Lee, community celebrate McNair Center expansion

BAYTOWN, TX — The Lee College McNair Center now has an additional 50,000 square feet of instructional space where students will receive hands-on technical training with the latest technology to prepare for high-paying careers in the growing petrochemical and construction industries.

More than 100 community members, elected officials and industry leaders joined Lee College this month to celebrate the grand opening of the $12 million McNair Center expansion, which was completed in January and now houses programs in machining, millwrighting, welding and pipefitting. Student ambassadors led attendees on tours of the facility before Pres. Dr. Dennis Brown and members of the Board of Regents gathered to cut the ceremonial ribbon.

Welders, pipefitters, millwrights and machinists earn a median salary of $18-24 per hour, and have the potential to earn as much as $75,000 or more annually with a two-year degree.

“At Lee College, we are changing the conversation about workforce education in our community,” Brown said. “No longer are we simply preparing students for jobs; we are preparing them for well-paying careers that last a lifetime. In the newly expanded McNair Center, more students than ever will have the opportunity to become the fully employable, highly skilled workers that industry so greatly needs. ”

Students at the center will learn within a modern industrial environment closely modeled after what they will find upon entering the workforce. Course curricula are built around standards set by the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), allowing students to earn industry-recognized credentials that make them more competitive in the job market.

“Opportunities abound in industrial construction for anyone interested in launching a career in a lucrative skilled trade,” said Debi Jordan, executive director of the Center for Workforce and Community Development, noting the increased need for a robust pipeline of candidates to fill thousands of available positions. “Industry is looking to Lee College to help fill that pipeline, and the McNair Center will provide best-in-class facilities.”

The McNair Center will also host daytime dual-credit classes this fall that allow high school students to earn college credits, and offer evening and weekend courses for working adults who want to pursue higher education while managing job and family responsibilities.

“The expansion will allow Lee College to provide quality educational programs that are in high demand in our region,” said Dr. Cathy Kemper-Pelle, vice president of Learning. “Area residents will have ready access to welding, pipefitting, machining, and millwright programs in a convenient location along Interstate 10. Students will learn from top quality instructors in state-of-the-art labs. This facility is a game-changer.”

The McNair Center expansion was funded through a bond issue approved in 2013 by 72 percent of voters. Brown credited the overwhelming support of the community, Board of Regents, local school districts, industry partners, elected officials and McNair

neighbors for helping bring to fruition the shared goal to create the premiere industrial and technical training facility in the region.

“The McNair Center — and the students whose journey to a brighter future will take them through its new laboratories and classrooms — has given all of us a reason to be proud,” Brown said.