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NCCC opens new Ti campus

"A nice place like this makes everybody happy"

By LOHR McKINSTRY, Staff Writer

TICONDEROGA -- North Country Community College's elegant new Ticonderoga campus officially opened Tuesday.

College President Gail Rogers Rice said the \$3 million building overlooking Percy Thompson Bicentennial Park is the culmination of six years of planning.

A balcony lets students look out at the Lower LaChute Falls, and the edifice at Hawkeye Trail contains classrooms and computer and science labs.

"North Country Community College is one of the fastest growing community colleges in the United States," Rice said.

"We've grown by 70 percent since 1999. We are one college in three places."

The college's main campus is in Saranac Lake, with another branch campus in Malone.

"This facility in Ticonderoga brings us into equity for southern Essex County," Rice said. "A nice place like this makes everybody happy."

The new Ticonderoga Campus was funded with a sale of public bonds by the NCCC Foundation and the Essex County Industrial Development Authority.

Enrollment in Ticonderoga is up 44 percent over last year, with 208 full- and part-time students taking classes.

"It was a dramatic increase in applications. We anticipate that will double by next semester."

The campus's capacity is 400 students.

"It probably will take us awhile to grow into that," Rice said. "It's been a great adventure."

The college was renting two downtown storefronts, one of which had a leaky ceiling and pigeon infestation, Rice said.

"We feel very proud to be in this new building and in this community. It's been a difficult struggle to move ahead."

Ticonderoga Town Supervisor Robert C. Dedrick said when college leaders told him they wanted to leave behind the two downtown storefronts they were using, he and the Town Council worked to find them a new place.

"North Country was looking at moving the campus, and the town board was adamant it was not going to leave the community.

"Now they have a tremendous facility. It's a beautiful, functional facility."

The college has plans to begin offering a licensed practical nurse program, possibly by the 2006-07 school year, pending state approval.

The college also wants to offer new criminal justice, business and liberal arts programs at Ticonderoga, and Rice said they're writing a new master curriculum plan to include those subjects.

"We wanted to design a usable, livable, student-friendly facility. It's a place where people can enjoy learning."

And enjoying learning is exactly what she's doing, student Kristy Mason of Ticonderoga said.

"It's a lot different here than a hallway down a storefront, which is what we had. It's calming and soothing. It's more of a college campus than a couple of rooms."

The new campus has 10 adjunct instructors, along with five full-time staff members, and will triple that teaching staff and add three more full-time staffers as enrollment increases, Rice said.

"This is the beginning of a new era for the college. It's been the realization of a dream."

NCCC Foundation President Theodore Morgan said his group was enthusiastic about helping with financing for the new campus.

"This is one of the most amazing things I've seen take place. The community has been very supportive. We're very proud of what we've done."

"We wanted to design something students would want to come to."

The new facility lives up to that ideal, Mason said.

"It all seems more professional. Students think they're getting much more for their money."