

Georgia Highlands, Kennesaw State partnering to offer degrees in Paulding

STAFF REPORT

Residents of Paulding County soon will be able to earn four-year college degrees without leaving their home county as a result of a new partnership between Kennesaw State University, Georgia Highlands College in Rome and the Paulding County government.

Beginning in January, KSU and Georgia Highlands College will utilize a 45,000-square-foot area in the Henry Winn and Bagby buildings in downtown Dallas — the county seat — to offer classes leading to a bachelor's degree. The capacity of the facility will allow the two institutions to serve between 1,000 and 1,500 students.

The partnership, announced at a press conference Tuesday, will expand academic opportunities for Paulding County, one of the state's fastest-growing counties and an area deemed "academically underserved" by the University System of Georgia's Board of Regents.

Under the new agreement, students will complete their freshman and sophomore years as students of Georgia Highland College, which is a two-year institution of the University System of Georgia. KSU professors will provide instruction for juniors and seniors and will grant the four-year degree — initially in the education and business fields.

"We are extremely pleased about this partnership which makes a four-year college education accessible to students in Paulding County," said KSU President Dan S. Papp. "We also hope to move quickly to offer master's level courses at the Dallas facility in the near future."

Papp said some of the details — the classes, schedules and faculty — still are being worked out, and will be posted on shared links on the Georgia Highlands College and KSU Web sites by August.

The USG's expansion into Paulding County is the result of a demographic assessment conducted by the Board of Regents to identify strategies for

meeting the state's enrollment capacity demands out to the year 2020.

"Our demographers told us we must accommodate 100,000 more students by 2020," said Robert E. Watts, the Board of Regents' chief operating officer. "About 70 percent of those students will come from within metro Atlanta and from areas like Paulding County, where we do not currently have facilities that provide access to higher education."

At the same time, the Atlanta Regional Commission has identified Paulding County as the fastest-growing county in Georgia, growing 170 percent over the last 15 years. The county has a population of more than 113,000.

"We've had our eye on Paulding County as a central place to locate a teaching site because it is one of the state's fastest-growing counties," said Georgia Highlands President Randy Pierce. "We know that education is the foundation for a better quality of life and for a better economic future."

Paulding County leaders said the educational partnership will spur continued economic development in the region.

"If there's going to be any further economic development in Paulding County, we have to make sure the kids have a chance to get a good college education," said Jerry Shearin, chair of the Paulding County Commissioners.

A member of the 35-unit University System of Georgia, Kennesaw State University is a comprehensive, residential institution with a growing student population of more than 20,000 from 142 countries. The third-largest university in Georgia, Kennesaw State offers more than 65 graduate and undergraduate degrees, including new doctorates in education and business.

Georgia Highlands College is a two-year, associate degree-granting institution of the University System of Georgia, serving more than 4,500 students at five sites in Rome, Cartersville, Marietta and Carrollton.