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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Topping-off ceremony for Cuyamaca College Student Center**

**EL CAJON** – – “We’ve waited a long time,” reads a message scrawled onto a steel beam that was front and center at a “topping-off” ceremony recently, marking the completion of a major construction phase for Cuyamaca College’s \$18.9 million student center that will finally provide students a place next fall to enjoy a hot meal, chat with friends or browse the bookstore between classes.

For now, as they have been since the college’s start in 1978, students are relegated to seeking refuge from East County’s blazing summers or winter rains wherever they’re lucky enough to find a patch of shade or a building overhang when the weather turns inclement. But that will change in a major way in the coming months.

In keeping with a construction-trade tradition, a brief celebration Sept. 5 put the spotlight on the last steel beam to go up on the project, a 47,000-square-foot center of contemporary design by architect LPA, Inc. The new facility will feature a food court, dining areas, student lounge and game room, as well as house the bookstore, health and wellness center, student government and club offices, a student-run copy center and more.

Bearing signatures and cheerful slogans penned by students, faculty, staff and other well-wishers, the last steel beam was hoisted by a towering crane and guided into place by a pair of construction workers. Straddling the narrow connecting beams, the two seemed oblivious to the dizzying height, going about their work as easily as if their steel-toed construction boots were planted on terra firma.

With the placement of the last beam on what will be the roof deck of the student center, Jim Austin, vice chancellor of business services for the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District, was overheard remarking to college President Geraldine M. Perri that in about a year, the center’s spacious balcony overlooking Cuyamaca’s famed grand lawn would be the perfect spot to toast the facility’s opening.

In her brief opening remarks, Perri acknowledged the nearly two decades that have passed since students began a pennies-a-day collection to help fund the building.

“You have had to wait a good 20 years since the student body began assessing this fee for the college to get to this pivotal point in history,” Perri said.

The student center construction fund has grown to \$748,000, thanks to the \$1-per-unit assessment to a maximum \$5 per semester that students approved by a sizable margin some 17 years ago. Those funds are supplemented by proceeds from Prop. R, the local bond measure backed by East County voters in 2002 to help pay for new construction and facilities repair at Cuyamaca and Grossmont colleges.

“This building is long overdue,” district Chancellor Omero Suarez told the audience. “I’m simply elated, excited and very, very happy that this college will have a full-service facility for the services that one would expect to be provided students.”

Governing Board Trustee Bill Garrett was joined at the podium by members of the Associated Students of Cuyamaca College, the student government organization. After introducing the students, Garrett led the group in a round of coyote howls, the familiar rallying cry adopted by the college, whose campus mascot is the Cuyamaca Coyote.

“How true to call this project ‘In the Heart of the Campus,’” Garrett said in reference to the promotional slogan that a college committee came up with in connection to the groundbreaking ceremony held last Valentine’s Day. “Its location is in the middle of the campus – the heart – where it will be a hub of student activity.”

Last week’s “topping off” ceremony for the student center followed on the heels of a similar event just days earlier for Cuyamaca College’s Communication Arts Buildings, a \$44.6 million project also scheduled for completion in fall 2007.

A third major facility under construction at the college is the \$25.1 million science and technology mall, which is furthest along with a January 2007 target date for completion.

Major construction is also under way a few miles away at Grossmont College, where Prop. R is funding a new science building and a digital arts and sculpture complex.

For more information about Cuyamaca College in Rancho San Diego and Grossmont College in El Cajon, go to [www.gcccd.edu](http://www.gcccd.edu). More details on construction is also available by clicking on the link, “Construction News.”