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SLCC facility should ease health-care shortages

By **Wendy Leonard**

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In what once was an empty field next to Bangerter Highway, a new facility that promises to help Salt Lake Community College turn out record numbers of health-care workers is near completion.



The Health Sciences Center at Salt Lake Community College's Jordan Campus will open this fall.

Salt Lake Community College

whole. State-of-the-art lab equipment, access to all disciplines and room to grow will provide students who are trying to get a feel for what working in a hospital is like, with an experience that is "as close as it gets," Bacon said.

"Nobody does anything alone in a hospital," she said. "Our system is set to model that interaction by creating interdisciplinary teamwork."

With already overflowing emergency rooms in the valley and the announcements of multiple hospitals slated to open this year and next, Bacon said, producing more graduates to fuel the workforce is imperative. Local industry leaders have provided money and pledged partnerships

The college's Health Sciences Center, which will provide classrooms for nearly 1,200 students in seven health-care-related disciplines this fall, is important because of Utah's growing health-care needs, said Marlene Bacon, the college's dean of health sciences.

"Utah seems to be a bottomless pit of demand for nurses and really for all health-related fields," she said. "Our nursing shortage, however, is impacting how hospitals can expand."

The college has committed to accept and train more health-care professionals in the coming years, and the \$31 million facility on the 9000 South and 3400 West campus will centralize the institution's efforts and give students a better feel of how the health-care system works as a

with the college, and although a financial commitment to the building has been met, at least \$4 million is still needed to break-even.

Intermountain Healthcare has signed on to help SLCC's cause by providing the largest-ever cash donation to the facility, thus forming a partnership with the college that will help place students while they train and later when they graduate. Intermountain's new hospitals will need an additional 150 nurses to function as scheduled.

Meanwhile, IASIS's network is looking to hire a similar number when more than 100 new beds open at Jordan Valley Hospital this year.

In late June, Sen. Bob Bennett, R-Utah, announced a Senate appropriation for Utah's health-education programs, including funding for SLCC's Health Sciences Center. The committee allocated \$500,000 to help move students through the programs there, ensuring an increase of more than 360 graduates per year.

"While this bill does not solve the problem entirely, it does provide significant resources to address issues like literacy and better access to quality health care in rural areas," Bennett said at the time. Money was also directed to Weber State University's nursing program, allowing it to recruit and hire new faculty members, expand classroom size and ultimately increase the number of nursing graduates.

SLCC's nursing program, which is approaching full capacity at nearly 500 students, is second to WSU in program size. The college accepts about 120 students to the program each year, but Utah is experiencing a 12 percent vacancy rate, according to the Utah Hospital Association.

The new facility is expected to help the situation by allowing the school to accept more students, as well as give them a better learning environment and will accommodate an increase of more than 360 health-care graduates each year.

Joy Tlou, SLCC's spokesman, said the college has a waiting list for students to get into specific programs, but no matter how long they are required to wait, everyone who is accepted will get an opportunity to finish the program of their choice.

Amid the 16 classrooms inside the building, the 151,000-square-foot building houses multiple



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examination and assessment rooms, more than 30 computer, medical and cadaver laboratories, a 500-seat auditorium, two clinics that will eventually be open to the public, a physical therapy pool, library/media center and four computer testing centers.

The entire building is wired for Internet and "well-thought out to accommodate traffic patterns and program needs," said facilities director Frank Baker.

Construction began in June 2005, and students are looking forward to having the facility completed and open Aug. 23.

First-year nursing student Camille Nelson, said it will be great to have all nursing students and classes in one place. "It will be a lot larger, more accommodating for the students," she said, "and it seems like it will be better all around."

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