



ACHIEVING
Businessexcellence

JULY 2009

www.bus-ex.com

Catch the wind

Investment in
green energy
overtakes
fossil fuels



Linger and learn

As it wraps up a 2002 bond program and gets into the heart of a 2006 bond issue for building and renovation work, Contra Costa Community College District in California is focusing on harnessing the power of targeted investment to transform campuses and the communities that host them, Keith Regan finds out

As part of a 2002 bond issue to upgrade and expand the facilities of the Contra Costa Community College District (CCCCD), Contra Costa College and Diablo Valley College received several new and renovated buildings. A new education center in San Ramon was also created. Additionally, the Los Medanos College campus was essentially transformed in the first round of the capital improvements

program. Three new buildings were designed and built around a new quad area, creating a more campus-like feel for the college. Since the work was completed at Los Medanos in the fall of 2008, enrollment at the college has been up 20 percent.

“If you talk to many of the people out there, they’ll tell you it has absolutely transformed the nature of the campus in terms of how its appearance relates to the rest of the community,” says Ray Pyle, chief facilities planner for the



district, which serves Contra Costa County in the San Francisco Bay area. “We think part of the enrollment increase has to do with the economy, but there’s no doubt people see the college in a different way today than they did before the work was done.”

The district is now hoping to use that same power of the 2002 bond—which authorized \$120 million in spending on new buildings and infrastructure—as it rolls out a 2006 bond program, which authorizes another \$286.5 million in development.

“What we’re doing with the 2006 bond is taking that same transformational approach for the projects on the Contra Costa College and Diablo Valley College campuses,” says Pyle. Work will be spread across the district, but at Contra Costa College and Diablo Valley College, new buildings will again be designed and built around

a new common, open area. “We’re focusing on integrated building and commons area design and using the investment to really change the way the campuses look and feel.

“With the work proposed at Diablo Valley College—the focus on better coordinated student services areas, in both assistance and instruction, and incorporating sustainable principles in our planning—the heart and soul of a 60-year-old campus will be transformed to meet the needs of students for the next 50 years,” Pyle continues. At Contra Costa College, the plans are to construct a new campus entrance, a student quad, a Student Activities building and a new classroom building. The Student Activities building will house an expanded culinary arts program, a new bookstore and student government facilities. The state-of-the-art classroom building will contain smart classrooms, faculty offices and spaces for students to “linger and learn.”

CCCCD operates the three community colleges as well as two learning centers, with approximately 1.5 million square feet of building space. In connection with the latest bond issue, each campus completed a master plan in 2008, and each has its own specific project list, though common threads include a move to integrate and

consolidate student services wherever possible as well as emphasize classroom and laboratory educational facilities.

One learning center, the Brentwood Education and Technology Center—a satellite location of Los Medanos College in the city of Brentwood—is going to be completely transformed, with a new campus location being acquired and new facilities constructed to replace the current location inside a former grocery store building. “For the first time it’s going to have a real campus feel to it,” Pyle declares.

The bond programs were written to allow for infrastructure upgrades where needed, and money is being put into road and parking lot upgrades and into high-voltage electrical system upgrades in some locations. Some athletic facilities have also been upgraded, which has helped make the campuses more attractive to students as well.

Sustainability has long been something the district has embraced and made part of its building program, though such efforts have not always been formalized. Most of the 2002 bond issue was completed without third-party certification of sustainability being sought, though energy conservation and long-term sustainability were considered in all the designs. More recently, the decision was made to pursue LEED certification for projects in the more recent bond issue through the US Green Building Council. Which level of certification buildings pursue will vary based on the project, with the district working closely with the individual architects and contractors to achieve the certification level that makes the most sense economically.

The 2002 bond did have a significant green component, however, in the form of a distributed solar power generating facility. Capable of producing 3.2 megawatts of power in all, the solar panels are distributed across parking areas at the three college campuses—they double as sun-shade structures. “As far as we know, when we constructed it, it was the largest system at any higher education facility in North America,” Pyle says. “We’re trying to establish leadership in sustainability and self-generation on our own terms.” The system generates as much as 25 percent of the system’s electricity power demands.

Contra Costa Community College District

Like other institutions and private project owners, CCCCD had to deal with sharp construction cost escalation in the 2002 to 2007 time frame, when construction in the private sector was going full speed ahead and competition for raw materials from overseas helped spike costs across the country.

The district responded by delaying some projects, altering others and putting others on hold. With the economy having changed dramatically, the district is now using interest earned on bond funds that had been set aside and not used to revisit some of those projects. "Now we've got some projects where we're seeing a lot of bids, and some actually might come in under budget," notes Pyle, who spent 20 years in the Navy and oversaw construction projects for that arm of the military before joining CCCCD

in 2007. "We're definitely operating in a much different environment today. People are lining up to bid on our work because they know we've got a number of projects just coming into the pipeline, and they want to work with us as we build out our program over the next five to seven years."

To help his central facilities department handle the current round of bond-funded projects, Pyle is planning to hire four new staff people to help with program and project management, and given the state of the economy and the building sector in particular, he expects to have a strong pool of candidates from which to choose. "It's a good program, with a lot of varied work and the sustainable element that people will find interesting," Pyle says. "Our building program is essentially doubling, so we need to ramp up to meet that demand." – *Editorial research by Dan Finn* ■

