

Bursting at the seams

Algonquin plans to expand all campuses to help combat trade shortage

JENNIFER YOUNG

This Week

With the looming threat of an upcoming trade shortage, Algonquin College is trying to do its part to provide skilled workers to those trades especially in need.

Some trades are already experiencing shortages. Algonquin is planning a massive expansion project that it hopes will help to combat that shortage. The main focus for the college is on expanding its programs in the construction trades and healthcare.

"We went with the two sectors that are experiencing the greatest difficulty in getting the numbers they need to do the work they have before them," said Robert Gillett, president of the college.

The college is planning a \$69 million construction and technical trades building and a \$35 million health sciences and strategic growth centre.

The construction building would be 160,000 square feet and LEED-Gold certified. When complete, the centre would add 600 new construction trades spaces. The building and the programs taught in it would also be focused on being environmentally friendly.

"Not only is it a growth of the trades, it's an entirely different approach to bring in an environmental component both in the building and in the program offerings which has never been done here in Canada," said Gillett. "It really is a very different trade centre than what you would traditionally think of."

The proposed health building would include five basic care labs, one emergency and trauma lab with two intensive care bays, two isolation units and a senior's apartment prototype among other things.

The expansion would make room for 950 more students than it can currently accommodate. This would ensure a consistent supply of professionals, such as nurses, social service workers and paramedics would be search of employment.

Both new buildings would allow Algonquin to consolidate current labs, giving them more space to expand other trades programs that are also

experiencing difficulty accommodating the demand.

"In our top 50 programs we have waiting lists in them all," said Gillett. "We hope by [expanding] we can add 3,000 more students every year to our enrolment which will also mean 3,000 more graduates each year, taking us close to about a 20,000 person full time college."

Gillett said that the college received 39,000 applications to different programs this year alone and could only accept 7,400. A big part of the reason was because the college simply doesn't have the space to accommodate the number of students even though those numbers are needed to help populate the skilled trades.

"In many cases we will have to limit enrollment because we virtually will not have the space to deal with it," he said. "We will maximize the facilities, but in many cases we're already there. We've got to balance the ability of our students to take programs in the

off hours with our capacity to generate the facilities required to teach the program."

The college is working closely with trade organizations to ensure that its expansion doesn't duplicate programs already offered in the city. So far organizations seem more than willing to work with the college.

"We have 600 letters of support from the trades organizations and our letters from the health networks are rolling in now," he said. "They're both absolutely on-side and say they need these people, but they need them even yesterday."

Algonquin also has plans to expand its other campuses in Perth and Pembroke to help combat the shortage.

"We're adding a new wing at our Perth campus this year and we'll be expanding in both the construction and the masonry trades," said Gillett.

In Pembroke, the college is looking to expand its automotive trades program. "That campus will go from about 700 to 1,000 students," he said.

None of this can hap-

pen, however, if the college does not receive approval for its plans or enough funding from the federal and provincial governments. Many colleges are looking to expand their programs because of the growing demand.

"Algonquin's request right now is the single largest request before the system," he said.

The size of the request and the number of other institutions vying for funds from the same purse is making it hard for Gillett to predict if the college's requests will be successful, though he hopes they are.

"Unless we can expand, having more applicants won't help because we won't be able to take them and we've made that case known to the government. It isn't a case of maybe, these applicants exist," he said. "We want to tell the government we need this space."

Even if the college's expansion plans are approved, none of the new facilities would be ready to open their doors for at least three years.

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• Robert Gillett

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