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COD building \$25 million homeland security education center

By Jake Griffin | Daily Herald Staff



An artist's rendering of the College of DuPage's \$25 million Homeland Security Education Center that is expected to be complete in 2011 and house several public safety programs that are now scattered throughout the campus.

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College of DuPage officials have unveiled the first cog of what they envision one day being the preeminent center for homeland security training.

The college's new Homeland Security Education Center comes with a \$25 million price tag, and consolidates the college's Suburban Law Enforcement Academy, fire science, criminal justice, emergency medical technician and forensic science programs into one building. A building that will house everything from state-of-the-art classrooms and fire truck bays to an underground rifle range and a tactical village that recreates a suburban streetscape. Behind the faux storefronts will be classrooms.

"That's sort of a like a Disneyland for cops," said Tom Glaser, vice president of administrative affairs. "The fact that we are making a significant investment like this puts others on notice that we will be leaders in this field."

The education center is part of an overall homeland security complex college officials want to create that will cost between \$175 million and \$225 million. Construction of the 60,000-square-foot education center comes in the first of three phases that will result in the Homeland Security Training Institute. Glaser said the exact timelines and projects for the two other phases haven't been decided because funding hasn't been identified yet.

COD has increased tuition sharply during the past few years, including a large bump that goes into effect this coming summer semester. The increases all have been blamed on state funding shortfalls. No one has hinted that tuition would be increased to cover future construction costs, but the college does charge a premium for classes that are more expensive to offer.

Money for the center is coming from a 2002 voter-approved property tax increase that has allowed refurbishment of some of the campuses older structures and construction of several new buildings. The homeland security center is the last construction project that will benefit from the increased tax revenue, COD officials said.

The nation's security, board President Kathy Wessel noted, "is a field that isn't going to go away. There's no place in the Midwest that's doing this, and we're going to be the leader."

The center will be located near the corner of Fawell Boulevard and Lambert Road on the

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west side of the Glen Ellyn campus. Earthmoving has begun, and Glaser said he expects students will begin using the building in the fall semester of 2011.

The center will replace classrooms and buildings that have long outlived their life expectancy, Glaser said. The Suburban Law Enforcement Academy is housed in a building that was built in the 1960s, he said.

"That was intended to be a temporary building, and no one could have seen it staying up as long as it has," Glaser said.

More than 7,500 students each year participate in the programs that will be housed in the new building, college officials reported.

The building upgrade is necessitated by the changing complexities of public safety training, said Theodore Darden, COD's criminal justice program coordinator.

"We have envisioned a curriculum that prepares our students and community for 21st century emergencies," he said. "These are disasters that are either natural or man-made. There's nothing like this offered anywhere as far as we know in the Midwest, and the Chicago area is the most populated point in the region, so it's a good fit."

Darden said the proposed institute will allow for a more interactive and hands-on approach to public safety training that is necessary today. He believes the institute proposal is a good fit for DuPage County because residents put a premium on public safety.

"They realize good public safety training is important and they have shown that through the politicians they have supported," Darden said.

In addition to teaching, officials expect law enforcement agencies from all over will want to utilize the facilities for training and seminars. For instance, Glaser said Transportation Security Administration agents could be trained at COD eventually because of its proximity to both O'Hare and Midway airports.

Another unique feature of the project includes a functional emergency command center. Students will use the facility for training. But in the event of an actual crisis, a municipality, county or agency could use the facility to coordinate response to an emergency situation, Glaser said.

"We're putting a stake in the ground to say we'll have a curriculum unlike anything available elsewhere," he said.



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