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Groundbreaking project RAMTEC center will serve students, employers

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MARION -- Construction crews broke ground Tuesday on the Robotics and Advanced Manufacturing Technology Education Collaborative, a training center being built at Tri-Rivers Career Center.

Jim Trafzer Excavation started clearing topsoil as educators, business and government leaders gathered for a groundbreaking ceremony near the construction site at the northwest corner of the career center building.

While work just started on the building, Tri-Rivers Superintendent Chuck Speelman said there is already talk of a second building if needed.

He and others praised what supporters say will be a training center that prepares workers for in-demand trades and increases collaboration between Tri-Rivers, Marion Technical Center and The Ohio State University at Marion.

"This partnership is going to make a lasting impact," Speelman said.

Construction is expected to take about 14 weeks, while work on a bay to be located within the existing career center building has already neared completion.

The center will prepare people for jobs as technicians and engineers in the fields of robotics and associated industrial automation. It already has been selected as a training center for the Automotive Manufacturing Technical Education Collaborative's national core curriculum, which will teach skills in demand at any auto manufacturer and many of their suppliers. Tri-Rivers and MTC are partnering together with Honda of America Manufacturing, which is in need of qualified technicians.

RobotWorx and other area industries have expressed an interest in the training center.

MTC dean of engineering technologies Dave Wagner, whose construction background is benefiting Tri-Rivers as it oversees the project, said the center will help create a skilled workforce in demand in Ohio.

"Instead of going out of state, we have locals who can become trained," he said. "We are trying to increase our pipeline (of skilled workers)."

Wagner and others also praised the collaboration between Marion's higher-education institutions, including Tri-Rivers Center for Adult Education, MTC and Ohio State Marion.

"Everybody has the same vision and we are forming those pathways," Wagner said.

He said high school students will be able to start out at Tri-Rivers Career Center and earn 16 to 20 credit hours before they graduate high school. They can continue their education at MTC toward a two-year associate's degree and possibly then work toward a four-year degree.

"That's the collaboration you are talking about," Wagner said.

Christine Gardner of the Ohio Association for Career and Technical Education agreed, saying it may be an option for students who are not yet confident enough to pursue a four-year degree. She said collaboration helps increase options for students.

"Students will have a chance to grow their education," she said. "Collaboration is a big thing. It's so important that all members of the educational community work together."

Speelman told attendees at the ceremony that the project is benefiting from donations by local companies, including Nucor Steel Marion and Glen-Gery Brick.

"It is a true community project," he said.

A team of career center staff, with the help of Wagner, is working to manage the construction project. The project is estimated to cost about \$800,000, which will be covered by previous career center cuts.

It is not dependent on a 0.5-mill, 10-year permanent improvement levy which, if passed, will raise about \$838,200 a year. School officials said the permanent improvement levy is needed to fund repairs to the building and update equipment used for other programs.

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Bill Sinden/The Marion Star

Art caption: Tri-Rivers Career Center broke ground Tuesday for the construction of the Robotics and Advanced Manufacturing Technology Education Collaborative center at the northwest corner of the Tri-Rivers facility.

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