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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 1, 2006

Topping-off ceremony for Cuyamaca College Communication Arts Building

EL CAJON – – A steel beam at a construction site on any other day wouldn't even draw passing notice, but it became the centerpiece attraction Friday at a "topping-off" ceremony at Cuyamaca College, marking the completion of a major construction phase for what's been described as a future jewel of East County.

In keeping with a construction-trade tradition, Cuyamaca College hosted a brief topping-off celebration, during which the last steel beam for the \$44.6 million Communication Arts Building was hoisted into place after it had been signed by a contingent of officials and onlookers, alike.

David Suter, the college's facilities coordinator, penned the name of his 5-month-old son on the beam with the notation, "Future Cuyamaca College Grad." Adorned with John Hancocks on one end and the words, "Artimex Local 229 Iron Workers," in multi-colored paint on the other, the flag-bearing "I" beam was lifted by a towering crane and placed atop what will eventually be the main stairwell for the 88,590-square-foot facility. (Artimex Iron Co. is a company based in El Cajon.)

"It feels like just yesterday we had the groundbreaking ceremony for the communication arts building," said Dr. Geraldine M. Perri, college president, just prior to the lifting of the beam. "As I walk this campus, whether it's the communication arts building, the student center or the science and technology mall, everywhere you turn, there are signs of new construction and the feeling of excitement as we look forward to the completion of these major facilities."

Governing Board President Deanna Weeks, who gave the official OK for the hoisting of the beam, took the opportunity to thank East County voters for their support of Prop. R, the \$207 million local bond measure approved in 2002 to build and repair facilities at Cuyamaca and Grossmont colleges.

"I think we want to take a moment to thank the people of East County for this wonderful building," she said. "With the learning that will take place in this future landmark, the voters of East County can rest assured they will be paid many, many, many times over for placing their trust in the college district and supporting this endeavor."

The communication arts building, funded by a combination of Prop. R and state bond funds, is scheduled for completion by fall 2007 and will provide much-needed laboratory and independent learning facilities for Cuyamaca's English, communication, American Sign Language, fine arts and music disciplines. And with a 360-seat assembly hall and a 100-seat digital theater capable of wide-screen cinema projection and digital multimedia presentations, the facility, designed by NTD/STICHLER, will at long last provide an indoor location where large groups can congregate.

At the groundbreaking in September 2005, the facility was described as a "jewel for East County" critical to the college's mission to offer a comprehensive education to students.

Because of its size and location, the building will be a visual landmark, particularly when seen from the college's main entrance at Fury Lane. The three-story facility is built into a hill and will link the lower and upper portions of the campus.

It is the massive facility's Rancho San Diego hillside construction that posed a major challenge: the unearthing and relocation of 57,000 cubic yards of soil too weak in places to support the structure and replacing it with slurry, a reinforced mixture stabilizing the soil.

The tremendous amount of excavation at one point caused the project to fall seven weeks behind, but thanks to the hard work of the construction crew, as well some manipulation of the work schedule to increase efficiency, the project is now back on track with the projected timeline, said Brett Jenson, a supervisor with Rudolph and Sletten, Inc., the facility's construction manager.

"Artimex, as well Conundrum Construction (a subcontractor), really stepped up to the plate to get the project back on schedule," he said.

Next week, a topping-off ceremony is scheduled for Cuyamaca's Student Center, an \$18.9 million facility also projected for a fall 2007 completion.

For more information about Prop. R, go to www.gcccd.edu and click on the link, "Construction News."

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