

RVCC Set to Receive Grants for Lebanon Site

By Nora Doyle-Burr

Valley News Staff Writer

Saturday, September 5, 2015

(Published in print: Saturday, September 5, 2015)

Lebanon — A little more than a week after announcing plans to open a Lebanon location, River Valley Community College has more cause for celebration.

The college expects to receive \$650,000 in grants to upgrade the larger of two former Lebanon College buildings downtown.

“We’re really, really excited,” River Valley President Alicia Harvey-Smith said.

A \$1.6 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development program made it possible for the Community College System of New Hampshire to purchase the 20,000-square-foot former Woolworth’s building on the pedestrian mall last month.

However, in order to use the building, Harvey-Smith said, it needs a boiler, as well as new flooring, ceiling tiles, lighting and improvements to the bathrooms to make them compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The college also plans to replace signs and modify the building’s security system.

On Thursday, the state’s Community Development Advisory Committee approved a \$500,000 community development block grant, the latest of several pieces of government financing which have combined to smooth the way for the college’s establishing a new location in Lebanon.

Should the Executive Council sign off on the block grant, it would go to the city of Lebanon, which then would subgrant the money to River Valley for building improvements.

“It’s a great opportunity for the Upper Valley to really fill a hole with regard to educational opportunities and employment training,” said Kevin Flynn, communications director for the New Hampshire Community Development Finance Authority, which manages the block grant program.

The region’s employers need an appropriately trained workforce, Flynn said.

If employers “can’t find qualified workers in a certain area, they’re not inclined to stay there,” he said.

Flynn said the Executive Council historically has supported community development block grants and is expected to make a decision in six to eight weeks.

The Northern Border Regional Commission also this week awarded River Valley a grant in the amount of \$150,000, New Hampshire Gov. Maggie Hassan and Democratic U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen announced in a Tuesday news release.

The commission is a federal state agency devoted to combating chronic economic distress in parts of New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine and New York. The region served by the commission includes four counties in New Hampshire and six in Vermont.

The community development block grant, combined with Northern Border grant, will bring River Valley closer to its goal of \$750,000-\$1 million as described last week by Kristyn Van Ostern, associate vice chancellor of finance and chief financial officer for the Community College System of New Hampshire.

Though River Valley had hoped for \$250,000 from the Northern Border Regional Commission, Harvey-Smith said she remains optimistic the school will be able to complete all of its planned renovations. She said she now plans to reach out to business and industry partners to garner the additional funding.

She said she hopes to begin work within the next four months.

The terms of the block grant require River Valley to create 25 jobs. The school itself has committed to creating five jobs, while Dartmouth-Hitchcock has committed to creating the other 20.

“We see a real benefit in our partnership with River Valley,” said Sarah Currier, director of workforce development for Dartmouth-Hitchcock.

Currier said she hopes the school’s new Lebanon location — less than 4 miles from the hospital’s main campus — will make it easier for current and prospective D-H employees to access training, particularly in the areas of business and technology.

D-H is working with River Valley to outline the skills it seeks in a trained workforce, particularly in administrative positions, Currier said.

“It’s an exciting time,” Currier said. “There’s a lot of work we have to do together between now and when it opens.”

The school plans to begin offering workforce training, continuing education, business and general education courses in the spring, Harvey-Smith said. By next fall, she said she expects the renovations to be complete and the school to be fully open. She encourages interested students to apply now.

Two other Upper Valley entities also benefited from Northern Border grants announced this week.

The Grafton County Economic Development Council received \$45,000 for a second-story pedestrian bridge to link two business incubator buildings in Centerra Business Park. The council owns the buildings with North Country Council in partnership with Dartmouth College's Office of Entrepreneurship and Technology Transfer.

Chris Wellington, director of the Grafton County Economic Development Council, said he hoped to have the bridge completed by spring. The goal in linking the buildings, which now are more than 90 percent occupied, is to make it easier for businesses to expand, he said.

The commission approved TwinState MakerSpace's request for \$250,000 to help purchase and renovate downtown Claremont's "sawtooth" building into productive space for entrepreneurs in science, technology, engineering, math and art.

Elsewhere in Vermont, the commission awarded grants to expand the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury, improve infrastructure at Willoughby State Forest, support the forest products industry, help expand the Franklin County Industrial Development Corp.'s industrial park, convert an environmentally contaminated site to an attractive public space in Enosburg Falls and improve wastewater infrastructure at the state-owned Northeast Kingdom International Airport in Newport.

Nora Doyle-Burr can be reached at ndoyleburr@vnews.com