Allan Coyle — News

Centre of Excellence construction begins

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Though the 2009 school year has just started, it's thoughts of future school years that are occupying minds at the Okanagan College's Penticton Campus.

Work has begun there on the Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Building Technologies and Renewable Energy Conservation, scheduled to be complete in March 2011. It's a major addition that will triple the size of the campus, adding new facilities and allowing them to offer an expanded range of programs.

But the new building is about more than just extra classroom space, according to Donna Lomas, regional dean for the South Okanagan. The Centre's design not only meets environmentally sustainable standards, incorporating the use of renewable energy sources, but also allows students to interact with the new technologies, monitoring them, metering them, making assessments about why one technology is more efficient or more effective than another.

"The building is being built with the ideas that it's a living lab," she said. "You're not going to have these dark little mechanical rooms where things are shut away."

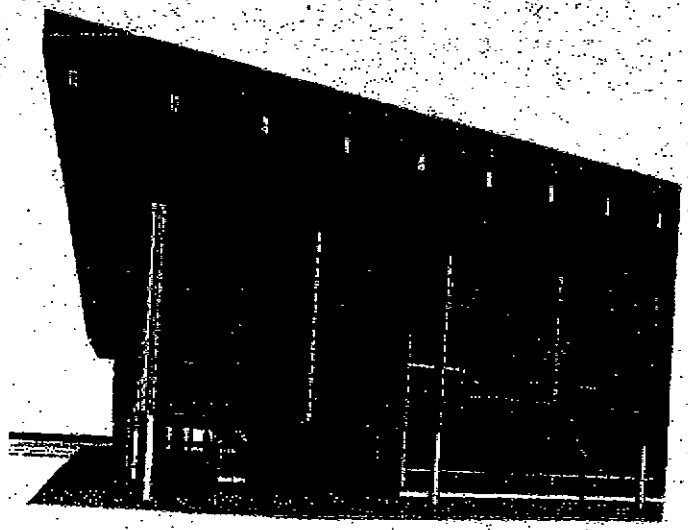

Illustration submitted

OKANAGAN COLLEGE'S Penticton Campus is undergoing new construction for a Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Building Technologies and Renewable Energy Conservation. The building, shown here in an illustration, is expected to be complete in March 2011.

Another form of interaction comes from the Okanagan Research and Innovation Centre, who will be establishing a business incubator in the new facility, joining forces with the college to help nurture new technology businesses.

Lomas said the college already has a close relationship with ORIC, who often turn to them as a testing ground.

"Post secondary education is always interested in research and related activities and at the college level, it's an applied approach," said Lomas. "These aren't people who are just thinking theoretically now, they're actually building things and implementing it."

At first, people might not see the link between something such as the science at work at ORIC and the building trades, but it is definitely there, said Peter Haubrich, president of ORIC.

"Homes, warehouses, and office buildings are becoming increasingly reliant on communication and smart technologies" he said.

"They use radio signals to control heating and ventilation systems, to optimize construction, measure and report structural loads — the list goes on. And there is an incredible amount of expertise focused on radio technology, advanced signal processing, software and electronics. There is opportunity for innovation and commercialization that we ought to — and will — take advantage of."

Lomas thinks it's a great opportunity for Penticton to be able to develop a whole new industry area around clean technologies and that students will benefit greatly by the interaction with the incubator and start-up companies on the cutting edge of those technologies.

"So we're going to constantly be trying to keep the centre of excellence moving forward. It's going to be constantly renewing itself with this new technology," she said.

"Future employees of the companies will be learning at the same time they are developing their products."

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