

Penticton Western News

## College expansion taking shape



Donna Lomas, regional dean of Okanagan College, gets a little help with her safety vest from MP Stockwell Day before heading out to the work site next to the Penticton campus. Though crews have been at work for a few weeks, partners in the new Centre of Excellence gathered at the campus Friday to officially mark the start of the construction phase of the expansion.

Steve Kidd/Western News

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Crews have been at work next to Okanagan College for a few weeks now, excavating a long rectangular hole as they prepare to lay the foundations for the Penticton campus' \$28 million expansion project.

But even though the project is underway, that didn't stop regional dean Donna Lomas from expressing how thrilled she was the Centre of

Excellence in Sustainable Technologies and Renewable Energy Conservation was moving forward.

"This is the most exciting day of my life," said Lomas at a ceremony Friday marking the official start the construction phase of the project.

It's only been a few months since the project, which will effectively triple the size of the Penticton campus, was announced. At the same time it was fast-tracked, accounting for the speedy start. It's due to be completed in March 2011.

The bulk of the money to pay for the expansion, \$23 million, comes from a joint federal-provincial funding program aimed at developing post-secondary institutions. The college, however, has to raise the final \$5 million as their share of the cost.

Contributing to the excitement Friday was an announcement that the college's fundraising efforts had received a major boost, according to Lomas, who announced that two companies had made sizable financial commitments.

PCL Construction, who were selected as the contractor for the project, made a \$100,000 donation to the building fund. They weren't alone — BMO Financial Group, a longtime supporter of the college, made a \$75,000 gift to the construction of the new centre.

Green building technologies are key to the new Centre of Excellence, not only in the classes that will be taught there, but in the design and construction of the building itself. Both PCL and BMO cited environmental sustainability as a factor in their donations.

"Companies like ours have a responsibility to take a leadership role in environmental sustainability," said Sean Armstrong, BMO vice-president for the Central Interior.

According to Okanagan College president Jim Hamilton, the unique nature of the design is already attracting attention.

“This project will place this college in the spotlight nationally and internationally,” he said. “The building will be what it teaches.”

The Centre of Excellence is being built to meet the Living Building Challenge, a set of building guidelines that exceeds Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design platinum standards. By incorporating solar power, passive air-conditioning systems, geothermal energy and many other building elements, the college hopes to reach carbon neutrality and net-zero energy, and be one of the first structures anywhere to meet the living building challenge.

Those building elements won't be hidden within the structure. Rather, they will all be accessible to the students, so they can observe and conduct real world testing of alternative systems as they study.


“This will allow students to do research in a way they never have before,” said Stockwell Day, Okanagan Coquihalla MP, who also commented on the economic stimulus provided by the project, which is expected to create 179 jobs.

“This new centre for green technology at Okanagan College will stimulate Penticton's economy and increase our community's vitality as more youth can affordably stay here to get a world class, state-of-the-art education,” said Bill Barisoff, MLA for Penticton. “This is a facility we can all be proud of.”

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