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Riding the wave to TCC's new campus



ROGER CHESLEY

YOU MAY THINK you're surfing when you walk into the library at Tidewater Community College's new Portsmouth campus.

There, amid the 100 soon-to-be-installed computers and stacks of books, the ceiling mimics a wave; it's lower in one point than another. The design also recalls, ever so slyly, the logo of TCC, one of the fastest-growing two-year colleges in the country.

It even brings a rush to the voice of Deborah DiCroce, the college's do-everything president and overseer of this latest expansion.

"We're bringing the Portsmouth campus home," DiCroce proclaimed this week, as we toured the state-of-the-art buildings sitting on 35 acres next to Victory Village business park. The old "Portsmouth" campus is actually in northern Suffolk and opened in 1968; its buildings and equip-

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ment reflect that age.

Not so the new campus, which rises on land that was part of the now-demolished Fairwood Homes complex. The campus is named after Fred W. Beazley, who along with the Beazley Foundation donated the original 1968 site.

Sitting across Greenwood Drive from the Bide-A-Wee golf course, the new campus should spur greater development in a section of the city that officials have optimistically dubbed "Victory." The Newport housing community is located nearby, as is the planned Victory Village multi-use development.

The campus "raises the quality bar in Portsmouth," said Doug Smith, a city council-

man and former economic development director. "In terms of the work force training, it's literally world-class."

Folks in Portsmouth are happy, sure, but I doubt they're as excited as the students and faculty. Administrators move in next month, and classes begin in January. The campus will complement others in Norfolk, Chesapeake, Virginia Beach and downtown Portsmouth that together serve 30,500 full- and part-time students.

With an investment of \$65 million from various sources, most of it from the state, the Portsmouth campus will welcome 8,000 students to start. It has the capacity to double that number.

Three buildings will host

a range of classes, including the Beazley School of Nursing; programs in heating and air conditioning, welding, and computer-aided design; science labs; and First College, a partnership between TCC and the Portsmouth Public Schools that gives high school seniors a chance to earn college-level credits.

College officials held focus sessions with faculty and students on the design of classrooms and sought guidance from other colleges, too. For instance, DiCroce said, administrators asked faculty members, "What should learning look like today?"

So the classrooms will have the requisite white boards and smart boards, of course. But other gadgets and surprises await.

The nursing wing will feature hospital beds and human patient simulators, where student nurses will practice on the

"person" under the watchful eyes of instructors in a control room. The drafting and design classrooms will feature high-end, powerful computers. The cavernous welding labs have all sorts of gizmos and tools and stations that look ready to build a submarine.

The campus is on the bus line, and it also has parking for 1,450 vehicles. It should be an easier jaunt for most Portsmouth residents than the old campus near Interstate 664.

Besides the convenience and amenities, DiCroce sees the move as helping to make the Victory area "kind of a Greenbrier of Portsmouth." It will take years for that to happen, but at least the process is under way. And as students might say: Surf's up.

Roger Chesley is associate editor of The Pilot's editorial page. Reach him at (757) 446-2329 or roger.chesley@pilotonline.com.