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LINDENWOOD

LU becomes St. Louis' first true bi-state university

Lindenwood University's Board of Directors on Thursday approved a three-way partnership with the City of Belleville, IL and Belleville District 201 allowing the university to purchase the historic 22-acre campus of Belleville West High School and turn it into a satellite campus.

District 201 unanimously approved the agreement Monday. City officials approved the arrangement last week.

Lindenwood already has begun two master's level courses in teacher education at the site. Other MBA, graduate and undergraduate evening courses started this week.

"This effort has been about dozens of community leaders working to secure the future of an important part of Belleville," said Lindenwood President Dennis Spellmann. "There are a lot of memories in that building. We want to help preserve those memories, and help create some new ones for generations to come."

Lindenwood has agreed to purchase the campus for \$1, and will invest at least \$1.4 million in capital and technological improvements.

The city of Belleville will contribute \$150,000 annually in tax increment financing to the project, as well as \$300,000 earmarked toward asbestos abatement. The city also has pledged to assist Lindenwood in:

- Locating tenants for excess space and renters for gymnasium and auditorium space, with the goal of \$300,000 annually in revenue to offset maintenance and operating costs
- Raising funds in the community to support fine arts facilities and programs
- Establishing partnerships with local businesses that result in tuition reimbursement for employees
- Recruiting students who desire full-time residential-based education to attend Lindenwood's main campus and to utilize the newly funded scholarship program made available by the university

Lindenwood has agreed to lease back up to 10,000 square feet of space to District 201 free of charge for 10 years. The school district plans to house its administrative offices at the site. That lease has been valued at \$1.25 million.

"This is a win-win proposition for everyone involved," said Spellmann. "And the biggest beneficiaries are the residents who will be able to get an affordable quality education close to home.

"We are proud to be partnering with the school district and working with them to enhance the district's professional development," said Spellmann. "But we also produce a lot of first-year teachers at Lindenwood. There's nothing I would enjoy more than for some of the fine youngsters of this community to become involved in teacher education at Lindenwood and turn around and teach right in their own community."

Spellmann said the opportunities for the community at the new satellite campus "will be endless." His vision for the property is for an educational and cultural "condominium complex that will be used by the community."

Lindenwood plans to lease out much of the property to users who would be compatible community partners,

Spellmann said. All proceeds from the leases will be put back into renovation and improvements.

“The faster the community uses this resource, the faster the project will go,” Spellmann said. “We want this to be a fully utilized hub of education and activity for Belleville.

“There has been an outpouring of community support for this project. The phone is ringing off the hook with organizations who are interested in partnering with us on this project. We are happy to be the catalyst.”

Lindenwood agrees to maintain at least three campus buildings—the auditorium, the main building and the girls gymnasium, and will pay in lieu of taxes \$10,000 in 2003, \$15,000 in 2004, and \$20,000 in 2005 and every year thereafter as long as tax increment financing is in effect.

Lindenwood also agrees to offer graduate education and business degree programs and undergraduate degree completion programs no later than July 1, with program expansion dependent upon the educational needs of the community. Lindenwood also plans to convert the six existing tennis courts to general public use, and work out agreements with Althoff Catholic High School and Governor French Academy for soccer and football games.

“One cannot underestimate the importance of this project to the community,” said Spellmann. “We believe the economic impact will be significant. But the cultural impact will be important too. Education is the key to a good life. This project is a smart investment into infrastructure that will strengthen the fabric of the community.”

Spellmann has an elaborate vision for the beautiful theatre at Belleville West. He hopes to begin a community fund-raising effort to turn the long beloved facility into a community jewel. He also plans to bring several Lindenwood theatre and music performances to the building.

“We’re looking forward to becoming a part of this community,” said Spellmann. “We want to be Belleville’s Hometown University.”

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