

Colleges unite on work force development

BY DAVID GOLL

Out of the state's continued cuts to education comes a unique collaboration between several Silicon Valley community college districts.

Foothill-De Anza Community College District is teaming with West Valley-Mission and San Jose-Evergreen community college districts on a new education center that will provide work force development courses enabling close to 90,000 students from all three districts to attend.

The new center will help fill the talent pool of skilled workers in the Bay Area, while saving the college districts money and staff resources.

Foothill-De Anza is running point on the \$38 million center, to be built on nine acres at the former Onizuka Air Force Station in Sunnyvale. The location is home to the famed five-story "Blue Cube" structure that once helped control military satellites. The Cube will be replaced by the new center, built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards. The project is expected to be funded through a \$491 million general obligation bond approved by voters in 2006.

Everyone wins

Linda Thor, chancellor of the Foothill-De Anza district, said the new facility will replace the district's existing Middlefield campus education center that has been housed at Cubberley Community Center in Palo Alto for more than two decades.

"We have been leasing that facility, which is a former 1950s-era high school," Thor said. "The facilities there are just not the equivalent of what we can offer at the (Foothill College and De Anza College) campuses."

The Sunnyvale center will allow the college to improve and expand its accounting, astronomy, emergency medical technician, paramedic, pharmacy technician and child development courses, said Denise Swett, Foothill's association vice president of the Middlefield campus and community programs.

Swett, who is also Foothill's acting vice president of student development, said she envisions the center as a gathering spot that will not only include programs from multiple colleges, but community groups, too.

Laurel Jones, president of Mission College in Santa Clara, is on board with the project.

"The hope is that the (colleges) will create a regional presence for career technology education programs," she said. Her college will likely contribute an undetermined amount of money, faculty and staff to the center.



VICKI THOMPSON

STUDENTS WELCOME: From left, Brian Murphy, president of De Anza College, Linda Thor, Foothill-DeAnza district chancellor and Judy Miner, Foothill College president, hope the new \$38 million education center in Sunnyvale will create a regional presence for career technology. Three community college districts will team up for the project.

All the education leaders agree the site could help them pool resources and expand course offerings by avoiding duplication with other campuses.

The site

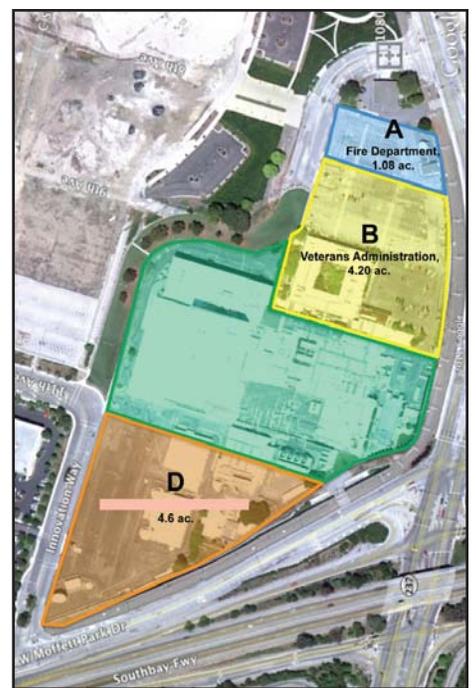
The 1960s-era Onizuka site, with 33 buildings, was closed by the federal government in July 2010. The new facility will be a mix of new and renovated structures initially encompassing about 50,000 square feet. It could eventually double in size.

The price for the nine acres was right. As part of a federal program encouraging re-use and redevelopment of former military facilities by educational organizations, the land and some of its buildings were offered to the district for free by the U.S. Department of Education. Thor and Charles Allen, the district's executive director of facilities, operations and construction management, said officials from the city of Sunnyvale have estimated the land's value at \$2 million per acre, or about \$18 million for the property.

Allen said the city, the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Department of Education will have to approve the district's plans approved by city officials. He is awaiting word from the Air Force on transferring the property to district hands.

"The Air Force wants to transfer the property," Allen said. "They have to maintain it now."

The school will seek a general contractor on the project within a few months, Allen said. He estimated the cost of demolishing Onizuka buildings not incorporated into the



COURTESY MAP

SKILLS: The Onizuka site, 9.15 acres, will become a 50,000-square-foot education center. Work begins this fall.

new center at up to \$5 million, with work beginning by fall. Only part of the Blue Cube, a 166,000-square-foot windowless structure that isn't seismically safe, may survive the redevelopment process, according to Judy Miner, the president of Foothill College.

But she said officials hope to salvage a portion of the structure, and turn it into a draw for the valley.

"We want the center to be a regional asset not only for Silicon Valley, but the entire Bay Area," Miner said.