

NEWS

Post-secondary options growing

When UBC Okanagan was established to meet the need for a full-scope university in the Okanagan, there was concern about what that would mean for some of the choicest Okanagan University College had offered to its students.

Two years later, we can see that post-secondary options for residents of Vernon have never been greater or more diverse. UBC Okanagan is growing rapidly, and a renewed Okanagan College is expanding the opportunities available to students throughout the Okanagan.

In the past several months, Okanagan College has launched new electrical and plumbing programs at a new facility in downtown Vernon.

It continues to work on programs in conjunction with the Vernon School District, such as the residential construction program and the CNC program.

Similar trades program developments and initiatives are underway in the Shuswap, Penticton-Okanagan Valley, Kelowna-Mission, Kelowna-Lake Country, Okanagan-Westside and Columbia River Revelstoke ridings. Okanagan College is now the fastest-growing trades training facility in British Columbia, responding to the needs of our strong economy.

The college's growth is something you might expect, of course, since according to the most recent information from B.C. Statistics, the Okanagan College region has the fastest growing population in the province. The number of 17 to 29 year olds grew by almost three times the provincial average last year (3.9 per cent vs. 1.4 per cent).

The college has also seen a dramatic increase in the number of apprentices it has trained: from about 1,100 a year ago, to 1,700 this fiscal year, with a projection of 2,100 apprentices to be trained in the coming year. Of course, we're going to need all those skilled people to keep up with the phenomenal job growth projected for the Okanagan: roughly 26,000 new jobs between now and 2010.

The expansion in number and types of programs available to students also includes health-care programs that are much in demand.

The college passed a \$76.5-million budget in March that will open the door to more than 120 new full-time equivalent student spaces for the home support resident care attendant program. Kelowna will receive 50 of those spaces, while Vernon and Penticton will get 30 each, and 10 in Salmon Arm.

A new stream of the college's practical nursing program will soon be offered in Salmon Arm in the coming year. The human service work diploma program will make its way to Vernon this year, taking on an added 30 full-time students. As more residential care and assisted living facilities have opened in Vernon, graduates of these programs can count on using their new skills right away.

The provincial government is keeping a close eye on the college because we know how valuable it is to the people at home.

Operating grants to UBC Okanagan and Okanagan College are expected to double by 2009-10 from 2005, to a combined total of \$102 million. In addition, by 2010 the provincial government will invest \$100 million in capi-

tal funding, plus \$52 million in added operating funding, which will create more than 2,000 new jobs.

There is a bright future ahead for students and the region.

The college is expected to inject \$500 million annually into the region's economy while creating spinoff opportunities through research and innovation projects.

It is clear that expanding post-secondary options in the Okanagan has clear long-term benefits for our region, and

both Okanagan College and UBC Okanagan are playing a critical role in the future of the Okanagan.

I offer my congratulations and thanks to the directors, administrators, staff and students of both Okanagan College and UBC Okanagan for ensuring the success of these post-secondary institutions and the opportunities they provide.

For more information on post-secondary education, go to www.tomchristensenmla.bc.ca.

