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Committee sets \$2.5 million goal for new Algonquin campus

By Terry Fleurie

Staff Writer

Pembroke -- Hot on the heels of a recent \$4 million pledge announcement by the Algonquin College Student Association for the facility's new Renaissance Square waterfront campus, the college introduced its new Capital Fundraising Campaign Committee on Monday, complete with its own \$2.5 million goal.

The event, which saw a large gathering of municipal leaders from across Renfrew County and the Pontiac, as well as MPP John Yakabuski, garnered both local and national media attention at the Pembroke Campus.

Jamie Bramburger, Manager of Community and Student Affairs in Pembroke, emceed the press conference which included an update on the project as well as the introduction of the new committee.

"We've invited you here today to hear more about our vision for a new Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley and to meet some very special community-minded people who are helping us to achieve our dream," Mr. Bramburger explained.

Karen Davies, Dean at Algonquin's Pembroke Campus, said Monday's announcement was an exciting day for Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley.

"For many years, there has been a desire to build a modern college to serve the Ottawa Valley and for the past year and a half we have been silently, and in some cases not so silently, looking to build a case for a new campus," she said. "Today, we want to update our political leaders and educational partners on the progress that has been made and ask for your assistance in helping us further the agenda to push this community project to fruition."

Ms. Davies noted Algonquin College has been a fixture of learning in Pembroke since its opening in 1967 in the same building which houses the campus today.

"It was a grassroots movement led by municipal and business leaders that brought a college campus to Renfrew County. Four decades ago, the community understood that having access to post-secondary education would be important in helping to meet the skilled labour needs of the future.

"Now, 40 years later, we are again feeling the pressure of the communities we serve," she added. "They are telling us we need to offer more skilled trades programming, we need to help the community retain more of our young people, we need to be leaders in helping our community adjust to the new labour market reality that almost any new job created requires post-secondary training."

To meet this demand, Ms. Davies said a new campus is needed in Pembroke and the time is now for that to happen.

She called Algonquin College a "critical component" of the region's economy, saying when they began putting their proposal together, they knew they needed to tell their story to garner support. In June 2006, an independent research firm concluded the activities of the college and its past graduates accounted for \$154 million in annual economic activity in all of Renfrew County.

"The college provides our region with a competitive advantage over other like-size communities that do not have access to a post-secondary training institute in their backyard," she said. "It is a jewel."

The college offers 16 full-time



Algonquin College introduced its Capital Campaign Committee on Monday who in turn announced a goal of \$2.5 million towards the proposed waterfront campus to be known as Renaissance Square. Committee members are from left: Chris Kelly, Fred Blackstein, Karen Davies, Dean at Algonquin's Pembroke Campus, Mark Huckabone, committee chair, Lisa Edmonds, and Lt. Col. Bill Moore. Missing from photo is C.B. Pappin.



Mark Huckabone, chair, Capital Committee



Karen Davies, Dean, Algonquin's Pembroke Campus

programs, certificates, diplomas, and degrees, apprenticeship training in many disciplines, customized training for companies and a wide variety of continuing education programs.

"We do this in a building that restricts our ability to expand programming," she explained.

Ms. Davies said enrollment in a number of popular courses has been capped over the last several years simply because the college cannot accommodate any more students.

"We deliver some of our apprenticeship training off campus because we do not have the flexible space here to provide that type of training on campus. We want to do more apprenticeship training but we need the facilities to do it.

She said the current campus was landlocked and restricted the college's ability to expand.

"Our building is aging and we don't have some of the student amenities that most students expect these days,"

she noted. "What we do have is an exceptional staff, excellent teaching and a commitment to student success

"Just think what is possible if we can combine these strengths with a new building that will create an additional 300 spaces for full-time students."

December 2007 was a momentous month for the college as the Board of Governors unanimously approved the vision for the new campus. Also in December, a detailed proposal was submitted to the province for financial support for the \$32 million project.

"The City of Pembroke has shown leadership by making available land near the city's waterfront and adjacent to the downtown that would allow the college to build on one of the most picturesque locations in the province. It would truly create a destination campus that would be attractive to local residents and provide the college with more opportunities to attract out of town students."

Numerous businesses, individuals

and municipalities have shown their support for the project already, she said, and the recent commitment by the Student's Association added its stamp of approval.

"It would be an understatement to say there is a lot of momentum to get this project done," she noted.

Ms. Davies said the college has been overwhelmed by the show of support to date but the task remains of securing the approval and funding from the government.

"We asked you here today to tell you that you can make a difference by spreading the word to your councils and constituents," she said. "All levels of government have a chance to help with this project."

Capital Fundraising Campaign Committee Introduced

Ms. Davies introduced the Capital Committee, saying it was a group of people who have stepped forward to help the college achieve its dream of a new campus.

The committee chair is Mark Huckabone, a Pembroke lawyer who is joined by Chris Kelly, another Pembroke lawyer, Lieutenant Colonel Bill Moore, Base Commander at CFB Petawawa, Lisa Edmonds of EGM Insurance, Fred Blackstein, volunteer extraordinaire and C.B. Pappin of Pappin Communications.

Mr. Huckabone said despite growing up across the street from the Pembroke campus, he is amazed to have learned many things about it which he did not previously know.

"I knew nothing about the college itself, the people who worked here, the faculty or the courses that were offered here, and I didn't see myself involved in any fundraising campaign on behalf of the college."

That all changed when former legal associate, Murray Kyte, chair of business, technology and outdoor education, persuaded Mr. Huckabone to become a part-time instructor in the Police Foundations program.

"In the five years that I have been teaching, my eyes have been opened to what is truly a gem right here," he said. "I didn't know how enthusiastic the teachers and faculty were about their programs, how great the relationship was between the teachers and students, and I had no idea there were programs being offered in conjunction with university degrees."

He also had no idea how many young people from Renfrew County were attending colleges out of the county. The enthusiasm for the new project is obvious everywhere, he noted, saying it took very little campaigning to get the committee involved.

"The people here are innovators; they're thinkers; they take advantage of the local surroundings," he explained. "We have programs here that take advantage of the Ottawa River, of AECL, there are programs that tap into one of the county's main resources, the forestry industry, and there's a nursing program here that has 100 years of history."

The college continues to provide quality education despite its limitations, he said, but a new campus can offer so much more.

"But there are real limitations to this building. It is landlocked, offers no prospects for expansion and can be characterized as not a modern building.

"It's my hope we can create a modern building on the shore of the Ottawa River that will stop, to some extent, the exodus of qualified, bright young people from Renfrew County to other community colleges."

He said the obvious economic benefits to the region would only be expanded with a new building.

Mr. Huckabone expects the new campus will have a huge impact on any young student making a decision on their educational future.

"We're asking for your assistance in raising \$2.5 million," he stated. "This is a great project with great people so you'll be hearing from us in short order."

The committee then unveiled a giant billboard that highlighted the project's statement, "Your College, Your Community, Your Future".

Following the formalities, Mr. Huckabone said the committee has been meeting since December and he is hopeful within the next 12 to 15 months the goal can be realized. The goal of \$2.5 million was identified early in the project to show the government the community was behind it.

Impressed With Project

Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MPP John Yakabuski said Algonquin College has done a wonderful job in developing its proposal for a new campus.

"It was an impressive presentation and an impressive team that has been formed to take this project to the next step," he said. "I really believe, and I don't want to jinx any project, but I've seen a lot of projects over my years as both a politician and a businessman, and the launch of this and the community support they already have in place, if that's an indication, I really believe this project will be successful in short order."

"The argument has been made, the work has been done, the project to me has already been sold," he added. "It's just a question of now getting it out to the general public, the business community who is going to benefit, and the institutional community who is going to benefit. The face of Renfrew County changes with this project."