



**CONTACT:** Della Elliott, GCCCD Public Information, (619) 644-7690  
della.elliott@gccd.edu

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Feb. 9, 2006**

## **Cuyamaca College students opening their heart to welcome construction start for student center** *Campus fetes groundbreaking with Valentine's Day celebration*

**EL CAJON** – – Seventeen years after students set up a piggy bank of sorts to help pay for a place where they could sit down for a hot meal, browse the bookstore merchandise, run off copies of lecture notes, pick up a brochure on smoking cessation, or play a game of foosball between classes, ground will be broken next week for a spacious \$18 million student center at Cuyamaca College.

By each paying a dollar a unit or a maximum \$5 per semester to the construction fund, students amassed \$748,000, a sum that will be supplemented with local taxpayer dollars to build the college's latest Prop. R project.

A public groundbreaking ceremony is set for 10:30 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 14, on the grand lawn of the college at 900 Rancho San Diego Parkway in Rancho San Diego. A free luncheon and DJ music will immediately follow to lend the occasion a celebratory flair in keeping with the spirit of the day. Aptly dubbed the "Heart of the Campus," the groundbreaking will highlight students with red ribbon in hand, creating a giant heart around the spot where dignitaries will toss the dirt.

"The fact that this is an entirely locally funded project, paid for by students and East County residents through Prop. R, makes this facility that much more special," Dr. Geraldine M. Perri said, referring to the local bond measure approved in 2002 to help pay for new construction and facilities repair at Cuyamaca and Grossmont colleges. While the other four major projects under construction at the campuses are funded by a combination of Prop. R and state funds, the Cuyamaca College Student Center receives no state construction dollars, officials said, because it's not an instructional facility.

What it will be is the hub of activity for campus life, housing the bookstore, health and wellness center, student government and club offices, an administrative office, a student-run copy center, student lounge and game room on the first floor; and a food court, dining areas, a convenience store, a coffee shop and three multipurpose rooms on the second level. The building, which will be near the learning resource center and the Prop. R-funded science and technology mall currently under construction, will also add

three open spaces: a wide-open plaza for larger gatherings that also will feature a tribute to teachers in concrete and brick; a gathering area shaded by grove trees for smaller groups, and a 3,800-square-foot covered deck for outdoor dining overlooking the grand lawn.

“Cuyamaca students have waited a long time for this facility,” said Governing Board President Deanna Weeks. “Their vote of more than 90 percent in favor of creating the construction fund back in 1989 shows they recognize the building’s benefit to the campus and students. They’ll finally have a place to go for shelter from the rain or the hot sun. And they’ll have a comfortable place to go during those breaks between classes, whether they choose to spend the time studying in the student lounge or sharing a meal with friends and classmates. The facility represents another block in the foundation that will help ensure student success at Cuyamaca College.”

The 47,000-square-foot student center, designed by LPA Architects, has an elegant, contemporary look with an asymmetrical, sloped roof, an abundance of floor-to-ceiling windows and skylights, as well as the inviting open spaces. Slated for occupancy in fall 2007, the student center is a far cry from what the campus currently has to offer as a place for students to congregate.

The Coyote’s Den, where students now go to eat, is a snack bar inside a temporary trailer measuring about 1,400 square feet; the dining area consists of a few patio tables set up outside. The new student center will have three food-court vendor areas totaling 4,300 square feet. The convenience shop, alone, with “grab-‘n’-go” foods, will equal the size of the Coyote’s Den. The main dining area will be 3,400 square feet with indoor seating for about 125 and the covered balcony can seat an additional 150. Each of the three multipurpose rooms measures 1,600 square feet and is separated by partitions which can be moved to convert the area into a 400-seat banquet hall.

The dining amenities, ample meeting rooms, office spaces and student lounge strike a responsive chord for students like Roslyn “Roz” Johnson, president of Associated Students of Cuyamaca College.

“It’s hard for students to enjoy a campus life when all you have as a place to relax and hang out is a double-wide trailer,” she said.

Cuyamaca’s dire shortage of facilities has relegated the ASCC and other student organizations to cramped quarters inside a trailer that also doubles as a makeshift student center. At the new student center, the ASCC office will measure about 1,500 square feet, more than double the 600 or so the students have now. The copy center, with both a self-serve area and a service counter, is an amenity currently lacking and will also provide a new revenue source for ASCC.

Roland Meze, a second-semester student, said he regularly stops by the student center trailer to relax between classes.

“I also attend Grossmont and San Diego State – Grossmont has that really big dining area where students can get together to eat and talk and San Diego State has a really cool student center,” he said. “Students need somewhere to go to de-stress, a place to relax.”

Beth Appenzeller, acting vice president of student development and services, noted that studies have shown that students feel more connected to their college and are more likely to succeed when they have a place where they can interact socially with other students.

“I believe that having a student center where students can meet, relax and study is a very significant addition to our college,” she said. “The student center will undoubtedly contribute to student life and student success.”

Besides more comfortable dining and a venue for socializing, the student center also includes a much larger bookstore and expanded health and wellness center.

Mike Gilchrist, bookstore manager, said the expansion from 1,000 to more than 5,000 square feet will allow for additional merchandise and better service to customers.

“There will be a bigger selection, more registers, and shorter lines,” Gilchrist said.

Because of the space shortage, all textbooks are kept behind the counter in the two converted classrooms which now serve as the bookstore.

“Students can’t really shop the store comfortably because it’s too small – the new bookstore will more than meet students’ expectations, I’m sure,” he said.

Health educator Peter Hanna said the expansion of the health and wellness center to 1,600 square feet and the new exam rooms and offices mean more privacy for students, as well as space for added staff.

The health center, currently consisting of a small lobby, a single consultation room with partitioned areas for limited privacy, and a cramped office, isn’t large enough, Hanna said, to provide lab tests or to have a nurse practitioner on staff. With the increased square footage comes the possibility of hiring a practitioner with the training and credentials to diagnose ailments and prescribe medication.

“Many students don’t have health insurance, so we see everything from minor bumps and bruises to much more serious conditions,” said Hanna about the estimated 25 students the center sees every day. “We do a lot of referrals to public health clinics – we consider ourselves as the entry point for medical treatment.”

ASCC’s Roz Johnson, who’ll be one of the students forming the heart at Tuesday’s celebration and proudly proclaiming herself as a Cuyamaca College student, said news of the student center and the major construction now under way has created a buzz among students that could only result in a stronger alliance to the college.

“What this building symbolizes is Cuyamaca’s commitment to students,” she said. “It’s really important. It took a long time, but I think the best fruit are those that take the longest to ripen.”

With the start of construction of the student center, Cuyamaca will have three major building projects taking place simultaneously. The other facilities are the science and technology mall and the communication arts building, both of which broke ground last year with funding from Prop. R and state bond funds.

For more information about the colleges and the district, go to [www.gcccd.edu](http://www.gcccd.edu)