

Centre standing out

OKANGAN COLLEGE: Today marks grand opening of \$28-million learning centre

By J.P. SQUIRE
The Daily Courier

The new \$28-million Centre for Learning at Okanagan College is a three-year dream come true for Heather Schneider.

Three years ago – on her first day at the KLO campus – Schneider heard “the exciting announcement that we were going to move forward on a new classroom building that was going to do a lot of things for students.”

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The grand opening is at 1:30 p.m. today.

A special three-page presentation – starting on B3 of today’s edition – provides the college’s vision of bringing education into the 21st century, outlining the building’s highlights with numerous photographs of the five-storey Centre for Learning.

Schneider, the college’s regional dean in the Central Okanagan, was a key member of the advisory committee that oversaw the design and construction.

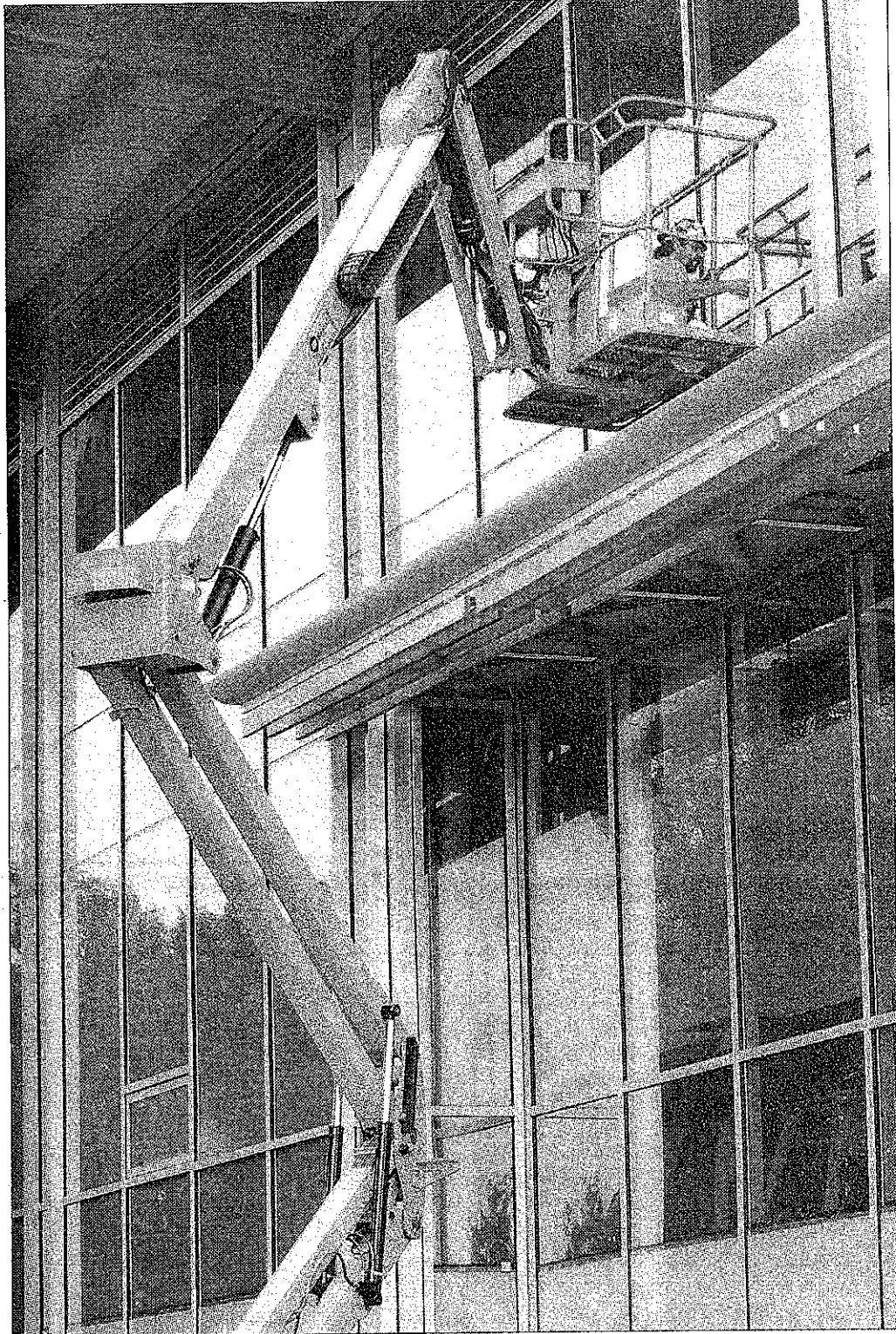
“I am so excited to see the building come to fruition. This was really a labour of love. We had a lot of challenges in student space, classroom space. We needed to expand our library. We wanted more space for food service for students,” she said.

“We were able to provide a brand new location for our international program as well as our downtown campus. We got our admin group back on campus. It’s really been a great, great bonus for the campus.”

The vision was to change the way Okanagan College delivered education, she said.

“We talk about transforming lives as part of our mission statement. We wanted to create a building that really reflected the kind of learning environment we knew our students needed. That’s what this building is all about.”

The Centre for Learning has classrooms not only with different sizes but different designs and different furniture, she said.



GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier

A worker puts the finishing touches on the new \$28-million Student Learning Centre at Okanagan College in this June 24 file photo.

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Okanagan College

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"One of the ones we've highlighted in the 30-seat Centre for Dialogue but we've got a lot of other different kinds of classrooms in the building. We just recognized students learn in different ways and not just in the classroom but outside the classroom," Schneider said.

"So we've got meeting spaces for students, open spaces for them to gather, small intimate corners where they can get together and work on their team projects. Or just meet and talk about projects, assignments and learning. We don't have, for example, a big lecture theatre or a classroom that seats 150. We went with small classrooms."

The expanded library is not only state-of-the-art but "the size they need for the campus they've got," she said.

"The vision and focus was really about the students and staff and providing space that we needed for learning. But along the way, we created a really great, sustainable building that is going to take us to the next step of sustainability and practices. We've really worked on the flow and circulation so that it's easy to use as well."

Schneider watched the entire process: from working with staff and students on the design to the pre-load – the sound of tyrannosaurus rex stomping the ground as heavy machinery shook surrounding buildings – to seeing the centre rise from the foundations, floor by floor.

She said with a laugh that the centre still brings shivers as she walks through and looks around.

"It might sound funny but it absolutely does. And I actually said this to my boss, Andrew Hay, VP of education: 'When I'm having a little bit of a down day, I go to the Centre for Learning and just watch the students interacting and learning.'

"Just the other night, I walked in and a faculty member was meeting with students about different kinds of extra-curricular activities they do around international activities and multi-cultural events. Now, they have a spot to hang their hat and do that, where it makes it easy."

The building is not only functional but beautiful, she added. "I was walking around with somebody else today who said 'I just love this building. It just feels right.'"