

THE NEWS-TIMES

WWW.NEWS-TIMES.COM | Friday, December 5, 2014 | SINCE 1883 | \$1.00



Naugatuck Valley Community College's Danbury center is at 183 Main St. The college plans to expand into a new, larger location across the street.

Autumn Driscoll/Staff photographer

NVCC EXPANDING

New campus welcomed downtown

Officials looking for influx of activity in Danbury when classes start next year in Main Street building

By Dirk Perrefort

DANBURY — Officials with Naugatuck Valley Community College have announced a significant expansion of programs in the city, including a new campus on Main Street that triples the size of its current facility.

Local leaders and downtown stakeholders hailed the long-awaited news about the downtown campus as another major development in efforts to revitalize the city's center.

"We've been keeping our fingers crossed for more than a year that the campus would be located on Main

Street," said Tom Devine, chairman of CityCenter Danbury, noting that locations just outside the Main Street corridor were also considered. "This should have an astronomical effect on the downtown."

The demand for a full campus in Danbury was spurred by growth in the local enrollment at Naugatuck's current center on Main Street in recent years, according to Daisy Cocco De Filippis, the president of Naugatuck Valley Community College.

While the center offered for-credit classes, the new campus, which will be in the Pershing building at the



A new downtown location at 190 Main St. would more than triple the size of NVCC's current location in Danbury.

corner of Main and West streets, will give students the opportunity to earn associate's degrees and to complete certification programs.

De Filippis noted that enrollment in Naugatuck's local programs spiked significantly after it began offering for-credit classes in the spring of 2009. In the fall of 2010, the local center had an enrollment of about 389 students. Today the center has more than 1,000 students.

"When the classes get out in the Danbury center, there is usually a huge traffic jam in the hallways," De

Filippis said. "We've just outgrown the space."

She said while the state's Board of Regents needs to sign off on the new location, the board approved a Danbury campus early last year and has been supportive of the programs.

Joseph DaSilva Jr., who owns the Pershing building and many others downtown, said the lease with the college is in final negotiations. He added, however, that he's agreed to fit out the 20,000-square-foot space to meet the college's needs.

By NVCC Staff

NVCC poised for major expansion in downtown Danbury

Continued from A8

The top two floors of the three-story structure, he said, had previously been used for apartments and offices, and have been vacant for some time.

"I'm really glad they stayed downtown," DaSilva said. "A community college campus like this belongs in the heart of the city."

While much of the building had been dark in recent years, DaSilva said the lights will be on when the campus opens and hundreds of students will be seen gathering near one of

the city's most prominent and visible intersections.

"We're on the verge of a big change in the downtown that's been long-awaited and it's great to witness," he said.

De Filippis said she hopes that the enrollment on the campus will double within the next five years.

"We have the opportunity to have a significant presence in Danbury and change lives," she said.

Besides the new campus, the college also recently announced a \$1.7 million federal grant to expand its

manufacturing certification program into Danbury through a collaboration with Henry Abbott Technical High School, also in Danbury.

For years, manufacturers in the region have bemoaned the lack of a qualified workforce for the industry, officials say. A similar certification program at Naugatuck's Waterbury campus has a more-than-90 percent job placement rate.

"Community colleges have always been nimble and able to move quickly to customize curriculum pro-

grams to meet the needs of local industry," said Stephen Bull, president of the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce. "This program is extremely important to Danbury-area manufacturers."

Bull added that with the new downtown campus is helping to create an economic development and education center downtown.

The campus, he said, is near the new Danbury Innovation Center, the new SCORE office, the Danbury Public Library as well as the Small Business Development Center inside the chamber's offices nearby on West Street.

"Whether you want to start a business, get some advice about an existing business or continue

your education to improve your career, it's all possible in the heart of the downtown," he said. "You couldn't ask for a better case scenario."

De Filippis said she hopes classes can begin in the new campus by fall 2015.

dperrefort@ncstimes.com
203-731-3358; www.twitter.com/DirkPerrefort