

BTC project hinges on funds

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Guardedly optimistic.

That's what Blackhawk Technical College President Thomas Eckert said about starting the college's plan to build an advanced manufacturing center in the city of Beloit in spring 2013.

The college hoped to start the project, located at the Ironworks Building on Third Street in downtown Beloit, later this year. Not enough money has been raised for the renovations, however. The property is currently owned by Hendricks Commercial Properties.

The college needs to raise \$10 million to \$12 million for the 130,000 square foot remodel.

He said if the project can get under way by the spring, then he believes it can be finished and opened by spring 2014.

Eckert said with the restrictions in the budget the school wouldn't be able to afford the lease along with the renovation costs at the same time.

Normally in a lease, the owner of the property will pay for the renovations and then add the costs over a period of time onto the monthly lease payment, Eckert said. Blackhawk's budget didn't allow for that, so the school tried to raise the money to pay for the renovations up front.

Eckert said he will meet with Hendricks Commercial Properties to determine a plan to raise the money needed.

Once finished the building will feature a variety of trade jobs including welding, industrial mechanics and electro-mechanic technician programs.

Eckert said these types of classes at the central campus between Beloit and Janesville fill up rather quickly and have longer waiting lists to get in.

"This is an enterprise idea if we can get more space and create an ideal facility then we can lower our waiting lists," he said. "Our ultimate goal is to have a steady flow of trained students ready to work."

Eckert said there is a shortage of workers who are trained for trade jobs, such as welding, and with the new facility hopefully that will curb some of the need.

"It really comes down fundamentally to a space issue," he said. "We have the equipment, we have the trained staff and if we get more space we will be able to train more staff and train more students."

The Hendricks group came to Eckert with the idea of renovating the old Ironworks complex after the school thought about expanding its manufacturing classes.

The school will add a third welding section this fall and will have classes from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

“If it’s at all possible and we can somehow raise the money, then we will have a model for manufacture training that will serve Rock and Green counties very well,” he said.

Eckert said the college will know more after the meeting with Hendricks officials. He added that finding the funding for the renovations isn’t only up to Hendricks and the college.

“We will need a number of donors to make it happen,” he said.

