

June 24, 1998

Lake Sumter Comm. College groundbreaking ceremony

By Cindy Hebebrand
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Hard work and determination paid off this past Friday as key players turned the soil at the groundbreaking for the South Lake Center. This ceremonial act represented the culmination of a dream to bring higher educational opportunities to South Lake County. The center, located at Hancock Road off S.R. 50 in Clermont, will house a southern branch of Lake-

Sumter Community College (LSCC). The project was the result of many partnerships, including government, higher education, and the community.

A steady breeze allowed the many local residents and distinguished guests to enjoy the event despite the high temperature.

Dr. Robert Westrick, President of LSCC, enthusiastically welcomed attendees and introduced many speakers.

One of the highlights of the day was a donation of \$67,000 by

Sprint, represented by Margo Odom, for the completion of a 24 station computer lab at the new college.

The importance of partners in the community was the key element focused on by all speakers. Without partnering, this new campus may never have become a reality.

"This project would never have happened without Dr. Westrick," said Cecil Shumacker, Chairman of the District Board of Trustees.

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Turning the soil at the Lake Sumter Community College groundbreaking on Friday, June 19th.

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Ann MacKay, wife of Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay representing Gov. Lawton Chiles, was excited about the new school as she praised the partnerships between LSCC, the University of Central Florida (UCF), and the hospital. "It is a wonderful thing to watch these types of partnerships," she commented.

Daniel Webster, Speaker of the House of Representatives, also praised the efforts that had been put forth and looked toward the future. "To extend out the opportunity to get a four-year degree here in the South Lake community is an awesome thought," he said. "It is very good for South Lake County."

Ann Dupee, former Councilwoman, read a statement of greetings and congratulations from Ms. Anna Cowin, member of the

Senate, who was unable to attend. In the statement, Cowin pledged her continuing support.

Trustees of LSCC, George Hovis and Victor Charron, spoke of the importance the new center will be to the community and praised the efforts of all involved.

Representing South Lake Hospital, Shannon Elswick, Vice-President of Orlando Regional Healthcare Systems, commented, "We seek out good partnerships and we invest in those relationships."

Dr. John Hitt, President of UCF, stated, "If you think what this will mean to South Lake County, you can't help but get excited about it." He explained that the aggressive growth in Central Florida creates special needs and that many students can't go long distances for college.

Daryl Carter, whose family donated 67 acres toward the site, spoke to

the audience. He commented that the new college was made possible by the community of Clermont.

Mayor Robert Pool reflected on the founding of the project. "This started as just a dream at a lunch at the Mission Inn," he said. One of the great aspects, according to Pool, was public and private sectors working together.

Commissioner William Good from the Lake County Board of Commissioners, remarked how this site on the hill had once been under the ocean and was now one of the highest points in Florida. He believes the new college will also reach new heights.

Randy Wiseman, Chairman of the Lake County School Board, acknowledged the contribution of the Carters. "Without citizens like the Carters, things like this wouldn't happen," he said, praising their act of great citizenry. He went on to say

the Board may be interested in erecting an elementary and secondary school on these premises somewhere down the road.

Ray Gilley, President of the South Lake Chamber of Commerce, commented, "This day and what we have accomplished exceeds our expectations."

According to Stephen Sewell, President of Lake-Sumter College Foundation, Inc., these may be the best years of our lives. Seeking higher education would provide community enrichment.

Dr. Westrick called the venture a "win-win situation." "The City of Clermont has been a strong partner," said Westrick. "Wayne Saunders has been a tremendous partner in this."

The ceremony ended with partners lined up, shovels in hand, turning the soil.



Ann MacKay, wife of Lt. Governor Buddy Mackay, representing Governor Lawton Chiles at the groundbreaking ceremony.