

College captures accolades

Western News Staff

Okanagan College has just received a major award honouring their sustainability efforts but not from one of the usual environmental groups — this award came from a group that recognizes beautification and civic pride as well as environmental responsibility.

Communities in Bloom, a national non-profit organization that focuses on the protection and promotion of green spaces, gave Okanagan College a five-bloom rating in the special attractions category of the 2009 competition.

The award does away with the idea that sustainability means industrial, utilitarian boring landscape. Instead, the college proved that being green cannot only be achievable but pleasing to the eye.

"The college has a clear vision for a sustainable campus guided by a well-defined sustainability plan," the judges said, pointing to the college's Three Steps Forward initiative, a plan to make all Okanagan College campuses environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

Graham Kershaw, who heads up the program at the college, was thrilled with the results. "Five blooms out of five — it doesn't get any better than that. We already have many of our initiatives well underway. This plan is making a huge difference."

The award comes less than a year after the college put the plan together,

although the institution's sustainability efforts go back many years.

"The award is clearly an endorsement that we are not only on the right track, but among the leaders in Canada when it comes to implementing sustainability practices at the institutional level," said Jim Hamilton, president of the college.

The Communities in Bloom judges also praised the college for creating a sustainability team to lead the organization as it focuses its efforts on renewable and efficient energy use that includes green buildings, transportation and sustainable landscape practices.

A major part of that effort is occurring on the Penticton campus, where construction is about to get underway on a \$28 million expansion, the Centre for Excellence in Sustainable Building Technologies and Renewable Energy Conservation.

The name describes not only the focus of the courses that will be taught there but a goal for the construction of the building itself, green building standards throughout, with the goal of reaching the highest sustainability level — the living building challenge — with a net zero environmental footprint.

"That's just such an exciting building," said Allan Coyle, public affairs director for the college. "The fact we'll be able to construct a building with this lack of environmental impact, being as green as it is — at regular construction costs, is going to set the industry back on its ear."