

# Construction at RPCC set to start in March

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Construction is expected to start in March on River Parishes Community College's \$9.2 million Center for Advanced Technology.

It will be the first project funded through Legislative Act 360, which was passed in 2013 and provides funding of more than \$200 million for 28 workforce and technology training projects across the state.

The technology center will sit directly behind River Parishes Community College's Edenborne development campus in Gonzales, which opened its doors in May at its new location after a 10-year stint in Sorrento.

Heavy rains forced officials with the Louisiana Community and Technical College and RPCC foundation boards to break ground Feb. 4 under a tent.

RPCC Chancellor Dale Doty said architectural and construction companies interested in bidding on the project have until Thursday, Feb. 12, to submit qualifications and credentials. Then, in two weeks, five or six companies will be provided the opportunity to bid on the design build project.

The contractor will be selected in March and dirt work on the site should begin immediately after the company is selected, Doty said.

Doty said the industrial construction boom in the area is creating the need for more well-trained workers and the technical center will fill that void.

However, he said, it was 32 area companies and residents that kicked in the remaining money needed to build the center.

RPCC foundation board President Lilly Murphy said members of the foundation had around 45 days to raise the 12 percent needed to match the state funding. She praised area business and industry for “coming to the plate” to make the project happen.

Murphy and several foundation board members waited in a line after the Feb. 4 ceremony to take their turn at gold shovels to turn dirt for the project. The narrow tented area made it impossible for everyone to line up at once for the ceremonial ground-breaking photo.

Standing next to Murphy, foundation member Ryland Percy, who lead the fundraising team, said the new center will provide the space to train more workers for jobs in the River Parishes area.

Percy said the new technology center will include open air welding bays and an industrial tower “just like the ones you see at a plant.” He said BASF donated the tower.

Monty Sullivan, the president of the Louisiana community Technical College System, said the center will change the lives of students living in the area.

He said training center graduates will be well-trained for jobs or to continue their education at area colleges and universities.

Sullivan said breaking ground in 18 months since the Act 360 was passed “is nothing short of extraordinary.” He said lots of parishes wanted to be the first to build as part of the push for more technology education centers.

The new center, which is expected to be open in a year, will offer “a better learning environment” for students preparing for new jobs or updating skills at existing workplaces, said Bruce Waguespack, RPCC vice chancellor for technical training.

He said the initial drawings for the 42,000-square-foot center were completed in January. The new center will replace the Sorrento campus, which sees about 350 students taking classes in process technology, instrumentation, drafting, welding and other job skills classes and more than 400 students attending adult education classes.

The new center will feature an operating chemical plant facility for process technology students that will allow them to “get a good idea of what it’s like to work in a plant and ... work shift work.”

He said RPCC will be able to customize training programs for business and industry in the River Parishes thanks to the added space the new center will provide.

He said the college’s goal is to follow the students throughout their careers through entry-level training to courses offered to aid with advancement.