 new employee positions.

Land for the project was essentially provided for free; the city sold LCC the property for \$1.

Greg Morgan, the community college's chief financial officer of college operations, said construction was made possible entirely by the city's generosity.

"The Downtown Campus is a gift from Eugene," Morgan told The Torch, LCC's student newspaper.

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Myray Reames

Roger Ebbage, director of the Energy Management Program for Lane Community College's Downtown Campus, helps his three-year-old grandson Caleb Ebbage shovel in the foundation of the new building at the LCC downtown branch's ground-breaking ceremony on Friday.