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LOCAL

Ribbon cut for GHC's new Douglasville satellite campus

From staff reports

Georgia Highlands College, the University of West Georgia and a host of dignitaries from the Douglas County area celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday for a new instructional facility on Stewart Parkway in Douglasville.

The 35,000 square-foot space, which formerly housed Cub Foods, has been completely renovated to accommodate 1,000 students, with about 10,000 square feet of additional room to expand in the future. It features four classrooms, three computer labs, two science labs, a student center, two student lounges, faculty and administrative offices, and an auditorium.

Both Georgia Highlands and UWG will offer classes at the new Douglasville site, which serves the citizens of Douglas and surrounding counties. GHC has been operating for the past year in modular units on the grounds of Chapel Hill High School, offering core curriculum courses to meet the requirements of an associate degree



Contributed photo

Cutting the ribbon at Georgia Highland College's new site are J. Randy Pierce (from left), GHC president; Rep. Bill Hembree, House District 67; Sen. Bill Hamrick, Senate District 30; Beheruz Sethna, president of the University of West Georgia; Ken Bernard, member

of the Board of Regents for the 13th District serving Douglasville; Gordon Pritz, superintendent of Douglas County schools; Rob Watts, chief operating officer and executive vice chancellor of the University System of Georgia; and Mickey Thompson, mayor of Douglasville.

or transfer to four-year institutions. The University of West Georgia has not yet begun course offerings at Douglasville but will eventually offer upper level courses and provide degrees in several selected majors.

"We are very pleased to be able to bring accessible and affordable higher education

to Douglas County, and we look forward to a strong and growing partnership with the University of West Georgia," said J. Randy Pierce, president of GHC, of the joint venture. "This is not the first time we have worked successfully with UWG to provide needed programs in the community, and

we are eager to expand our joint offerings with them."

Currently, students can receive both their bachelor's and master's degrees in Early Childhood Education on the Floyd campus.

Pierce also praised community leaders for their many efforts in bringing the site to Douglas County.

Nonpartisan may be way to go for local elections

PARTISAN ELECTIONS, particularly on the local level, inject a predetermined narrative—one that isn't necessarily applicable—into voters' decision-making process. All too often, a voter simply sees the "R" or "D" next to a candidate's name, makes an assumption on what the candidate, as a Republican or a Democrat, stands for, and blindly casts a vote.

Yet, while Republicans and Democrats may have philosophical disagreements over prominent pieces of state or national legislation, those partisan philosophical differences in viewpoint don't, or shouldn't, automatically result in a difference of opinion regarding the funding of a school expansion or extending the hours at a local park. If anything, local politics are where people of different ideological mindsets frequently come together.

The reason is simple: when projects and issues are unfolding in people's backyards, the politics become more personal.

It is, then, feasible to suggest that applying the rigidity of partisanship to local elections simply isn't fair.

Given that few, if any, candidates ever emerge from the minority party to take on long electoral odds, primary elections serve as de facto general elections for most local offices. This creates a whole host of problems.

FOR STARTERS, primary races feature lower turnouts than general elections and typically turn out the more conservative and liberal elements of the population. In Oconee County, for instance, fewer than 8,000 voters cast a ballot in last month's primary election. In 2008, however,



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Of course, they also could be operating under the less pure motive of voting for the opposition party candidate they feel would be the weakest challenger for their preferred party's candidate in state and national races.

Nonetheless, if they opt for a ballot from their preferred party, they are shut out of casting a ballot for their local county commission or school board.

It's easy to see, then, that the system is in need of some tweaking. Doing so, however, is more difficult than you would think. That's because the problem isn't politics. It's power.

In Oconee County, for instance, local Republicans are staunchly opposed to implementing nonpartisan local races. In fact, during a forum for last month's primary elections, all of the Republican candidates seeking local or state offices voiced their support for the current system.

THIS MIRRORS the opposition that Democrats in Athens-Clarke County put forward in the days leading up to the local vote that ultimately brought nonpartisan races to that community.

In fact, the doom-and-gloom scenarios that many put forward never came to fruition.

Civic discourse wasn't trampled, and "secret Republicans" didn't flood the local government. Athens-Clarke County held on to its progressive government because it's a progressive community.

Should Oconee County put nonpartisan local elections in place, the status quo would hold