

Atlantic Cape cuts ribbon on \$12.4M student center

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MAYS LANDING — Students at Atlantic Cape Community College finally have a place to call home, college President Barbara Gaba said before cutting the ribbon on the new, \$12.4 million student center Wednesday.

“From the beginning of the project, it was envisioned that there would be a beautiful place where students can learn collaboratively, relax, have fun, meet and engage with fellow students and faculty,” Gaba said.

The college broke ground on the 22,000-square-foot project in September 2016 as part of its Blueprint 2020 plan to upgrade the infrastructure at its three campuses. In addition to common space, including a game room, the student center also includes dedicated space for the Student Government Association and for the student publications, Atlantic Cape Review and the Rewrites literary magazine.

“We are so blessed to have our new office,” said SGA President Lidangela Guzman-Palacios, of Egg Harbor Township.

Denise Brown, 20, of Pleasantville, is part of the student literary magazine. She said prior to the new student center, the group met in a small room that hardly fit more than five people.

“It’s very important we have a space we can unite together,” Brown said.

“We finally have a chance to make this like a family,” added Dillon Clark, 19, of Egg Harbor Township.

The building, designed by Spiegle Architectural Group, was jointly funded by Atlantic County and the state. The Student Success and Career Planning Center, a veterans lounge and meeting space are located on the second floor.

Assemblyman Vince Mazzeo, D-Atlantic, was one of several local politicians on hand for the ribbon-cutting. Mazzeo said 2nd District legislators have been talking for years about diversifying the economies of Atlantic County, and Atlantic Cape was a centerpiece to that plan.

“The whole key to all this is we have to have skilled workers and we have to have trained workers,” Mazzeo said. “In the future, as we progress in Atlantic County, this college will adapt to that.”

Atlantic County Freeholders Caren Fitzpatrick and Amy Gatto, as well as Cape May County Freeholder Jeffrey Pierson spoke about their experiences with Atlantic Cape.

Fitzpatrick, an alumna of Atlantic Cape, said the college serves a diverse group of students both in demographics and in learning styles.

“Community college fills that need in a very special way. It did for me,” she said.

Gatto said everyone in the county believes in the investment Atlantic Cape has made into the students and the college.

The college, which has seen declining enrollment in recent years, is making an effort to attract more students through relationships with local high schools, Gaba said. Students from Ocean City were invited to attend the ribbon-cutting. Gaba addressed them directly, asking them to consider Atlantic Cape when they start making their post-secondary plans.

“People need to see us. They need to see the beautiful facility we have,” Gaba said after the ceremony.