

# River Valley and Granite State join forces

Agreement to bring more students downtown

By Damien Fisher | Jun 03, 2014

CLAREMONT — Two colleges are entering into an agreement today that could have a large impact on the future of the city.

Leaders with Granite State College and River Valley Community College are meeting in Concord this evening to sign a memorandum of understanding that will establish a program that allows River Valley students the opportunity to earn degrees through Granite State, said River Valley President Alicia Harvey-Smith.

“It’s really exciting,” Harvey-Smith said. “I think it’s big for Claremont.”

The agreement lays out a two-year pilot program that will send River Valley students to the downtown Granite State campus for classes where they can earn an associate bachelor's, or even a master's degree, Harvey-Smith said.

“This is part of the vision for the college’s future success,” Harvey-Smith said. “It gives our students the opportunity to start their first two years with River Valley, and then go seamlessly to Granite State for their bachelor's, or even their master's — all at one location.”

The agreement will allow both colleges to grow, she added, while students will be able to increase their educational potential. Such agreements are common for most community colleges, Harvey-Smith said, but new for Claremont.

The agreement will be limited to specific degree programs, but both colleges anticipate a successful pilot program. If all goes well, the program could expand with more students attending class on Pleasant Street. That idea is exciting to City Manager Guy Santagate.

“It’s a major breakthrough for us,” he said.

Santagate has long wanted to see more college students downtown, and a better connection between River Valley and the city. This deal essentially puts a four-year college campus in the heart of the city. While the expansion of the educational opportunities is exciting, Santagate likes the idea of more college students as customers for the many Pleasant Street businesses.

“Something that brings people to the downtown is a big deal for Claremont,” he said.

River Valley is already in very early stages of investigating the possibility of putting dormitory-like housing downtown. Jack Donovan, executive director with the New Hampshire Business Finance Authority, presented a plan to the city last month that would put 20 River Valley students into housing in the Brown Block.

The NHBFA owns the Brown Block and is looking at different ways to develop the residential portion of the building. Both RVCC officials and Donovan have said it is too early to comment on the proposal.

Santagate said getting the agreement between River Valley and Granite State has been talked about for years, but Harvey-Smith was able to work with Granite State officials, and Claremont's Planning and Development Director Nancy Merrill to get a deal done.

Santagate served on the committee that hired Harvey-Smith, and said this is the type of action the college, and the city, needs. It's exactly why Harvey-Smith was hired.

"I'm betting on her," he said.