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Student association giving \$4 million for new college

Posted By SEAN CHASE

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MAJOR DONATION - Karen Davies (right), Dean of Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley, shakes hands with student association president Rob Nettleton after he announced a commitment to invest \$4 million in a new campus facility proposed for Pembroke's waterfront. The money will go towards the construction of a gym and fitness centre. The college's board of directors has approved the new campus site, to be called "Renaissance Square", if the provincial and federal governments provide adequate funding. For more photos, please visit our website photo gallery at www.thedailyobserver.ca. (Observer photo by Sean Chase)

Algonquin College has taken a big step towards achieving its plan for a new campus in Pembroke.

Adding its support to the initiative, the college's student association announced Friday it is committing \$4 million to expanding the new college when it is built to include a gymnasium and fitness centre.

"We want to ensure that students who study at the Pembroke campus have the same college experience as other Ontario college students," association president Rob Nettleton said during a special announcement ceremony in the campus' student lounge.

"Pembroke students have been asking for sports and fitness facilities. This is really students helping students," he said.

A plan to build a new 80,000 square-foot Ottawa Valley campus on the Pembroke waterfront has been endorsed by the college's board of governors, contingent on receiving appropriate funding and government approval.

If approved, the project, called "Renaissance Square", is estimated to cost \$32 million and would accommodate the enrolment of 300 additional students.

"We are urging the provincial and federal governments to invest in the future of the Pembroke campus," said Mr. Nettleton.

He said the \$4-million figure is the minimum the association will contribute and that the amount could go higher depending on the project's progress.

Karen Davies, the Dean of Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley, said the school is unable to grow and expand programs at the current location. She said the student body has endorsed its vision for a new campus with the funding pledge.

"Imagine the possibilities a new campus will bring to the Ottawa Valley," said Ms. Davies.

The college has set a goal of raising \$2.5 million. The new building will not only push total enrolment to 1,000 full-time and apprenticeship students, it will give the campus a new lease on life, said Raymonde Hanson, academic vice-president.

"It's more than time to renew and expand," she said praising the City of Pembroke for making the land available at the new site.

Rural areas like Renfrew County deserve access to post-secondary education, Ms. Hanson said, adding Ontario is facing a critical shortfall in skilled employees with the province facing a deficit of 190,000 by 2016.

Enrolment at the campus hit an all-time high this past year with 735 full-time apprenticeship and college preparation students.

This fall, Algonquin College received more than 39,000 application for 7,400 available first-year course vacancies.

While the city is negotiating a lease agreement with the college, Mayor Ed Jacyno said it's important for the federal and provincial governments to get on board with the project.

"We're hoping to see one of the nicest campuses in Ontario built right here," said Mayor Jacyno, who hopes a campus at the marina will revitalize the downtown core.

Current Algonquin students are positive about the prospects of a facility that boasts leading-edge classrooms, labs, recreational areas and green space.

"It's going to make a huge impact on the community as a whole," said business student Holly Bailey adding it will attract employers seeking to address labour shortages. "It's going to provided us with the competitive edge and make us comparable with other Ontario colleges."

For personal support worker student Kim Thompson-Ranger, she hopes a new campus will be around for the next generation, including her three children.

"It's going to draw people to our community and keep our children in the community," she said.

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