

Cabrillo faces money squeeze despite building boom

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As they step onto campus in coming months, Cabrillo College students will witness a dichotomy: Administrators have passed along a directive to cut spending next year by \$925,000. Yet the college has a long list of building projects set to begin in early 1995.

While they advocate a \$27 million spending plan that is nearly 4 percent smaller than the current budget, college officials say their best-laid plans are often misunder-

stood.

College department heads have been asked to tighten their belts for the coming year because state funding of community colleges continues to decline, they say. At the same time, buildings continue to rise for one reason: Construction money comes from different kitties.

"We are building, but at the same time we're having to reduce the operating budget," said campus spokeswoman Liz Irwin. "While we're getting wonderful,

generous gifts from the public for capital improvements, they're dedicated for specific projects and cannot be used for the operational program."

Among the projects on the drawing board:

- A project to repair and remodel the Sesnon House, set to begin next week. The historic building, once home to the college's box office, community education office and several non-profit organizations, has stood empty since portions of it crumbled in

the Loma Prieta earthquake. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has agreed to pay \$464,500 of the \$677,000 project. The college is continuing to negotiate for more federal funds and may receive funds from the Cabrillo College Foundation for additional improvements such as light fixtures reminiscent of the era it was built.

- By the first of the year, work on a \$1.9 million photography laboratory is expected to begin. The building will include one 12-station and two 25-station laboratories

and is to be paid with state building funds. The 12,000-square-foot project will correct health and safety problems that stem from poor ventilation in the existing 12-station laboratory.

- College football stadium renovation. New bleachers, new tennis court surfaces and other improvements are expected to cost about \$250,000. The Cabrillo College Foundation is leading a fundraiser to pay for the project.

- A \$1.4 million "High Tech Center" to house the college's

business office, physics laboratory, computer, music, and art technology laboratories under one roof. About \$700,000, enough to complete the planned renovation of an existing building on the campus, has been raised for this project. Construction is to begin this spring. The center is to open, at least in part, by next fall.

- Construction of the Baskin Child Care Center is to begin early next year. The 3,000-square-foot center will be built with a \$350,000

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donation by Jack and Elena Baskin and should open by next fall.

● A 30,000-square-foot addition to the college's Library and Learning Resource Center is to be completed by 1997. Next month, the library will be moved to portable buildings near the Sesnon House and the computer lab will be moved to the 1400 building. Ground breaking for the \$10 million project is scheduled for this summer.

Although half of these projects are being paid with private donations, College President John Hurd admits it may give the impression the college is better off financially than is actually the case.

"Maybe the timing (of the building projects) isn't the best given our operating budget," he said.

When administrators announced last week that they are planning for nearly \$1 million in state budget cuts for the 1995-96 school year, teachers union leader T. Mike Walker was among dissenters. With what appears to be a brightening of the state economy on the horizon, Walker argued, why not use the college's reserve funds to make up for the state deficit?

"The economy certainly is getting better but by the same token the way our funding has shifted, considerably more of our money comes from property taxes," Hurd said. "Even if the state economy is improving, it doesn't mean property values are going up and our revenue base may not be improving at the same rate the general economy is improving."

College departments, Hurd said, are being asked to take their fair share of cuts, to avoid eleventh-hour cuts and layoffs.

The cuts include an anticipated 3 percent from the state, which adds up to \$725,000, and another \$200,000 in increasing operating

costs.

"Next year is going to be a challenge," Hurd said.

He points to last year, when the college embarked on a similar plan of action. By eliminating 23 vacant positions in the college's electronic department, police department, learning center, athletic department, visual and performing arts department and an assistance program offered to minority students, the college avoided potential budget problems, he said.

"We tend to take a cautious and a conservative approach and the 3 percent state deficit estimated for next year, I think, is a cautious approach. Not unrealistic, but cautious," he said.

The strategy, he said, has "served the college very, very well in the last few years."

California community colleges have not received cost-of-living increases for four years, making the demand for budget cuts more urgent, Hurd said.

Earlier this week, college officials received news that this year's deficit from the state has climbed from 2.6 percent to about 4.2 percent. As a result, the \$330,000 in reserves set aside for unanticipated expenses will just cover the loss, Hurd said.

The latest decline in state funding, Hurd said, is attributed to falling amounts of property tax collections.

"Because of this latest shift in estimated property tax collection, it means an additional \$380,000 we won't receive this year," he said. "That means we have a \$60,000 problem to deal with."

The Cabrillo College governing board will review the budget during its February meeting and is expected to vote on a final draft of the budget in March.