Georgia Highlands, Kennesaw State officials open Paulding classes site

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Leaders from two colleges, Paulding County and surrounding areas came together Friday to celebrate a partnership that will expand collegiate offerings in northwest Georgia.

Officials and area residents gathered in downtown Dallas at the Bagby Building for a ribbon-cutting ceremony of a new instructional site for Georgia Highlands College and Kennesaw State University. The building, donated by Paulding County, underwent a nearly $1 million renovation and now features classroom space, computer and science labs, a media library, administrative offices and meeting rooms.

"We celebrate this morning the opening of a facility that will provide acceptable and affordable college options to the residents of Paulding and surrounding counties," GHC President Randy Pierce said during Friday's ceremony.

The new site expands Georgia Highlands' presence in the region. The two-year college, which serves about 5,000 students, has sites in Rome, Marietta and Cartersville, the latter of which has served the lion's share of the institution's students in recent school terms. The college is also opening a site in Douglasville.

Fall semester classes at Georgia Highlands College start Wednesday. The Paulding site will begin operating that day with about 20 staff and faculty and will offer more than 30 classes. Georgia Highlands will offer core undergraduate classes this semester, while Kennesaw State will offer upper level business classes and graduate course in educational leadership this spring.

"This new site will provide Paulding County citizens with increased access to two of the state's top-notch institutions," KSU President Daniel S. Papp

PAULDING, GA

Flanked by local and state leaders and holding pairs of scissors, Kennesaw State University President Daniel S. Papp, left, and Georgia Highlands College President Randy Pierce get ready to cut the ribbon at the college's newest site Friday morning in Dallas. Georgia Highlands will offer core undergraduate classes at the site beginning this week, while Kennesaw State will offer upper level business classes and graduate course in educational leadership this spring.
Paulding

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said. "This project is a prime example of what can be achieved when local and state officials work together to enhance a community to empower higher education."

As academic programs expand at the Paulding site, leaders at the two colleges will eye further renovations to the Winn Building, which sits across from the historic Courthouse Square. The building also was donated by the county.

University System of Georgia Chancellor Erroll B. Davis Jr. lauded the partnership between the two colleges and government officials who brought about educational offerings that will impact a growing area that the system has determined to be under-served by current system facilities, as the population of Paulding County alone is expected to double by 2020.

"Collaboration between institutions has not always been the hallmark of our system, and I'm very pleased and proud that we now can demonstrate that if we work together, what can we do for the citizens of this state," Davis said.

Other leaders who spoke at the ceremony were State Sen. Bill Heath, R-Bremen; Georgia Speaker of the House Glenn Richardson; Paulding County Board of Commissioners Chairman David Austin and Dallas Mayor Boyd Austin.

Bartow County leaders attend ceremony

Also speaking during the ceremony was State Rep. Paul Battles, R-Cartersville, who has served on the Board of Trustees for the Georgia Highlands College Foundation and has been involved with several other education-related organizations.

"Education has an impact on our state and really our nation. Anytime we have an opportunity to open up a new facility for education, I'm supportive of it, whether it be in our county or not, though it just so happens that Georgia Highlands is in Bartow County," Battles told The Daily Tribune News after the ceremony.

In addition to new sites in Dallas and Douglasville, Georgia Highlands leaders are also eying a potential second building on their Cartersville campus. The facility came one step closer to fruition last week after the Georgia Board of Regents approved a fiscal year 2011 capital budget request of $275.6 million, which includes a $19.9 million request for a student academic center on the local GHC site.

Battles said he would push to see the proposed Cartersville building funded, but added that such funding may be hard to come by amid the tough economy.

"We are hoping we will see another classroom facility. We need it," he said. "The demand on dollars is tough right now, and we have to make sure we're serving those that we're building for."

Kay Read, president and CEO of the Cartersville-Bartow County Chamber of Commerce, attended Friday's event and said she expects the Chamber to support a second Cartersville building for Georgia Highlands.

"Certainly the demand for it is there, and the Legislature generally will support anything where there's sufficient demand," Read said. "We have our legislative agenda every year, and I'm quite sure our governmental affairs committee and board will certainly support getting funding for a new facility."

Read added that the Paulding County site also will benefit surrounding counties, including Bartow, and could possibly draw students from the outskirts of the county.

"Georgia Highlands is especially important to Bartow County, but the stronger it grows throughout the region, that's going to pay off for all counties involved," he said. "This is a big move for the college and Bartow County supports that."

Cartersville Mayor Pro-Tem Dianne Tate also was in attendance to support Dallas' new campus.

"We're all in it together, particularly when it comes to education, because the closer we can get education facilities to people who need them, with so much traffic and people having such time constraints, the better off we'll all be," Tate said. "I think it's important that they support Cartersville, and vice versa."

The Bagby Building in Dallas, the newest instructional site of Georgia Highlands College and Kennesaw State University.