

*Paxton Record: Tom Bennett column, Feb 2011*

Parkland College will once again respond to the demand for more skilled technicians within the construction, automotive, and related industries of our district. College officials and area industry leaders will break ground for its new Applied Technology Center (ATC) on Monday, March 7, with a ceremony at the Parkland Gym at noon.

The Parkland ATC will provide about 64,000 sq. ft. of greatly needed classroom and workshop space immediately north of the Tony Noel Agricultural Technology Applications Center, on the campus's west side. It will house programs from the school's ever-expanding Engineering Science and Technologies department, namely, the comprehensive Automotive, Ford ASSET, Collision Repair, Industrial Technology, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC), and Welding programs.

Faced with similar demand for more technicians within the diesel power technology industry, and through the strong support of area diesel industry leaders, Parkland was able to finish construction last fall on a 14,000 sq. ft addition to the Tony Noel center, to house and expand its Diesel Technology course offerings. The two facilities are part of a two-phase Master Plan for campus construction, renovation, and remodeling that was begun in 2009.

Years of insufficient on-campus classroom space have hindered Engineering Science and Technologies from keeping pace with increasing enrollments, requiring waiting lists for potential students. Some enrollments have nearly doubled over the past decade; between FY 2003 and 2007, for example, Welding enrollments grew by 38.6%; Ford ASSET increased 52.9%; and Auto Collision Repair enrollments grew by 26.1%. Classes have been housed in temporary on-campus structures or in leased off-campus facilities to try and accommodate current increases. These classrooms often are not located near each other or other technical programs, reducing the educational benefits to students. Students in EST's off-campus courses also do not have easy access to general education classes or valuable student services such as advising and career planning, in the way that on-campus students do. Such reduced access is a barrier to Parkland's mission of providing quality education and services for all our students.

The new ATC, partially funded by the State of Illinois through the Capital Development Board, will be built to LEED "Gold" certification standards to meet the highest green building and performance measures. It should be ready for its first classes in spring 2012.

The youth in our counties want to acquire the skills to meet industry demand, and Parkland College continues to work hard to help them gain those workforce skills, improving the local economy in the process. Please join us Monday to celebrate this move forward.