

10,000 students expected at WSU's new Hills location

By BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

If you build it, they will come. Dean Robert Carter of Wayne State University's College of Lifelong Learning said that the university, long a part of Detroit's educational establishment, must continue to reach out to outlying areas, like Farmington Hills and the rest of Oakland County.

To that end, WSU's Oakland Center, now under construction on 12 Mile Road, will open to an estimated 10,000 Wayne students, both graduate and undergraduate.

Carter said the center will be one of three regional centers planned by the university to replace smaller centers. The Oakland Center replaces locations in Birmingham and Southfield; the others are the University Center in Macomb and the Wayne Center planned for one of two locations in Detroit. Those three will eventually replace eight locations.

"We still do things on site, like at the Pontiac GM plant," he

said. "But we want more centralized locations where people can attend classes towards degrees."

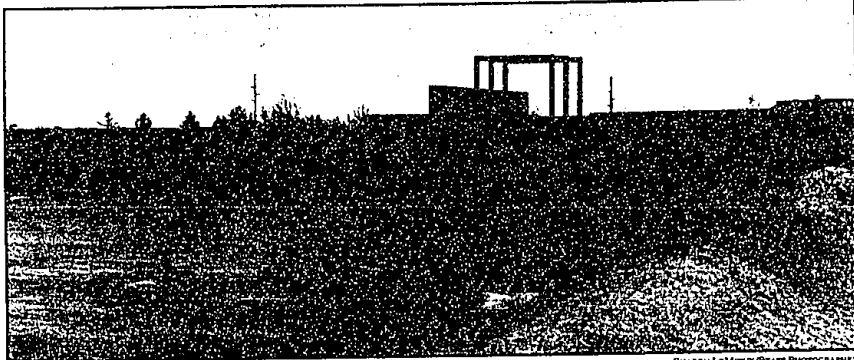
The new Oakland Center, which is on property formerly housing Texas Instruments, will house 75 classrooms, three computer labs and other state-of-the-art educational features, Carter said. It will also have a theater/auditorium/large classroom combination.

"This will be one of the showpieces in the nation for education," he said.

The renovation will be more than a facelift. The building, which had 51,000 square feet before the renovation, will be almost double the capacity.

An open house is scheduled for Aug. 13 with classes to begin in September.

The center will offer classes in liberal arts, business and other areas, and will offer some advanced courses, such as classes in the master of business administration program, Carter said.



SHARON LEMIEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A new WSU: Wayne State University's Oakland Center, which will replace three WSU facilities, is being constructed on 12 Mile in Farmington Hills.

Polls show SMART millage winning in Oakland County

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

With crucial millage elections in Macomb and Wayne counties less than a week away, SMART officials say they are confident their request for additional operating revenue will be successful — largely on the strength of polling in Oakland County.

"I wish Oakland County was voting first," Michael E. Duggan, interim general manager of SMART, the area transit system, said Tuesday. "If Oakland voted first (and supported the SMART millage), it might influence voters in Macomb and Wayne counties."

Voters in Macomb and Wayne counties will vote Tuesday on the SMART millage proposal that calls for raising property taxes by one-third of a mill to provide operating funds. Oakland will vote on the proposal two weeks later on June 6.

"I'm not surprised the millage proposal might pass in Oakland," said county commissioner Sue Ann Douglas, R-Rochester. "But it's not because of wide spread support, it's because so many communities have opted out (or refused to take part in the election)."

Even so, Douglas said she remains skeptical of SMART and its management. "Three years from now SMART will again be asking voters for money to bail it out of a financial crisis."

Other critics, including county commissioner Shelley Goodman Taub, R-Bloomfield Hills, are skeptical of predictions the SMART millage proposal will pass.

Duggan said a coalition of the elderly, the handicapped, labor and businesses have been calling 4,000 or 5,000 voters every day. "I get the results every morning," he said. "They show 65 percent (of those responding) in Oakland supporting the millage proposal. In Wayne we have about 60 percent in favor and in Macomb it's about 57 percent."

Duggan agreed that a strong showing in Oakland is largely a result of communities that might have voted against the millage deciding to opt out — or not take part in the election — thereby giving other communities more clout.

Following a meeting of the SMART board of directors Tuesday, chair Matthew M. Wirgau, one of two Oakland representatives, said he "is pleased about the upcoming elections."

"Finally there's public discussion about policy on public transportation," Wirgau said. "In the past, nobody talked about public transportation. Now, because of the financial crisis, people are having to face the issue and decide what they want to do."

That discussion prompts people to realize the importance of public transportation, said Wirgau, whose career includes five years with the U.S. Department of Transportation and almost three years with the Federal Transit Administration.

"I can understand how people think SMART is inefficient," he said, referring to local and frequent criticism of the system. "But voters have to decide if they want to let the system die (by rejecting the millage), or if they want to provide the money, and then improve the system."

Wirgau said he also thinks the

SMART workers show support

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Nicole Ruff, a SMART bus driver, can't understand the criticism aimed at the transit system and its employees.

"We work very hard," said Ruff, a Southfield resident. "And SMART is a valuable asset to the community."

Ruff and about 400 other SMART employees are working without pay as voters in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties prepare to decide a millage proposal that is vital to the future of mass transit in southeast Michigan.

Macomb and Wayne will vote Tuesday. Oakland will go to the polls two weeks later on June 6.

"We got a partial check last week," said June West, SMART marketing director. "We don't know when there'll be another check."

West, who also lives in Southfield, said employees will likely get paid once the millage proposal is approved, or when federal funds become available later this year.

But continuing to work is the employees' way of showing cooperation, said West, "to

show we care. Sure our jobs are at stake, but a lot of people depend on SMART."

Ruff, who usually drives a line haul (or long haul) bus along Woodward Avenue, said she and other workers are occasionally miffed by criticism of SMART and its workers. "But I think that criticism comes from people who have never been on a bus along Woodward. If they had, they'd know how much people rely on SMART."

SMART critics, who include nearly half of Oakland County's commissioners, insist the transit system is mismanaged and financially irresponsible.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, who has endorsed the SMART millage, said he is "not particularly happy with SMART. We (Oakland) inherited the transit system and there are some studies that show it's competitive with other systems."

"I want voters to give us three years," he said. "We'll make some changes to make the system more efficient. After that, voters will be happy to renew the millage."

millage will pass in all three counties.

"When that happens, a lot of communities that opted out of the vote (also ending line haul and short run service) will want to get back into the system," he predicted.

Also at the Tuesday SMART meeting, the board voted to continue so-called municipal credits — or funds — to communities that opted out of the vote.

Municipal credits are money from gasoline taxes collected by the state and related to SMART for distribution to local communities for mass transit. Virtually every community gets municipal credits — \$48,000 for West Bloomfield, for example, and almost \$60,000 for the Rochester

area — to use for van and bus transit.

SMART initially said it would likely withhold municipal credits from communities that opt out of the election. SMART has already ended line haul and short run bus services to communities that decided to not take part in the election.

"But SMART will continue to provide municipal credits," said Wirgau, "withholding it would be unfair."

Communities that lost those credits thought it was unfair, too. Some of them, including West Bloomfield and Bloomfield Township, threatened to file suit to assure they would continue to get their share of the gasoline tax rebate to use for transportation in their own communities.

Canton police to hold auction

By JOANNE MALIBZEWski
STAFF WRITER

If you're interested in a bicycle, tools, holiday ornaments, car hood ornaments, hub caps, jewelry or any other odds and ends, a police and court public auction May 24 is for you.

"Most of it was found property or it was seized," said Brenda Luke, Canton police property clerk. "With the bikes, there are parts and some of them older. The better ones we gave to charity."

The auction is scheduled for 10 a.m. at the Canton Department of Public Works, 4847 S. Sheldon Road. It is a joint effort of the Canton Police Department, Canton administration, Northville

Township Police, city of Northville Police and the 35th District Court.

"Everyone has their own list," Luke said, referring to each of the participating departments and the court. A list of items from the Canton police is available at the front desk of the department on Canton Center Road.

The DPW will open at 9 a.m. for interested participants to check out the items offered by the police departments and the court. Participants must register to bid during the auction.

While the auction will continue until about 3 p.m., potential bidders must be at the DPW and register between 9 and 10 a.m., Luke said.

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