

MTSU, Motlow announce Shelbyville project

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By John I. Carney



Sidney McPhee,
President of Middle
Tennessee State
University
(MTSU photo)

The long-anticipated Middle Tennessee State University satellite campus in Shelbyville announced on Monday that it is now scheduling appointments with potential students -- and it is now being presented as a joint venture of MTSU and Motlow State Community College.

The facility, located in the Medical Arts Building on Dover Street, is called Middle Tennessee Education Center, not "MTSU South," the informal name (with matching web site address) which had been used during planning stages. It will include classrooms as well as administrative and advising offices for both MTSU and Motlow.

County Mayor Eugene Ray confirmed this morning that Molly Culbreath, the MTSU coordinator for the facility, is now onsite and in her second week at the facility. He said Motlow personnel will eventually join the facility as well and that classes were scheduled to begin this fall.

"I'm very pleased at the progress we are making," Ray told the Times-Gazette this morning.

The facility will offer Master of Education courses as a pilot program. Additional programs will be added as they are developed and resources made available.

"MTSU is excited about the opening of the Middle Tennessee Education Center, which will help address the educational needs of the citizens in this region," said Sidney A. McPhee, president of MTSU. "The establishment of this center is consistent with the mission of the University to make education more accessible, and we are proud to partner with Motlow State Community College in this very important endeavor.

"Additionally, we are grateful to Mayor Eugene Ray and Bedford County officials for their foresight and help in making this possible. The programs and services provided through the Center will be a tremendous asset to the community."

A big step in tough times

The current economy poses challenges for higher education -- budgets are tight, and yet this is precisely the type of environment in which displaced workers might need new skills or training.

"The timing of this innovative opportunity comes at a paradoxical crossroad," said MaryLou Apple, president of Motlow College. "When we say we are expanding opportunities in this economic climate, people often ask why. The truth is that this partnership is tremendously cost-



MaryLou Apple,
President of Motlow
State Community
College
(Motlow College
photo)

effective for our students. Area residents seeking additional education, nontraditional students and those still in high school will all have greater educational options.

"County high school students will have increased opportunities for many more dual- and joint-enrollment classes during the late afternoon and evening time slots, saving gas, time and travel to other campuses," Apple added.

MTSU had announced last October that it was seeking input at a newly-created web site on the proposal to open a satellite campus in Shelbyville. At the time, it was announced that the proposal would be submitted to the Tennessee Board of Regents in December 2008 and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission in January. But the TBR meeting came and went without any mention of the Shelbyville site, and meanwhile the state's colleges and universities were trying to cope with tight state budgets. MTSU faced controversy and protest from students about some of the cuts proposed by McPhee.

However, Ray -- who had first discussed an MTSU satellite here with McPhee -- continued to insist that the MTSU project was on track.

"MTSU and Motlow both have long histories of working to meet the educational needs for students from this region," said Ray in an MTSU news release. "Many of the students who take certificate programs or associate-degree programs from Motlow wish to continue their education at MTSU, so the establishment of the Middle Tennessee Education Center will enhance this effort and will be a great benefit to the citizens of Bedford and the surrounding counties."

"The center will serve as a conduit to services provided by MTSU and Motlow," said Mike Boyle, dean of MTSU's College of Continuing Education and Distance Learning. "In addition to holding some courses at this site, our administration office will provide information regarding admissions, financial aid and student-advising services."

"This type of effort could not have been successful without the leadership and vision of President McPhee and Mayor Ray. Dr. Apple, Bedford County officials and many other key legislators have played instrumental roles in initial success of this project," added Boyle.

New name

"'MTSU South' was just a project name for this facility," said David Foster, a director of continuing education at MTSU. "'The Middle Tennessee Education Center' encompasses much more by offering programs and services from Middle Tennessee State University and Motlow State Community College to benefit the citizens of this region of the state."

Making higher education more accessible to more people and providing expanded services as demand increases have been a constant focus for organizers of MTEC.

"The overall goal of the facility is to make it easier for those who live in this part of the state to more easily pursue higher education," said Culbreath. "Often people are unsure where to turn to get information or assistance, and I look forward to helping them by answering questions or pointing them to the right person or office."

"The centralized location of Bedford County and its proximity to Motlow, make this facility an ideal hub to extend our educational service and programs to the residents of the counties of southern Middle Tennessee," said Dr. Dianna Rust, MTSU's associate dean of continuing education. "In conjunction with MSCC, we will be working with the department chairs and other deans to develop programs and courses to fill these needs."

'Overwhelming' response

"The response to the Needs Analysis Survey was overwhelming," added David Gotcher, director of academic outreach at MTSU. "We now have a much better understanding of the education interests of the residents of this area and look forward to working with Motlow to meet those needs."

The relocation of Bedford County Medical Center to a new facility, called Heritage Medical Center, has caused some doctors to leave the county-owned Medical Arts Building, freeing it up for other uses. Bedford County has moved some administrative offices, such as the finance department and the zoning and codes department, into the two-story portion of the building, and MTEC will operate in the older, single-story portion.

In other MTSU news, the school was scheduled this morning to announce a partnership with the University of Tennessee Space Institute near Tullahoma. Students in MTSU's flight test engineering program will now take their last semester of classes at the UTSI facility and will receive dual credit allowing them to get a start on a graduate degree from UTSI.

FYI

For more information on MTEC or to schedule an appointment, call 685-4444. Additional information will be posted at: www.mteducationcenter.com.