

LCCC officials tout growth at Watsonstown

BY KEVIN MERTZ

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WATSONTOWN — Administrators with the Luzerne County Community College (LCCC) believe 100 students could be enrolled in classes at the college's Greater Susquehanna Center in Watsonstown by the fall semester.

LCCC President Thomas Leary and Greater Susquehanna Center Director Kelly Foran spoke on the growth of the center during an open house held Monday. Officials from the Warrior Run School District, Watsonstown

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From left, Luzerne County Community College President Thomas Leary and Greater Susquehanna Center Director Kelly Foran spoke on the center's growth during an open house.

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Borough, as well as students and members of the community attended the open house.

The Warrior Run School District school board in May approved a six-year agreement for LCCC's Greater Susquehanna Center to operate out of a portion of the former Watsonstown Elementary School building. The center is using five classrooms and two computer labs in the building.

At the time the agreement was approved, it was announced that LCCC's tuition rate would be \$134 per credit.

A \$10 per credit facility fee and a \$30 per credit capital fee are also charged to anyone taking classes at the center. Those funds go to the school district.

Leary said on Monday that as part of its commitment to the center, the LCCC has agreed to cover the facility and capital fees for the first year.

From this past fall to the spring semester at the center, Foran said enrollment has tipped.

In the fall, she said just eight students were enrolled in two classes — English and First Year Experience — being offered at the center.

This semester, Foran said 35 students are enrolled in in two English classes, a sociology class and an emergency medical technician class being offered through the center in Watsonstown.

"We are hoping to reach over 100 (students) for the fall semester," Foran said.

Leary said LCCC operates seven branch campuses, and has followed similar growth models at each campus.

"We have every confidence we will be able to build our momentum here (in Watsonstown)," he said. "This first year is sending our message out of what we can do... It's been a building block to what we can do."

This summer, Foran said the campus will be offering two computer classes, as well as a math class.

Offerings will further expand in the fall. Classes to be offered will include First Year Experience, psychology, interpersonal communications and several math classes.

Additional classes may be added as Foran and Leary confirmed LCCC will be renovating a room at the school to serve as a science lab.

"We will be able to offer science classes that are needed for our health majors," Leary said.

Whitney Hans, of Lewisburg, is one student who said she will benefit from having a science lab at LCCC's center in Watsonstown.

"I started here at Luzerne this spring semester," she said. "With living in Lewisburg, this is a lot closer than driving to Nanticoke or Shamokin."

While she enrolled in the school due to its proximity in Lewisburg and the fact that it offers evening classes which match her work schedule, Hans was initially unsure how she would complete some since classes required as she is in LCCC's nursing program.

"With some of my classes I do need to do lab work," she said.

Leary said investing in a science lab at the Watsonstown location is just another sign of LCCC's commitment to the area.

"We are making this investment as we feel this area is rich for a community college opportunity," he said.

Foran said LCCC is working with the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) to possibly secure grants which could allow science, technology engineering and math (STEM) courses to be offered in Watsonstown. The college is also working with Bucknell

University on potential grant sources to benefit under-represented students attending college.

According to Leary, students from Watsonstown, Milton, Lewisburg, WilliamSPORT, and several surrounding counties have enrolled in classes at the Greater Susquehanna Center.

He also praised the Warrior Run School District for working with LCCC to establish the center.

Warrior Run Superintendent Dr. Alan Hack also commented on the strong working relationship between the two entities.

"It's far exceeded our expectations in the amount of time (LCCC has) been able to do this," Hack said. "We should feel proud of having this program located within our school district."

He said Warrior Run is working with LCCC to potentially offer dual-enrollment classes and other opportunities for high school students in the district. Foran said LCCC is working with other area school districts to also develop such programs for high school students.

The Watsonstown Elementary School was vacated at the end of the 2015-2016 school year when the Warrior Run School District consolidated its elementary program.

Hack previously said the building has approximately 22 classrooms. At the start of the 2018-2019 school year, CSIU started leasing 8.5 classrooms in the building to host various programs. In December 2018, the board approved granting CSIU an additional two-year lease, at a cost of \$8 per square foot, for the space it uses.

Warrior Run's Transition program also operates a consignment store, Defenders' Trading Post, out of a portion of the building.

Staff writer Kevin Mertz can be reached at 570-742-9671 or email kevin@standard-journal.com.