

A tough act to follow

LMC president leaves on strong note

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BENTON TOWNSHIP — As game-changers go, getting the state to sign off on a \$17 million renovation project — after almost a decade of lobbying — leads the top of any executive wish list.

For Lake Michigan College's outgoing president, Bob Harrison, that moment provides yet another reminder of the rising profile of the institution he's led since 2009.

"We pride ourselves on being responsive to what the needs of the community are," he said.

For LMC Board Chairwoman Mary Jo Tomasini — the approval of the col-



HARRISON



HP file photo

Michael Moyer, program director of the Great Lakes Wine Institute, inspects wooden wine storage casks, part of the new Enology and Viticulture program at Lake Michigan College. Photo taken in January.

lege's \$17 million capital outlay grant request marks another step in its march toward becoming a regional force, if not a state one.

"I tend to agree with Bob. We've had a banner year, but the news (last) week is outstanding," Tomasini said. "We're just meeting the needs of the community, and I'm excited about that."

As CEO of Competitive Edge, Tomasini hears similar excitement from her business colleagues about the grant request, which Gov. Rick Snyder signed into law last week.

"What I'm hearing is that Lake Michigan College has really emerged as a leader, and people are looking to us to set the pace for the future. They're excited we've been so responsive," she said.

Long time coming

Getting the grant had long been a top priority for Harrison, who's retiring Thursday, closing out an LMC career that began in 1999 when he became dean of business services.

Harrison worked closely on the grant with state Rep. Al Pscholka. R-Stevensville,

among others, to see it through.

Pscholka played a key part as chairman of the Michigan House of Representatives' Appropriations Committee, which approved his bill to fund half the college's request, or \$8.5 million, from the state's Building Authority Fund. LMC will provide the other half.

As Pscholka noted in his news release, he'd been working with his staff for five years on the matter, "and the college itself has been seeking

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the money since 2006,” he said.

The grant will allow LMC to upgrade its 307,800-square-foot main campus on Napier Avenue, which is 45 years old.

Plans call for renovating 50 classrooms and two lecture halls, and an overhaul of its heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system – plus creating a career and transfer center and student success center.

Construction will start in 2017 after the college completes a one-year planning process with faculty and staff to determine which projects take priority.

Harrison said he expects the construction process to follow a similar template as the science lab overhaul it completed six years ago.

“We’ve seen an increase in the number of students taking science classes, number of majors going up, and successful completers going up. We want to use that as our prototype for the changes we’ll make over the next several years,” he said.

Other highlights

LMC followed a similar rationale in deciding to house all of its manufacturing technology programs at its Hanson Technology Center, which it plans to open in fall 2016. The estimated cost is \$11.8 million.

The college prepared for the project by closing its M-TEC building, where some of the programs had been housed, in December 2014. It sold the building to Whirlpool Corp.

“Having the center will give local economic developers and state agencies a tool to sell as they attract businesses to Michigan,” Harrison said. “We’ll be able to offer more services and attract more students than we have in the past into manufacturing. That’s positive for the local economy.”

LMC in 2015 continued to expand its academic offerings, starting with its first enology and viticulture (wine) program, in which 14 students are now enrolled, Harrison said.

LMC opened a temporary lab for the program in August 2014 and added an associate’s degree for it this year. The program’s long-term home is the Wine and Culinary Education Center, for which the board approved infrastructure and design work in October.

Other additions included

a medical assistant program, which opened with 20 students, and new certificate programs in supervisory skills and supply chain management.

LMC overhauled existing curriculum areas like its math classes, which it revamped with collaborative work sessions, shorter lectures and an effort to present problems in real-world terms.

All these initiatives reflect the types of students that LMC is now attracting, Harrison said.

“The world is changing so quickly. Students are coming to us with different learning styles. They’re far more fleet of foot with technology, and so there’ll continue to be investment in how we adapt to meet their needs,” he said.

Down the road

Big as those achievements have been, they wouldn’t happen without LMC’s longstanding policy of finiding out what students, employers and other stakeholders want, Harrison and Tomasini say.

“That’s why we’re out with advisory committees, talking to employers and community-based organizations,” Harrison said. “If anything, we’re probably a little more fleet of foot, and being able to respond to the dynamics of the local economy – and local needs – far greater than the four-year schools.”

Being a smaller organization has its upside, said Tomasini, now in her seventh year as a board member.

“We’ve done an outstanding job of remaining nimble, and that has allowed us to respond quickly. Sometimes, you get stuck for years trying to move through a decision, or trying to start something,” she said.

LMC is gearing up for another big transition as Harrison is replaced in January by Jennifer Spielvogel, who is leaving as an administrator at Cuyahoga Community College.

“She comes from an organization that’s well recognized for how they connect with the community and focus on adding value – so she’s a great fit,” Harrison said.

Tomasini said she looks forward to building on the track record Harrison established at LMC.

“Dr. Spielvogel understands we are in the middle of some really great things, but some really large and significant projects – so our battle cry will be to finish them, and do them well,” she said.