

Legislature gives green light to Clermont campus

By ERIC WALKER
Press Editor

Efforts to have a two-year branch of Lake-Sumter Community College (L-SCC) in Clermont got a boost from the Florida Legislature during its session over the past couple of months to the tune of a quarter million dollars.

The state legislature agreed to fund \$250,000 for development of plans and site work of the south Lake campus, set for land along State Road 50, north of Hancock Road.

According to Dr. Robert Westrick, president of Lake-Sumter, the approval from the legislature puts them well ahead of schedule. "That would put us one year ahead of where we thought we'd be," he said.

"That would move our calendar forward. We're hoping to get funds to start construction," Westrick added. "That's our goal for next year."

Being one year ahead puts time on L-SCC's side, which is another bonus for the Clermont site's backers. Lake-Sumter and the family of Maury and Daryl Carter, who donated the land, had initially agreed to a five-year time table, which stipulates that construction would have to be up and running within those five years, otherwise the land would revert back to the Carters.

Talks about opening a campus site for L-SCC in south Lake began nearly three years ago, when Westrick was named president of the Leesburg-based college. Prior to that, several courses had been offered in and around south Lake, such as courses offered at South Lake High School, but a formal campus didn't seem to be an option.

The community college has an enrollment of approximately 3,000 per term, with around 100 enrolled in courses at SLHS. The majority of the students

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enrolled are centered in Leesburg.

The process got into high gear last June with the land donation and also the opening of a college branch in Sumterville. With Lake County being as large as it is, and with the population skyrocketing, college and city officials began looking into the matter more closely.

With the land donation last year, the plan then got underway.

Westrick estimated that the necessary

blueprints and planning could possibly be completed by early spring 1997. Courses offered would tie in with the Leesburg campus, and may focus on associate degrees for computer and business, per a needs assessment study conducted by the college.

The president also added that support for the Clermont campus has remained very high, especially with various other developments in south Lake, such as South Lake Hospital's construction of a new

facility east of Clermont, as well as talk of local attempts to lure the U.S. Triathlon Association to Clermont from Colorado.

"We're very pleased with the enthusiasm," he said. "We would like to have some collaboration with the hospital, and with the triathlon group. We could do something with them, as well," he stated.

Gov. Lawton Chiles should sign the measure in June, July or earlier, Westrick said.

If that happens, the board in charge of overseeing the task would then begin the process of hiring an architect and developer to start plans and blueprints of the campus.