

Technical college invests in new fisheries facility

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BELLINGHAM — Bellingham Technical College broke ground Tuesday, July 31, on the new Perry Center for Fisheries and Aquaculture Sciences in Maritime Heritage Park.

Construction is slated to begin immediately, with completion estimated in fall 2013.

The project is meant to demonstrate public and private support to maintain, restore and enhance the important Northwest fishing, shellfish and maritime industries and preserve a key aspect of Maritime Heritage Park.

Because the current facility (in Bellingham's former sewage treatment center) is structurally compromised and no longer meets the requirements of the program, BTC launched a capital campaign with a \$2 million matching state allocation to build a new building at the existing location.

Many businesses, individuals, businesses, civic groups, BTC staff and public/private foundations have contributed to the capital campaign. Whatcom County's Economic Development Investment Fund is making a significant investment. BTC continues to invite and encourage contributions to ensure using the full \$2 million state match. Located in the park, BTC's Fisheries & Aquaculture Sciences Program has operated successfully for 33 years. It provides an educational path for students with an interest in becoming stewards of the environment, enhancing and protecting our fisheries and aquaculture resources and learning and applying science to this field.

With an 86 percent job-placement rate, graduates work as fish hatchery specialists, fish culturists, shellfish culturists and as scientific aides evaluating, enhancing and restoring habitat. The program, as part of its lab component, has successfully restored a once-dead salmon run to Whatcom Creek — and has had a major impact on the fisheries, shellfish and habitat restoration throughout the Northwest. Students also work with shellfish aquaculture, annually planting and managing oysters, clams and mussels on the shores of Samish Bay.

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