

College expansion sought

By RAUL HUERTA

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — When the Cabrillo College Watsonville Center opened two years ago, no one knew that it would need to be expanded so soon.

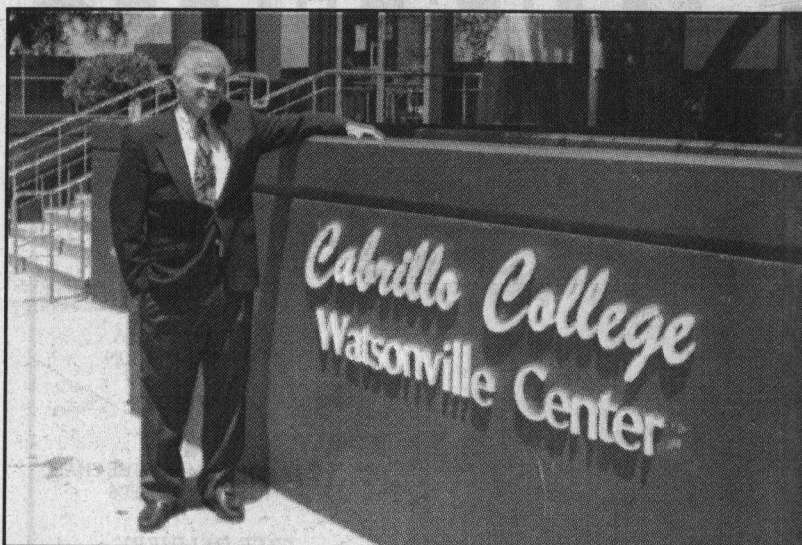
"We just knew that the La Manzanita facility was overcrowded and inadequate," said John Hurd, president of the Cabrillo Community College District. The center had previously moved from its 5,000-square-foot location at the La Manzanita center on Main Street.

Hurd said that the college was anticipating construction of a new facility, but not until the year 2000.

But already the college is trying to obtain \$4 million in funding to construct a 26,250-square-foot expansion at the current location at 318 Union St., Watsonville.

"Our master plan indicated that (expansion) was a step in the process... it's just happening more quickly than I expected," he said.

Hurd pointed to a recent study



Bob Smith

Cabrillo College President John Hurd wants to expand the Watsonville campus to hold the more than 2,000 students expected by the year 2005.

that said that the Watsonville Center is expected to exceed its capacity, 1,346 students, by the fall semes-

ter of 1998. The 1995 study also stated that enrollment at the center,

1,107 for the fall semester of 1995, was expected to double by the year 2005.

He also said that of 1,234 students surveyed at Watsonville and Aptos high schools, 42 percent of the students said that they had Cabrillo College as their first choice for attendance and 26 percent said they were considering Cabrillo College as an option.

The survey was conducted by the Watsonville Center Task Force, which included college professors, city officials and community members, formed in August of 1995 to find out the educational and service needs at the Watsonville center.

So the Cabrillo Community College District Governing Board along with the city of Watsonville is working towards making the expansion a reality. The Cabrillo College Foundation has committed to provide \$200,000 for the center and the Watsonville Redevelopment Agency \$1.8 million.

Now, \$2 million from the state is being sought by the city of Watsonville to complete the cost.

Hurd said that city officials have told him that the application process to obtain the funds was "looking very promising."

But Ned A. Madonia, housing and economic development director for the city, said that he wouldn't speculate if the grant would be provided. He did say that in the past, the city was able to obtain a \$1 million grant from the state for the development of the downtown garage and \$1 million for the development of the Plaza Vigil incubator building.

If the grant is provided, the expansion of the center would be built behind the current location, the old post office, which covers 11,000 square feet and consists of seven classroom. The expansion would be a three-story classroom building covering 26,250 square feet. It would contain a total of 12 classrooms, enabling the center to house at least 2,000 students, Hurd said.

The classes provided at the center would continue to be a combination of general education classes — like math, English, science and political science — and vocational courses — like small business, computer programming, word processing and criminal justice.

Hurd said that in the future more vocational classes would have to be provided.

"We are just going to have to respond to the economic times," he said, "I can't help but think that there will be a need to increase efforts in programs and services that lead to... career opportunities as soon as possible."

Hurd pointed to a report from the city manager's office that said that since 1989 more than 3,600 Watsonville residents have lost their jobs due to plant closures. The report also said that these people have had a hard time to re-entering the workforce because they lack skills and have language difficulties.

The expansion would also enable an additional 1,250 students per year over a five year period to attend the center.

Hurd said that the college would work together with the students and the employers to see what type of classes would be more appropriate for the students to obtain the proper training.

A pre-application for the grant was sent in May to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration by the city of Watsonville.

Hurd said that the response from the EDA on the pre-application had been positive and that the EDA recommended the city send the full application.

Madonia said that the full application will be sent in August and that the city will obtain a final determination in the latter part of September.

If the grant is provided, plans for the construction can be done within six months and then sent to the state for approval, Madonia said. The state takes from three to six months to approve the plans, he said.

After the state has approved the plans, construction would begin in about two months and the actual construction of the expansion would take from nine months to a year, Madonia said.

Nonetheless, the city and the college will have to wait until a response is received.

And if the grant is not approved, "then the next step would be to see how we can raise the money in the future," Madonia said.

Hurd agreed and said that even if the money was obtained, the college would continue to search for funding.

"We will grow out of that facility, so we have to continue planning as far into the future as we can," he said.

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REFERENCE