

## business: SPOTLIGHT

# USCB NEW RIVER

## *Higher education in the Lowcountry*

Looking to earn a four-year degree in the comfort of your own hometown? You can now. The greater Hilton Head area has the distinction of being the first South Carolina community to welcome a new four-year university and campus in fifty years. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on July 1 of last year, and the campus welcomed its first students in August.

The New River Campus is an extension of the University of South Carolina-Beaufort. Referred to as the “south campus” of USCB, the New River Campus is located on Highway 278, just minutes from Hilton Head and I-95. New River will be able to confer the same degrees as its sister campus in Beaufort. These degrees now include bachelor’s degrees. In 2002, the state granted USCB four-year status, allowing the institution to develop its own baccalaureate programs. Currently, six bachelor’s degree programs are offered: early childhood education, English, business administration, liberal studies, hospitality management, and human services. USCB has plans to add four more bachelor’s degrees in history, Spanish, psychology, and biology in the near future.

“Beaufort County is the fastest growing county in the state,” said Lila Meeks, vice chancellor of advancement for USCB. “Jasper County’s not far behind. This new campus is located right in the middle of all this growth.” The location of the campus will also provide easy access for students in neighboring counties; those in Effingham and Chatham counties in Georgia qualify for in-state tuition.

Providing easy access to education is the primary mission of the new campus. As the populations of Hilton Head and Bluffton have grown, so has the number of both traditional and non-traditional students seeking to further their education locally. Many USCB students living north of the Broad River and working in southern Beaufort County will find it easier to attend classes there.

“It makes more sense for one professor to drive 25 miles to teach a class than to have 20 or 30 students drive to class,” said Meeks. “It makes getting an education more convenient for students.” Professors, who are all required to have at least a master’s degree with an additional 18 hours in the discipline they teach, have joint appointments at both campuses. The new campus replaces the existing 10,000-square-foot facility on Pope Avenue where local students have taken classes since 1983.

Local business and community leaders have played a critical role in turning the dream of a new, local campus into a reality. Union Camp, now International Paper, donated 80 acres for the new campus in 1994. The first lead gift, from Palmetto Electric Trust, was donated in 1996, and in 1998, Brantley and Helen Harvey donated one million dollars for the planned campus south of the Broad. Hargray Communications gave 3.5 million dollars for construction on the first building.

The Hargray Building, with its impressive front entrance, is the heart



PHOTO BY ROB KAUFFMAN

*Dr. Jane T. Upshaw, USCB Chancellor*

of the new campus. The 57,000-square-foot building houses administrative and faculty offices, a small library, computer lab, student services offices, and nine classrooms. Later this fall, the Science and Technology Building will open with additional classrooms and faculty offices. By spring of 2005, students at the new campus will be able to utilize state-of-the-art computer and science labs to support their academic studies. A new library is expected to open next fall. The 200-acre campus also includes a greenhouse and maintenance building, as well as ample outdoor patios and gardens designed for study or relaxation.

The current site plan includes ten academic buildings. Construction on additional buildings will occur as enrollment increases and funding is made available. The university is also in talks with private developers about the possibility of building student apartments.

The opportunity to earn a four-year degree locally is something that has been missing in this area of the Lowcountry for almost 150 years. Beaufort College, the precursor of USCB, was founded in 1795 and offered degrees in the liberal arts and sciences until the Civil War forced its closing in 1861. It wasn’t until 1959 that local leaders opened the Beaufort campus as an extension of USC, offering some university courses. Since 1968, USCB has been offering associate degrees. Students have been able to take courses at USCB toward a four-year degree from USC Aiken or Columbia since 1970.

“Beaufort County has been part of one of the few regions of the state without a four-year university for too long,” said Lila Meeks. “There’s been nothing south of Charleston or Orangeburg or east of Aiken, until now.”

“We believe a four-year institution makes a huge difference in a region, economically, intellectually, and culturally. It brings economic development beyond the students that attend. There are business that want to be where a university is.”

The new campus is expected to bring increased opportunity for community partnerships and programs with area schools, organizations, and businesses as well economic benefits. The dedication of the Hargray Building will take place on October 28. Governor Mark Sanford and President Sorensen of USC are expected to attend the event, which is open to the public. Visit <http://www.sc.edu/beaufort> or call 521-4100 for more information. – Teresa Colvin