

NEWS

Tech's partnership with Columbia State blossoms in Lawrenceburg with new facility

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An educational seed that Tennessee Tech University planted in Lawrence County a few years ago has blossomed into a new facility with new opportunities for students in southern Tennessee.

The Southern Tennessee Higher Education Center and representatives from Tennessee Tech, Columbia State Community College and other higher education partners gathered with local government officials, industry leaders, and community members recently to celebrate the inaugural ceremony of the new Lawrence County center.

“Today is about partnerships, it’s about bringing people together,” said Tech president Phil Oldham. “Today we celebrate the realization of a vision that was born in this community, giving rise to unlikely partnerships.”

In 2014, community leaders began dreaming of expanding the educational opportunities for students to include earning a baccalaureate degree in Lawrence County. This concept included a partnership between Columbia State and Tech as well as other area four-year

4. institutions.

The partnership with Columbia State in Lawrenceburg became part of Tech's 2+2 program where traditional and non-traditional students could take classes for two years with Columbia State and then two years with Tennessee Tech to earn a bachelor's degree.

"We are very excited about the foundation we laid a few years ago and to see the fruition of that and to see that it will continue to grow," said Mike Gotcher, Tech's dean of interdisciplinary studies. "We have been talking to Columbia State about the programs we have here and how we can expand those programs in the future."

For the past five years, Tech has offered classes in interdisciplinary studies through Columbia State in Lawrenceburg, adding classes in agriculture along the way. Tech also hired a full-time site coordinator to assist in recruiting, community events and serving as a liaison between the Lawrenceburg campus and Tech's campus in Cookeville.

"It's going to open so many opportunities for local students and Tennessee Tech," said Chris Jackson, who serves as Tech's site coordinator and who is also a county commissioner in Lawrence County. "We plan on growing Tennessee Tech's program and presence here as much as we can."

The 40,000 square foot facility, located at the corner of highway 43 south and U.S. 64 bypass, will feature 15 classrooms, science laboratories, a library, computer labs, meeting rooms, a community room, and much more.

Among those attending the celebration of the new facility, was Mara Lerner, a Tech alumna who earned a degree in 2019 through Tech's 2+2 program in Lawrenceburg. A mother of seven children, Lerner was able to go back to school after 25 years to earn a degree in interdisciplinary studies.

"Basically, I had always wanted to go back to school to finish my degree, but life was always kind of crazy," said Lerner. "I wanted to teach my kids that school is important. I wanted to show them to do as I do and not just say what I say."

Currently the vice chair of the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce and a local business owner, Lerner followed up her bachelor's degree from Tech with a masters in social work from the University of Tennessee.

"God just opened up the door. I felt like Tennessee Tech was put in our little town just for me," said Lerner. "Not only was it in town, but the flexibility of the hours and the accelerated courses and the whole program was exceptional for what I wanted to do."

Lerner is just one of the success stories that has come from Tech's partnership with Columbia State in Lawrenceburg. With classes for Tech and Columbia State beginning this fall in the new facility, other students will have the opportunity to excel academically like Lerner did.

"We encourage our students at Tech to be Bold, Fearless, Confident, and Kind," said Oldham. "These are values clearly shared with the people of Lawrence County."

For more information on the Southern Tennessee Higher Education Center, go to <http://southerntennessee.org/> (<http://southerntennessee.org/>).

4. For more information on Tech's 2+2 program, go to <https://www.tntech.edu/cis/sis/2plus2-bachelors.php> ([/cis/sis/2plus2-bachelors.php](https://www.tntech.edu/cis/sis/2plus2-bachelors.php)).





[RETURN TO NEWS ROOM \(/NEWS/INDEX.PHP\)](/NEWS/INDEX.PHP)

Tags: [2021 \(?tag=2021\)](#) [Featured \(?tag=Featured\)](#)

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[ADMISSIONS \(/ADMISSIONS/INDEX.PHP\)](/ADMISSIONS/INDEX.PHP)

[ABOUT TECH \(/ABOUT/INDEX.PHP\)](/ABOUT/INDEX.PHP)

[NEWS \(/NEWS/INDEX.PHP\)](/NEWS/INDEX.PHP)

[CALENDAR \(/CALENDAR\)](/CALENDAR)

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[CONSUMER INFO \(/CONSUMER-INFO/INDEX.PHP\)](/CONSUMER-INFO/INDEX.PHP)

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