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FEBRUARY 11TH 2012 BY UNKNOWN

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Special to the ShowMe Times
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POPLAR BLUFF - Three Rivers College administrators are taking on their first brick and mortar project at the main campus, the \$1.5 million renovation of Rutland Library, slated for completion by the end of the year.

The long-sought facility update was originally announced by Dr. John Cooper's administration in 2007, when Three Rivers received a \$2.2 million windfall from the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority as part of former Gov. Matt Blunt's Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative.

"We've had the MOHELA money waiting on financial stability so that we could start updating the facilities," said Three Rivers trustee Marion Tibbs, who has served on the board since 2006. "Building remodeling and repair was the original intent, but the loss of \$1.4 million on operations" from cuts in state allocations "took the wind out of our sails for a little while."

The Academic Resource Commons, which is what the Rutland Library building has been known as since a transition began in fall 2010 to centralize academic support services, will house the library, a coffee and pastry shop, testing and public computing centers, rooms officials are calling collaboratories, tutoring and other educational resources through federal programs.

"The redesign and renovation of the ARC will have an extremely positive impact on academia because students will have a single place they could go for a variety of services to support the learning process, based on their individual needs and desires," explained Dr. Wes Payne, vice president for learning. "When I first arrived here" in 2009, "we had a separate math lab, a separate writing center, of course nursing and allied health co-located in the library—it was evident that support services needed to be brought together under one roof."

In developing a master plan with architectural firm Dille & Traxel over the last year and a half, updating the ARC was identified as the highest priority because of the impact it will have on student success, according to president Dr. Devin Stephenson.

"We believe it's the first of its kind—the ARC. You don't find this at every college," Stephenson said. "We believe it will be the most popular place on campus."

Stephenson noted that the Higher Learning Commission would conduct its focus visit next year to help determine whether Three Rivers' accreditation will be renewed in 2017/18. To have the ARC up and running will be physical proof that emphasis has been placed on improving learning outcomes, something the community college was cited for lacking in 2008.

Upon receiving a clean audit last month, Stephenson decided to allocate the five-year-old capital improvement funding to the ARC. Space was freed up in the 24,000-square-foot facility a year ago when the nursing and allied health program was moved out to Poplar Bluff Regional Medical Center's South Campus, resulting from a partnership forged with hospital officials.

"With the current needs on campus, that was the obvious thing—to take over space they already own, that's not being used, and evaluate the entire building, because it's better for them to use the money all at one time," architect Ben Traxel said. "After that, what you have is a domino effect of departments moving out of other buildings."

Bids for construction and a local vendor will be opened in March. The ground is expected to be broken by late spring, with a goal to finish the remodel in December, according to project officials.

The main entrance of the ARC will still face the Westover Administration Building, but the front doors will be shifted toward the east wing, Traxel said. There will be a circulation desk in the lobby, and where the old doors were located, a café will be designed.

While plans are still being modified, the second floor will include the tutoring center and a multipurpose space with adjustable walls, according to planners. The building will also contain computing stations as well as WiFi access.

"When most of us think of libraries, we picture stacks and stacks of books on dusty shelves," said Corey Halaychik, Three Rivers reference/circulation librarian. "From our student surveys, we gathered they were looking for more of a balance between quiet study spaces and, after spending their time in the classroom all day, a more collaborative environment that is comfortable—like a home away from home."

The exterior of the ARC will feature masonry and brick work that will become the community college's standard for future building projects included in the master plan.

Last June, the Three Rivers Endowment Trust hired the Clements Group based in Salt Lake City, Utah to launch a major capital fundraising campaign for an event center and a humanities and social sciences building on the Poplar Bluff campus.

"The ARC is only our genesis of building projects here," Stephenson stated.

Named after major contributor, the late Myrtle Rutland—a Bernie native, Rutland Library was built in 1980 using donations from hundreds of people. To save money, the 30 plus year-old building was combined with occupational technology through a partnership between Three Rivers and Poplar Bluff Industries, according to community college records.

"This could not be coming to fruition without the hard work of the administration and the sacrifices made by the faculty and staff," Tibbs said. "I wish we could put up a sign with everyone's name on it: 'This project made possible by...' And it would have to be a big one!"

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