

# New bond rating to save county funds

Everyone needs to borrow money now and then, apparently even wealthy Oakland County government. And the cost of borrowing that money just got less.

Wall Street's two most prestigious bond rating firms have informed county Treasurer C. Hugh Dohany that Oakland's bond ratings are being raised, which officials say is a reflection of the county's strong financial condition.

"I'm delighted because the upgrade will save Oakland County millions of dollars in future borrowing costs," said Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson. "I want to also serve notice here and now that we will return to New York next year seeking another increase in our bond rating."

Standard & Poor's elevated Oakland County's bond rating from "AA" to "AA+", while Moody's Investors Service increased it to "Aa3" from "Aa1". Both ratings are just one category below "AAA", which is the highest bond rating possible.

The improved bond rating will have an immediate impact

on the sale of bonds for the Robert Reid Drain Project in Bloomfield Township. This 20-year, \$5.5 million bond issue alone will end up costing the county about \$170,000 less in borrowing costs because of the higher bond ratings. With the county expected to sell nearly \$100 million in bonds over the next two years, the higher bond ratings could translate into millions of dollars worth of savings to the county.

The two bond rating firms cited the county's positive economic environment, good management practices, low debt burden and diversified job base as reasons for the upgrade in the bond ratings.

In March, Patterson led a delegation of county officials to New York to lobby Standard & Poor's and Moody's for a higher bond rating. At the time, Patterson said he felt the county deserved an upgrade because of its solid financial condition, which included less dependency on the auto industry, the reduction in long-term debt, and a \$25 million savings in the area of employee benefit costs by the year 2000.

# Next step for OU — interactive learning

New, souped-up Oakland University classrooms are virtual spaceships that may transport students anywhere.

"Oakland University infuses new information technologies into the classroom and laboratories to develop job skills needed for the 21st century," OU President Gary D. Russi said.

OU now has 10 classrooms that have a combination of VCRs, televisions and video/data projection systems. Instructors during class may access the World Wide Web using a laptop or through a personal computer, then what is on the computer screen may be shown on the TVs or projected onto a movie-type screen.

"Say the instructor accesses a weather site," said George Preisinger, manager, Instructional Technology Center. "The class would have up-to-the-

minute weather information."

Instructors during class may also access other computers on the Internet, from Tokyo to Toledo. The technology provides more classroom teaching tools — students benefit from the vast array of information and engaging capabilities. With the new equipment, lessons may be much more compelling than traditional lectures.

The new classroom also makes it easier for instructors to schedule services: using home or office computers, they can browse the university's video catalog, then schedule videos to play in classrooms automatically, Preisinger said.

Classroom systems started operating last October.

Kieran Mathieson, associate professor, Management Information Systems, School of Business Administration, said he accesses a Web site in class when he

needs to show students something about.

"All of my notes, assignments, examples and schedules are on the Web," Mathieson said. "Students also use an on-line discussion forum to ask questions outside of class, so they don't need to physically find me. Everyone in the class sees the questions and my answers, so students learn answers to questions they didn't think to ask. It works well."

Kevin Early assistant professor, Sociology and Anthropology, College of Arts and Sciences, likes the convenience of the new electronic equipment. "It's a breath of fresh air," he said.

Early recently scheduled a video to play from a remote location. "That's the whole beauty of the technology," he said.

Gregory Patterson, assistant professor, Dance, Music, Theatre

and Dance, CAS, said, "I really like the accessibility it's creating for the class." He shows documentaries in his Dance History and Appreciation course.

The next step is interactive distance learning, Preisinger said, where students and instructors in different classrooms learn from each other.

Oakland University is a comprehensive state-supported institution of higher education located in suburban Oakland County, Michigan. OU offers undergraduate programs in 71 areas and graduate programs in 46 areas. Dedicated to preparing learners for the 21st-century workplace, the university is organized into the College of Arts and Sciences and the schools of Business Administration, Education and Human Services, Engineering and Computer Science, Health Sciences, and Nursing.

# OCC construction causes closures

Around Oakland Community College:

## Price of progress

Visitors to OCC campuses can expect some moving delays due to construction and renovations. Items:

■ The athletic building and pool on the Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills will be closed until about Oct. 1 for building renovations.

■ Oakland Drive between Farmington and Orchard Lake roads on the Orchard Ridge Campus will be closed through September as parking lots are resurfaced.

■ Foot traffic will be obstructed at the Royal Oak Campus beginning in June as a new parking ramp is constructed at Washington and Lincoln streets.

## Costs rising

A robust economy has a bad side effect: rising construction prices. "There are fewer bidders," Patrick Kopytek, director of physical facilities, told the board May 19.

The board granted authority to its construction manager, George W. Auch Co. of Pontiac, to enter into design and construction contracts for these projects:

■ Mechanical renovations of the physical education (H Building) on the Orchard Ridge Campus. Revised budget estimate is \$1.133 million compared to last October's estimate of \$913,000. Heating and cooling equipment are at the end of expected service life and "near failure," said Kopytek. Energy efficiencies are expected with new equipment.

■ General renovations of H building. Revised estimate is \$710,500 versus the earlier estimate of \$664,000. Locker rooms

will get 25 percent more space; the women's home team will get a locker room and meeting space.

Kopytek said rebidding is unlikely to result in lower bids but instead will result in delays. Altogether, 106 projects have been approved by the college board at a total price tag of more than \$26 million \$200,000 below estimates, despite the higher-than-anticipated costs on these projects.

## Maintenance work

The board granted the Auch company authority to enter into design and construction contracts on these maintenance projects:

■ Auburn Hills Campus Parking Lot F — \$632,800. Goals: improve handicapped parking and traffic flow.

■ Auburn Hills G Building roof replacement — \$171,000. Old roof is beyond serviceable life. Moisture has penetrated existing polyurethane coating.

■ Highland Lakes Campus, chemical lab casework in Levinson Hall — \$55,300. A fume hood is deteriorated beyond repair. Counter tops and piping will be improved.

## Equipment added

The board approved: ■ Leasing new storage disks for the main college computer at a three-year cost of \$156,420 from Cornerstone Systems Inc. of Denver. A disk failure last December caused significant "down time" during final exams.

■ Purchasing new, multimedia equipment for mathematics at the Royal Oak Campus — a \$29,120 contract for low bidder Midwest Visual of Troy. Four Sharp projectors, four Canon visualizers and four white wall screens will be installed.

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# Safety group honored

The Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County (TIA) has been honored by the Michigan State Safety Commission for its outstanding contributions to traffic safety in Michigan for the past 31 years.

The TIA provides more than 60 local police agencies and communities in Oakland County with accurate traffic crash data and engineering services. The association distributes annual reports ranking intersections and links by number of crashes, severity and crash rate to each community. The TIA uses this data to work with communities to solve traffic problems. They also have established an alcohol enforcement program which has served as a national model. The TIA sponsors school safety belt and anti-drunk-driving programs on a regular basis with Oakland County Schools.

"The Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County has spent the past 30 years dedicated to improving traffic conditions in their community," stated Michigan State Police Director Col. Michael R. Robinson, chair of the Michigan State Safety Commission. "Their dedication has greatly impacted the safety of drivers in the communities in Oakland County."