

COCC Plans Campus Center, Rehearsal Hall, Evaluates Student Housing

by K_Guice

The Central Oregon Community College Board had a busy agenda Wednesday, July 12. Two large campus construction projects were approved to move forward and college officials announced a \$750,000 gift to the college that will be dedicated to the construction of a rehearsal hall for the college's instrumental performing groups.

Construction for a multi-million dollar campus center has been given approval after budget-saving alterations were made to the project. "The board approved us to work with the architect on the smaller-scale project without the bookstore," said Ron Paradis, director of college relations. "That is the biggest change in the project."

Originally the campus center was proposed to be 36,000 square feet. Due to funding, that has been scaled back to 27,000 square feet. Currently, the building will have an estimated cost of approximately \$9 million to \$10 million. Bidding is expected to begin next spring, with a one-year construction period to begin by the summer.

The campus center will serve as a multi-purpose building for students and the general public. "One of the things we wanted to do was make it not just for the campus, but for the community," Paradis said.

That is where the rehearsal hall factors into the equation. Jim Weaver, executive director of the COCC Foundation, announced the \$750,000 gift from Fran Wille and her late husband, Paul.

"Wille Hall is what we are calling it," Paradis said. "It will be part of the proposed campus center building." It is slated to be built along College Way near Mazama Gymnasium.

“We will have many purposes for the space,” Paradis said. “We will also use it for community events, speakers and meetings.”

In addition to rehearsal space for COCC performance students, it will serve as a rehearsal hall for the Central Oregon Symphony. “The Central Oregon Symphony has been around for years and has grown to become very popular in the community, but they didn’t have a good rehearsal spot,” he added.

The contribution from the Willems, who shared a passion for music, will change that. The late Paul Wille, a retired officer in the Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps, actually played bassoon with the Central Oregon Symphony for more than 20 years.

“In coming to know Fran, I have come to understand that music was a very important part of this couple’s life together and their life in Central Oregon,” Weaver said. “Their gift so well celebrates that love of music and musicians and it furthers music in a very concrete way.”

The preliminary plans call for a 3,000-square-foot building. “Gifts like this are crucial,” Paradis said. “Without this gift we wouldn’t have this part of the campus building.”

That appreciation was shared by Michael Gesme, the conductor of the Central Oregon Symphony and the Cascade Winds Symphonic Band. “I don’t know that words can express our collective gratitude for this amazing gift,” he said.

“This gift is a testament to the Willems’ deeply held passion for the fine arts. We look forward with great anticipation and much delight to rehearsing in the room that bears their name.”

Fran Wille, who is in the final stages of terminal cancer, has dedicated the remaining funds from their estate to an endowment for instrument repair, music field trips for students, music instructors' salaries and other uses determined by the Foundation and the COCC music department.

Jean Frye, a fellow symphony bassoonist and friend to the Wille family noted that others had made small donations to the fund for the new building. There is a hope that others will also be inspired to donate as well.

In addition to the campus center and Wille Hall, the board also reviewed a report on a student housing feasibility study conducted over the past few months by Brailsford and Dunlavey. "The conclusion is that we should build," said Paradis.

At the meeting, Paul Brailsford reported that there was a demand for apartment-style student housing and recommended a financial analysis should be made. "The board is absolutely in agreement; however they asked that the staff investigate further the financial and operational feasibility," Paradis said. Those issues will be revisited in the early fall.

Currently, the campus has a residence hall built in the 1960s that houses 100 students. Paradis says he doesn't feel it is what students in 2006 are looking for in a dormitory. In addition, it is not handicap accessible.

"If that is approved we would move forward on a similar time line," Paradis said. In addition, if the housing project is approved it could change how the campus center would look. "There would be less free space and more cafeteria space or the building may look slightly larger," he said.

If all of the projects move forward as planned, it will free up much needed space in other instructional areas of the campus.

For example, Grandview houses the cafeteria, student activity offices, classrooms and serves as an office building. “We will take the other half of that building and turn it into offices and class rooms, which will alleviate a lot of stress,” said Paradis.

COCC Plans Campus Center, Rehearsal Hall, Evaluates Student Housing by K_Guice