

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 27, 2009

Contact: Cindy Smith
(432) 264-5034; 517-0073

From the Big Spring Herald
April 27, 2009

Staff Writer: Steve Reagan
(432) 263-7331 x 234

SWCID Workforce Center Opens

Workforce training students at Southwest Collegiate Institute for the Deaf will no longer have to hit the road to take classes. Friday ribbon-cutting ceremonies highlighted the opening of the new training center on the SWCID campus which will soon be home to about 50 students taking trade classes.

While some equipment remains to be either moved in or purchased, college officials plan to start holding classes in welding, automobile mechanics and building trades. Both practical labs and classrooms will be housed in the building.

This will prove a welcome break for students who have, until now, had to split time between SWCID, located on the site of the old Webb Air Force Base in west Big Spring and the Howard College campus on the east end of town.

The \$1.15 million building took about six months to complete. Money for the project was appropriated by the Texas Legislature. "We're still buying equipment for the building," said Howard College President Dr. Cheryl Sparks. "But we plan to have it fully operational by the start of the fall semester." Sparks said during June groundbreaking ceremonies for the building that it is the culmination of years of planning by college officials.

"We've been working on this for more than six years," Sparks said at the time. "We first submitted a request with the Legislature three sessions ago. Each session after that, we presented increasingly scaled-down proposals until it was finally approved."

Friday, Sparks said the building was a culmination of a years-long campus improvement project.

"We started our (master plan) project in the early 1990s, based on interest from the Texas Legislature to finance some of these programs," Sparks said. "Since that time, we've been able to renovate some buildings and, in other cases, construct new ones ... the Workforce Training Center was the last building we needed to complete to finish our overall strategic building plan for SWCID."

Officials anticipate at least 50 students will take advantage of the center's services this next semester and Sparks hopes that number is merely the beginning.

"We now have the physical facilities in place; now, we're going to increase our marketing efforts," Sparks said. "One of our goals is that we want to develop an adult basic education program at SWCID. We're working with state and federal authorities to secure funds for that."

-- Steve Reagan