River Valley College readies Lebanon opening

By NHBR Staff
Published: October 2, 2015

Appearing at the announcement that the Community College System of NH is acquiring the former campus of Lebanon College, are, from left, CCSNH Chancellor Ross Gittell, River Valley Community College President Alicia Harvey-Smith and Congresswoman Annie Kuster. The property will become a second satellite campus for the Claremont-based River Valley.

With the acquisition of the former campus of Lebanon College, River Valley Community College is expanding its scope beyond its main campus in Claremont and satellite campus in Keene.

The former college is now the property of the Community College System of NH. The $1.6 million purchase was made thanks to financing from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, which provided a 40-year loan with a 3.6 percent interest rate. The Lebanon branch will open in the fall of 2016.

“Strong community colleges play a vital role in ensuring the economic and social vibrancy of rural America,” said Ted Brady, USDA Rural Development New Hampshire and Vermont state director. “The USDA is excited to follow President Obama’s lead in promoting rural community colleges through supporting projects such as River Valley Community College’s expansion.”

Brady noted that U.S. Rep. Ann M. Kuster, D-N.H., had played a pivotal role in the expansion because Kuster orchestrated the partnership between CCSNH and USDA, which funded the new project in part thanks to language Kuster championed in the 2014 Farm Bill directing the USDA to work more closely with community colleges across the country.

“I am thrilled to congratulate River Valley Community College, the Community College System of New Hampshire, the USDA, and the many partners that made today’s announcement possible,” Kuster said. “This investment by the USDA is a critical one to the community of Lebanon and the entire region — it will help create a skilled workforce, create jobs, and support local businesses for years to come.”

River Valley currently serves approximately 1,000 students in Claremont and Keene. The acquisition of the Lebanon campus will allow enrollment to increase initially by 500 students, with room for expansion, officials said.
College President Alicia Harvey-Smith said the new campus will serve as a hub for workforce development and business and industry training. In developing the new campus, River Valley partnered with two of the region’s most prominent employers, Hypertherm and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, to ensure that potential students receive industry-relevant academic and professional experiences in one of the region’s most economically vibrant areas.

River Valley is expected to offer courses in business information technology and liberal arts and humanities, Harvey-Smith told the Valley News.

But there are renovations that need to be made, including a new furnace, phone system security system and flooring.

The college aims to raise $750,000 to $1 million for renovations through a mixture of grants and private donations, Kristyn Van Ostern, the Community College System’s associate vice chancellor of finance and strategic planning told the Valley News.

The Community College System’s $1.6 million loan from Rural Development is the first time a community college in the region has utilized such a loan since their creation in a provision in the 2014 Farm Bill said Ted Brady, the director of the Rural Development program in Vermont and New Hampshire, according to the Valley News.

“I have to tell you my heart just jumps at the prospect of 500 students getting the opportunity for higher education right here in Lebanon,” said Kuster. “For all that means for the Upper Valley for community development, for economic development, but most importantly for human development,”

Kuster said River Valley’s expansion was “the most concrete result I’ve had from running for Congress.”

This article appears in the October 2 2015 issue of New Hampshire Business Review