New River Experiences 35 Percent Enrollment Increase

At the end of the first week of fall semester classes, New River Community and Technical College’s enrollment was up 35 percent based on the same time last year.

“We’re anticipating another 500 dual enrolled high school students and 250 students from our inmate program to enroll in the coming weeks,” commented President Ted D. Spring.

“Although we expect there will be some decline due to non-payment, we believe our end-of-term enrollment will exceed 3,000 students. Our enrollment at the end of the fall term last year was 2,393.”

Spring attributed the increase to several factors. He noted that the recession has sent many adult learners back into the classroom to upgrade their job skills. He credited the efforts of New River’s staff with doing an outstanding job of recruiting students and hosting orientation sessions over the summer to ease the transition to college for new students. He noted that awareness of the college has increased significantly over the past few years because of marketing efforts, and he also cited outreach by New River into counties in its service region where there is no campus location, such as a satellite location in Marlinton to serve residents of Pocahontas County.
This is the third year in a row that the college has experienced an increase in enrollment. Two years ago enrollment jumped 33 percent, and last year it was up another eight percent. The sustained growth has created challenges, Spring admits.

“The college’s facilities at all locations are filled to the capacity, and we have virtually nowhere to offer the kinds of technical programs that we should be offering to help build a skilled workforce for our region,” he said.

New River has developed a 10-Year Master Facilities Plan to address the needs for expansion. The first phase of the plan includes construction of a new administration and classroom building in Beckley and renovation of a building on the Greenbrier Valley Campus in Lewisburg. The legislature appropriated $16.5 million for these projects last year, but sale of bonds was postponed due to the economic situation.

“We have just received the go-ahead to move forward with these projects,” Spring said. We are already meeting with architects to begin the planning process.” We will also pursue grant opportunities, federal stimulus dollars and other avenues to fund the other projects in the facilities plan.”

Other projects include an expansion to the existing Nicholas County Campus and the construction of a technology center on that campus; construction of a technology center on the Greenbrier Valley Campus; and construction of a new campus in Mercer County. New River currently provides services at the Mercer County Technical Education Center in Princeton and offers some classes on the Bluefield State College campus in Bluefield.

A second challenge resulting from the rapid growth is the extra burden it has put on the staff and faculty, Spring noted. Although a number of new positions were added over the past year as New River assumed responsibility for administrative services previously provided by Bluefield
State College, there are still only about 100 full-time faculty and staff to serve a student population fast approaching 3,000.

"I can’t say enough about the tremendous effort that our staff and faculty have put forward to complete the mandated transition from Bluefield State while at the same time adjusting to a phenomenal rate of growth and change. They have been simply outstanding, and our students are the benefactors of their great work."

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