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**WCC EXTENSION SITE IN PEEKSKILL TO DOUBLE IN SIZE, OFFER MORE PROGRAMS
Plans call for 10 new classrooms, an arts studio and formal lecture hall**

A new lease agreement will allow Westchester Community College to double the size of its Peekskill extension center and offer more courses and lecture programs, County Executive Andy Spano announced today.

The Westchester Art Workshop site, currently located on the first floor of 27 N. Division St., plans to take over the entire building. The \$1 million project should be complete by September so the 2002-03 academic year can begin with 10 new classrooms, a new art studio and formal lecture hall.

Surrounded by a digital art exhibit in the front gallery, WCC President Joseph N. Hankin joined Spano to make the announcement and unveil architectural plans for the entire 20,000-square-foot building. The event was also attended by Peekskill Mayor John Testa, County Legislator George Oros, and Timothy S. Carey, chairman of WCC's board of trustees.

"The Peekskill Extension Center is one of the county's unique educational treasures, yet its ability to offer programs has always been limited due to a lack of space," Spano said. "It's wonderful to be part of a plan to expand those offerings and attract more students in the northern part of the county. We need this type of facility in Westchester – where students can use technology to create art and build marketable career skills."

Hankin emphasized that the college has successfully expanded its offerings throughout the county.

"This expansion came about because of the efforts of Andy Spano, the County Board (including former legislator Timothy Carey and current legislator George Oros) along with state legislators. This project will truly help those in Northern Westchester to further their education," Hankin said.

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Salvatore J. Carrera, the county's economic development director, paved the way for the expansion by negotiating a 10-year lease with landlord Alfred Weissman for the second floor of the building, formerly home to Woolworth's. State probation offices, currently using part of that space, will be relocated.

Architectural plans are complete but the lease must still be approved by the County Board of Legislators. That vote is expected to come in the next month or so.

Bringing in artists and studios - and creating an overall atmosphere conducive to the arts - is very important to Peekskill, said Mayor Testa.

"We're forming a new revitalization task force for downtown and this center is a good launching point," said Testa, who is also a member of the college's board of trustees. "It's vital for the downtown economy."

"We're building on an already strong partnership between the county, the city and the college," said County Legislator George Oros. "This project shows just how well we can all work together especially when it comes to creating more educational opportunities for residents."

The Peekskill extension center, opened in 1994, enrolls about 500 students each semester. The site offers programs in computer arts, graphics, multimedia and digital music, and boasts more sophisticated equipment than many major art schools, especially for students working on associate degrees and certificates.

"It is gratifying to see Peekskill's progress and to realize that the dream of an art and technology center in the city has become a reality," said Carey, chairman of the college's board of trustees. "The college is always searching for ways to better serve the residents of the county and this expansion will give our students additional options."

Because the extension center currently has only two traditional classrooms, the construction of 10 more will make a tremendous difference, according to Carla Mazzarelli, the branch's assistant dean. Many more general education classes (especially during the day) can be scheduled and English as a Second Language courses can be offered on site. Those courses, which attract about 70 students a semester, would be relocated from Peekskill High School.

The addition of a new art studio will also be a major draw for the Peekskill center - already located in a city emphasizing the arts in its economic revitalization. Students currently work in a multi-purpose room that doubles as a studio. A new studio would allow for larger easels and canvasses, as well as more art courses, such

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as drawing, painting and watercolor, on site. Many of those programs are now only offered at the Westchester Art Workshop in White Plains.

A first-floor multi-purpose room used for studio art classes and lectures will be converted into a full-size lecture hall. The room will go from 50 to 80 seats and be better able to accommodate an ongoing lecture series. More office and conferencing space as well as a larger student lounge will also be added.

Funding for the renovation will come from college funds as well as various state and county grants.

The extension site primarily focuses on computer art and design. The existing center contains six computer labs (one with DVD burners and attached TV screens so students can see their projects in “real time”), a music lab where students create compositions on computer screens using Midi-keyboards and synthesizers, and a recording studio.

Westchester Community College has been working with the county in recent years to develop satellite branches and increase educational opportunities for people who may have trouble - due to work schedules or transportation difficulties - traveling to the main campus in Valhalla. A site specializing in health care recently opened in Ossining and a new Yonkers branch focuses on computer technology. A new Mount Vernon site is expected to open in September.

Courses are also offered at various other locations in Westchester and Putnam including White Plains, Mount Vernon, Tuckahoe, New Rochelle, Port Chester, Shrub Oak, and Mahopac.

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