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CF cuts the ribbon at new campus in Levy County



Dignitaries cut the ribbon Friday (Aug. 11) at the ceremony to dedicate the new Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus of the College of Central Florida. Fred Roberts Jr., chairman of the CF Foundation (left) and CF District Board Chairman Bill Edgar handle ribbon-cutting duties. Pictured (from left) are Dr. Rayne Giddis, provost of the new campus; dairy farmer and donor Ron St. John; CF President Dr. James Henningsen; land donor Loy Anne Mann; Roberts; Edgar; State Rep. Charlie Stone (R-Ocala, Dist. 22) who successfully lobbied for state funding to build the college; Ron Ewers, district board of trustees member; Joyce Brancato, Levy County representative on district board of trustees; District Board of Trustees Vice Chairman Rusty Branson; Don Taylor of the district board of trustees; and Vernon Lawter, vice president of regional campuses.

Story and Photos

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LEVY COUNTY -- The College of Central Florida unveiled the campus of the Jack Wilkinson Levy Center north of Chiefland on Friday (Aug. 11).

The main structure is a two-story set of classrooms, labs, meeting rooms, a workout room and administrative offices that has been 13 years in the making. There appears to be ample parking. Vending machines are the main source for food and drink currently.

Constructed with community donations totaling \$3.5 million and another \$11.5 million in state funding, this new CF campus is the first permanent structure for the college in Levy County.

The ribbon-cutting took place at the front entrance of the main building, with the ribbon and participants being framed by colonial style columns.

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(from left) Ron St. John, a donor to the college and local dairyman, Sheriff Bobby McCallum, Stewart Wasson and Levy County Property Appraiser Osborn Barker (walking behind them) take a tour of the new college campus.



The Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus won the hearts of many with its stylish architecture

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Dr. James Henningsen, president of the College of Central Florida addresses the assembled guests and dignitaries from the podium in the conference center of the new campus.



The executive meeting room offers ample space for meetings. The college meeting room facilities are open to all people for use. Just contact CF for more information about the potential to uses a meeting room.

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The front entrance of the campus administrative and classroom building is framed by tall columns dwarfing visitors entering for the first time.



College officials expressed pride in the science laboratory -- complete with drop-down screens.

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The student lounge is roomy with large windows.



An exercise room is available for students to utilize

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The entire campus overlooks a small forest along U.S. Highway 19, north of Chiefland south of the City of Fanning Springs.

The campus is named in honor of the late Jack Wilkinson, a former Chiefland High School math teacher and Chiefland farmer who gave the college \$2.5 million as a gift from his personal fortune.

Wilkinson lived in a modest residence along U.S. Alt. 27, and few individuals would have surmised that he was a relatively wealthy man, until after he had presented the breathtaking gift to CF.

When asked why he gave CF the gift, Wilkinson said he had dedicated his life to teaching children, and this present was in keeping with his life's work as an educator.

The CF District Board of Trustees voted to name the campus in Wilkinson's honor in 2009.

Former CF Trustee Loy Ann Mann and her husband, the late Dr. Jack Mann, a Chiefland chiropractor, had donated 15.3 acres of undeveloped land for the college site in 2006.

This couple started the series of other actions resulting in the campus coming to fruition this year.

Additional property was purchased by the college in 2007.

The new building itself is named in honor of the family of Ron and Marcia St. John, who donated land to CF that was sold to generate additional cash for constructing the classroom and administrative building.

The building is named the St. John Educational Center.

Drummond Community Bank and its founder Luther Drummond, president and CEO, donated for construction of the college as did countless other donors.

"This wouldn't have happened without community support," said Dr. James Henningsen, CF president.

The building looks classy.

"The facility will be important to dual enrollment students who will be impressed with the seriousness of college. There will be no mistaking this for a high school," said Warren Parkin, a visitor to the dedication.

The Levy campus of CF has been housed since 1993 in the Providence Mall Shopping Center across U.S. 19 from Chiefland High School. The lease on the mall space expires on Aug. 31.

Before the 1993 opening in what is also called the Save-A-Lot shopping center, the campus was housed at the Bronson center east of Bronson since 1982.

Dr. Rayanne Giddis, provost of the Levy Campus, said 786 students had been enrolled at the Levy Campus in Chiefland, but 200 new students have been added.

While the campus won't officially open for classes until the third week of August, students can register now at the new campus during weekday business hours.

The college also has online classes.

Bob Hastings, who was the Levy County superintendent of schools when the new building began to receive community donations and state funding, said he was very impressed by the new campus.

He and Carol Sullivan, also a visitor at Friday's dedication were members of the CF board when the vote was taken to move forward with a permanent campus. Sullivan said either Hastings or she made the motion and one of them seconded it.

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“I’m telling you this turned out to be so nice,” Hastings said. “I think this will add a lot to Levy County. The difference between the storefront center in Chiefland and this is amazing. When you come here, you know you’re in college.”

John Adams, landscape architect for the campus, said CF committed to preserving as many trees as possible. He believes the trees make the campus fit well with its surroundings.

“I think it says a lot about fitting the campus in instead of just plotting it in,” Adams said. “The college had this commitment to save these trees across the front. When you drive past on U.S. 19 you are looking through trees at the college.”

The rear of the college connects with more forest and the Nature Coast State Trail, a walking and bicycling trail stretching from south Chiefland through Fanning Springs and across the Suwannee River before terminating in Cross City..