

OCC programs new robotics training courses

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

A robot cell has a new home on the Auburn Hills Campus of Oakland Community College. It is the first installment of a gift that will help OCC transform the face of American manufacturing.

"These are the most advanced robotic systems on the market. This is as good as it gets," said Dr. Richard Saunders, president of the Auburn Hills Campus, where most of OCC's technical programs are located.

"It's part of an agreement with Fanuc Robotics. We supply the training for the people who buy

their products, as well as for our students. In return we have something we can ill afford to purchase.

Some 600 students, OCC enrollees and employees of firms in Oakland County, are being trained.

"With this new lab, in terms of robotics instruction, it's safe to say nobody has this kind of instrumentation in the state," Saunders added.

Fanuc, headquartered on Hamlin Road near the Auburn Hills Campus, is giving OCC the first installment of a five-part gift, worth \$520,000, of robotic cells. "Each cell is devoted to a dif-

ferent type of operation — materials handling, painting, assembly, and so on," Saunders said. "With them comes PLC for programmable logic controllers. They tell the robots which way to swing. The primary thing we teach is how to program them."

The deal was germinated a year ago when Saunders read an article by Eric Mittelstadt, CEO of Fanuc, the largest manufacturer of robots in the United States, though Fanuc is Tokyo-based. "He wrote an article about underutilization of robots in the U.S. Americans do about 10 percent of their manufacturing with

robots; the rest of the world, 60 percent.

"I called him up and invited him to breakfast. Over six months, we worked out an agreement, a way to introduce robotics to a lot more manufacturers," Saunders recalled.

For traditional OCC students, there's a two-year associate in applied sciences degree with a major in robotics. In addition, many companies send in employees from all over the country, putting them up in area hotels, for intensive training at OCC. "Doug Sinclair teaches most of the industry people. Coincidentally, Sinclair once worked for

Fanuc," Saunders said. Other instructors are hired part-time from local firms.

Manufacturing with robots fits in neatly with OCC's new "virtual reality" lab. Virtual reality is a three-dimensional, computer-generated environment which optically surrounds the designer, who is immersed into the computer program rather than merely using it.

In a virtual reality lab, one can design and test a product without building a solid prototype. The significance, said Saunders: "What used to take six weeks to do now takes six hours. It's rapid

prototyping — how fast can we get an idea to market."

He noted that Boeing built its 777 aircraft by virtual reality without wind tunnel tests. Virtual reality labs can also do crash tests and wear-and-tear tests. "You don't have to make anything (to test). You do it all with mathematical models," he said.

OCC hosted a virtual reality conference on the Auburn Hills Campus in May. Speakers included the general manager of Technomatix Inc., the chief of the Army's Tank Automotive Command, a General Electric Aircraft engineer.

2nd coffeehouse brews downtown

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Throw another pot on the stove. A second coffeehouse is opening in downtown Farmington.

Cafe Gourmet will start serving customers in two to three weeks, according to the owner. The new coffeehouse is in the Downtown Center, off Farmington and Grand River.

Like the name implies, gourmet coffee drinks such as espresso and cappuccino will be the specialty. Ice cream, dessert, rotisserie chicken and corned beef are also on the menu, owner Sam Kashat said.

Cafe Gourmet joins the Grand Cafe, and Mrs. Doris Lovill's Tea Coney, specializing in warm beverages. Other establishments have followed suit such as Farmington Bakery, which has added gourmet coffee for carry out.

One coffeehouse too many is not a worry, though.

"(That's) fine," said Kashat, who is a Farmington Hills resident. "In Royal Oak, every block there is one. In Birmingham, every block there is one."

City officials won't mind being lumped with those Oakland County communities, especially if more shoppers pour through.

"I wish them all the luck," said Grand Cafe manager Tom Corey. "We have a lot of restaurants and cafes in downtown Farmington."

'The better downtown does, the better we all do.'

Tom Corey
Grand Cafe manager

The better downtown does, the better we all do.

Added tea room owner Doris Lovill: "I'm not concerned. I think a tea room is a little different. . . it's a different clientele.

"Besides competition is very good. It keeps us all on our toes."

Cafe Gourmet is Kashat's first coffeehouse. He opened a deli-tesse on 12 Mile and Southfield, but closed it after six months.

"The city didn't allow me enough seating," Kashat said.

Kashat has been involved in the convenience store business. His family owns the Garden Party Store in Livonia and Keg & Wine in Redford Township. Cafe Gourmet opens at the former location for the Hollywood Grill, which closed more than a year ago.

A cafe there is a natural, said Kinco Realty's Nadine Rafferty. "It adds something totally different," Rafferty said. "We have Dagwood's Deli . . . We don't have a restaurant to draw people to that area (south side of the downtown center)."

Bye-bye beard



ANNE HEALEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Close shave: Warner Middle School physical education teacher Tom Negoshian gets a trim from eighth-grader Shelby Berger at a shave off Dec. 22 to benefit the Salvation Army. Teachers agreed to the scissor treatment if students donated more than 300 bags of clothing and household items to the Salvation Army. Warner students also raised \$165.43 in red kettle contributions.

Opinion mixed on bond issue

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Despite unanimous backing from the school board and an enthusiastic study and show of support from a citizens committee, public opinion remains mixed on the bond issue proposal in the Walled Lake Consolidated School District.

Those opinions were expressed either during or after Tuesday's special meeting, where the board voted 7-0 to call the second bond issue of 1994-95.

A two-part ballot proposal, totaling \$116 million, is scheduled to be decided on Saturday, Feb. 4. Voters can approve or reject one or both questions.

Parents Rob Percha and Marcy Zeman strongly believe it is imperative that the split-ballot proposal be approved. That is, if the high quality of education is not to be jeopardized.

"I think the bond issue is needed," Percha said. "For so many people who come here, (there is only) one thing they don't like about the whole thing and, unfortunately, that one no vote for a small part of the bond is enough to bring it down."

According to Zeman, she has had a "For Sale" sign sitting in

WALLED LAKE SCHOOLS

the garage of her Farmington Hills home since the Sept. 27 bond issue was defeated. She said she hopes the third time (voters also rejected an October 1993 bond issue) is the charm — otherwise she might decide to take the sign out of her garage and put it in front of her house.

"I don't see how this community can not vote for it," Zeman said. ". . . I cannot believe this is a community that doesn't support their children's education."

Another parent, Michele Peltier, adamantly opposes the bond issue in its current form and wants administrators to cut more financial fat out of the package. Among items on her list of cuts: fancy clock towers, such as the one at Clifford Smart Middle School, and classroom carpeting.

"I understand it makes classes quieter to have carpeting," Peltier said, "but the last I knew, kids are sitting down when they're learning."

After the meeting, she amplified her earlier comments. "I'm not against one little thing. I'm against all of it. It was defeated twice and they're not changing it.

It's the same thing." Meanwhile, Michael McDonald, mayor of the city of Wixom, openly wonders what the impact of holding a mid-winter Saturday election will be, particularly on those retirees who are out of the state and not in voting precincts on Feb. 4.

"I'll support Part A," said McDonald about the \$90.55 million proposition geared at providing new classroom space and district-wide technology. "But this is a direct try at getting the lowest possible voter turnout they possibly can . . . a lot of people are going to be denied the opportunity to vote."

Part B of the bond issue, for \$25.45 million, is for the renovation of some older school buildings and the construction of pools and gymnasiums — the latter viewed as non-essentials by some residents.

School board president David Flammer denied the Saturday election is an attempt to keep the voter turnout low — or, more specifically, to keep the "no" vote home.

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Focus from page 1A

and bartended, featured a live band.

Free 3-cent stamps

Mall Boxes Etc. wants to spread the word: It's giving away 3-cent stamps. The cost of mailing a letter is going up 3 cents. Come Jan. 1, it'll cost 52 cents to post a one-ounce, first-class letter. People will need lots of 3-cent stamps to add to the 29-centers they've already bought. Mail Boxes Etc., a franchise specializing in postal and other communication services with locations in Farmington Hills and Walled Lake, will be giving away 3-cent stamps through January.

No purchase is necessary, but there is a limit of 10 free stamps per customer. Mail Boxes Etc. owner Mike Haas adds that customers won't have to stand in line for stamps or other services the business offers. "Our motto is: 'No lines, no waiting, no kidding,'" Haas said.

Local Mail Boxes Etc. are at 12 Mile and Farmington roads in Farmington Hills, and at 14 Mile and Haggerty roads in Walled Lake. For more information, call Haas at 469-1011.

Ceremony on cable

Subscribers to MetroVision, which provides cable television to the Farmington area, will be able to view live coverage of the 1995 Michigan gubernatorial ceremonial. The 2 1/2-hour program will start at 10:30 a.m. Monday, Jan. 2, on PASS, Channel 43 on the MetroVision system. Interviews with Gov. John Engler, Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfeld and other celebrities will be featured.

Items for Farmington Focus may be mailed to the Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington 48335, faxed to 477-9723 or dropped off at the newspaper office.