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Cabrillo expands satellite campus

Old Watsonville post office site

By GREG BEEBE
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WATSONVILLE — Cabrillo College will move its south county campus into expanded quarters in the old Watsonville post office under a lease agreement expected to be finalized this week.

The deal will see the junior college's satellite campus more than double in size when it moves from its present location in the La Manzana building at 18 W. Lake Ave. to the old post office building on Union Street.

School officials hope to have the new center open for expanded course offerings by the fall. Landlord will be the city of Watsonville, which purchased the building for \$425,000 from the U.S. Postal Service in 1992.

The expanded campus is an important boost for South County higher education and Latino students in particular, said Rachel Mayo, director of Cabrillo's Watsonville center.

Since Cabrillo started offering classes at La Manzana in 1987, the percentage of Latino students attending the college jumped from 5 to 15 percent. More than 60 percent of the 250 or so students at the Watsonville center are Latino, she said.

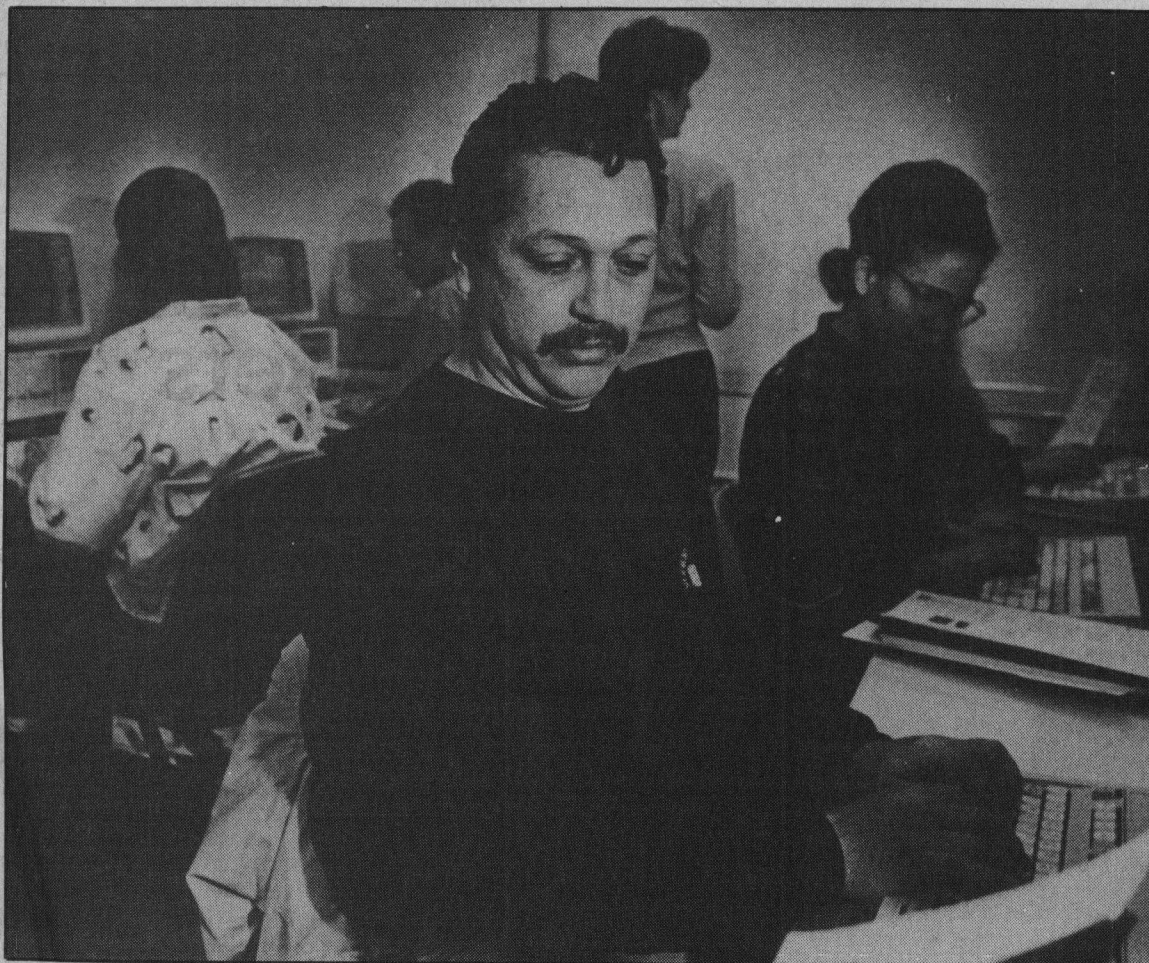
The growing popularity of the college's courses here has resulted in a serious space shortage.

"We don't fit, especially in the evening" when the satellite campus college caters to its primary user, the part-time student, said Mayo.

La Manzana has three classrooms and a computer lab. The classrooms are regularly jammed; the computer lab is sometimes pressed into service as a classroom and conference room, said Mayo.

The dire lack of space has limited course offerings, discouraging some students from enrolling at Cabrillo, Mayo said.

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Cabrillo student Dave Carranca hones his computer skills in the La Manzana complex.

Cabrillo campus

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"One of the reasons there's not more (students) is because with the limited amount of space we have, we cannot offer the range of classes people need to take a full semester here," she said.

"There are very few students who actually take all of their classes at La Manzana. If we could increase our numbers, the demand would be higher," Mayo said.

Among the most popular courses at the Watsonville center are English as a second language; basic English; basic math; and computer classes. More classroom space would help fill the growing demand for more advanced classes, said Mayo.

Tutors are an important part of the Cabrillo experience for many Watsonville students, but the space problems have left academic helpers working "in a box, basically" she said.

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A larger campus could open the door for special off-campus center funding from the state,

said Mayo.

"If we're ever going to receive state funding as an official off-campus center ... we have to get up to at least 500 full-time equivalent students, and we have about half of that now," Mayo said. Currently, funding for the campus comes from the school's general coffers, about \$171,000 this year, said Mayo.

By moving down the road, the college will more than double its space, from roughly 4,500 square feet at La Manzana to approximately 12,000 square feet at the new location, said Carl Blanke of Hirsch and Associates, the commercial real estate broker who is working on the new lease agreement.

The post office building will need some improvements such as a new sprinkler system and elevator before the college can move in, Blanke said. Architects are currently working on designs for classrooms and office space, said Mayo.