

New NCI classrooms unveiled

Wednesday, August 19, 2009

By MICKEY POWELL - Bulletin Staff Writer

With three buildings on different streets uptown, the New College Institute (NCI) essentially has made Martinsville's central business district its campus, according to Associate Director Leanna Blevins.

But "our campus extends throughout various parts of the commonwealth, and it is growing each semester," Blevins said Tuesday afternoon during an open house for NCI's newly renovated classrooms in Jefferson Plaza.

Through videoconferencing technology, NCI broadcasts live, interactive courses to institutions of higher education statewide in places such as Danville, Norfolk and Galax, according to Blevins.

"This is important," she said, because "just as we are fulfilling educational needs of students in our home community, we are also finding that we can help to do so in those other regions."

NCI, a state-supported institute that opened in 2006, enables students to take third- and fourth-year classes locally to earn bachelor's and master's degrees conferred by universities throughout Virginia.

The State Council for Higher Education in Virginia is expected to decide in the 2012-13 academic year whether NCI should stay in its current form or evolve into either a stand-alone university or branch campus of an existing university.

NCI has administrative offices in a building on Bridge Street and a classroom building on Jones Street uptown. After also using one floor of Jefferson Plaza on East Church Street during the past school year, the institute in April signed an agreement to lease two additional floors in the plaza, which it will share with the Piedmont Regional Governor's School.

The governor's school is moving from the former South Martinsville Elementary School on Memorial Boulevard.

Charles Toothman, NCI's chief fiscal and administrative officer, recalled that since it was built in the early 20th century, Jefferson Plaza has been used for various purposes, including a hotel, department store and business school.

Since opening three years ago, NCI has "put back to use about 30,000 square feet of space" uptown, said Executive Director Barry Dorsey.

The Jefferson Plaza space recently was remodeled, and more than \$600,000 in educational equipment, including videoconferencing systems, was installed, Dorsey said.

"NCI has built a high-quality, high-tech academic community with amenities that are second to none," Blevins said.

Dorsey added that the institute "has become an economic engine that is ... helping to revitalize and transform



Charles Toothman, fiscal and human resources manager at the New College Institute, and Suellyn Danter, media specialist at NCI and Patrick Henry Community College, demonstrate a live feed between PHCC (screen at left) and their room in the Jefferson Plaza. (Bulletin photos by Mike Wray)

[More Photos](#)

uptown Martinsville.”

Enrollment at NCI rose from 53 in its first year to 347 during the past year, and officials expect it to exceed 400 by the end of 2009-10. Already, 86 students have completed degrees through the institute, Dorsey said.

His remarks drew applause from approximately 100 people who attended the open house and toured the new classrooms.

Dorsey said he thinks NCI currently has enough space to meet its needs — including expected growth — during the next three years. But if it continues to grow as it has during the past three years, “certainly we’ll need additional space thereafter,” he said.