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# Bellingham college's \$4.5 million fisheries building completed

BY KIE RELYEA

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BELLINGHAM - A grand opening celebration Saturday, Nov. 16, will mark the completion of the new \$4.5 million Perry Center for Fisheries and Aquaculture Sciences and the public and private donors who helped Bellingham Technical College replace its worn-out fisheries building.

Patricia McKeown, president of Bellingham Technical College, called the public-private support the "real exciting part" of the project.

"It's pretty exciting ownership in the building," McKeown said.

The Saturday event is by invitation only. A public open house will be held later.

The old, worn-out fisheries building at Maritime Heritage Park was built in 1947 to serve as a wastewater treatment plant.

The walls and roof leaked. The heating and electrical systems were outdated, and classroom chairs with wheels tended to roll to the other side of the room.

No more, with the completion of the new two-story building at Maritime Heritage Park.

The 8,000-square-foot building was built to last 50 years and to a LEED silver standard to make it more energy-efficient.

Rosendaal-Honcoop Construction of Bellingham was the builder.

BTC has run the fish hatchery at the mouth of Whatcom Creek in Maritime Heritage Park since 1978, after the former wastewater treatment plant was converted.

Officials said when they took over the hatchery, there were no natural salmon runs in the creek. Today, it has multiple healthy runs of salmon species, according to BTC.

The program's reach extends beyond Whatcom Creek.

Its students have had a major impact on fisheries, shellfish and habitat restoration throughout the region, BTC officials said. The most visible sign may be the thousands of fishermen and families who line Whatcom Creek each fall to catch or see the returning salmon.

The program and its students also operate the trout hatchery at Whatcom Falls Park.

BTC's graduates are employed as fish hatchery specialists, culturists for shellfish and fish, and as scientific aides for habitat restoration.

The program's students also plant and manage oysters, clams and mussels on Samish Bay each year, as well as raise nearly 2 million steelhead and salmon that are released into area creek and rivers.

The new building was paid for with public and private dollars, including \$2 million from the state and \$450,000 from the Whatcom County Economic Development Investment program.

Other sources were Rotary Club of Bellingham, Taylor Shellfish and Seattle Shellfish, BTC staff and faculty, Lummi Tribe, sports fishermen, Bornstein Seafoods, as well as up to \$1 million from the college's reserves.

A private donation also came from Chuck Bundrant, chairman of Seattle-based Trident Seafoods, which has a processing plant in Bellingham. Bundrant gave \$250,000 and asked that the center be named for Edd and Virginia Perry.

Edd Perry, Bundrant's friend, had been the owner of San Juan Seafoods in Bellingham, and the two have worked together for many years.

To McKeown, the project honors an essential piece of the Pacific Northwest -its fisheries and aquaculture.

"This allows young people, and those not so young, to work in an industry that they're really committed to," she added.

During the building's construction, BTC also revised its curriculum, allowing students, after two years, to transfer to Western Washington University's Huxley College of the Environment or Northwest Indian College for further study in their baccalaureate programs.



Earl Steele, Bellingham Technical College Fisheries Technology instructor, talks with a Fisheries and Aquaculture program class, Nov. 12, 2013 at the new Perry Center for Fisheries and Aquaculture Sciences, 1500 C St. at Maritime Heritage Park in Bellingham.

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