Nursing school expansion approved

Beaufort County Community College has announced plans to expand its Associate Degree Nursing program by nearly 50 percent in the next 12 months in an effort to boost health care in the region.

BCCC's ADN program will increase from a maximum of 42 students to 60 students in January 2007, according to Laura Billey, director of BCCC's nursing school.

"We're very excited about this," Billey said. "The nursing program is a very competitive program and because of that, there are people who are qualified for admission to the program who haven't been able to get in. Hopefully, this will decrease that number."

BCCC plans to expand its ADN program by admitting a class of 42 students in August 2006 and an additional class of 18 students in January 2007. Those admitted in August will be scheduled to graduate in May 2009 and those admitted in January will be scheduled to graduate in August 2009.

The expansion of the BCCC nursing program is made possible, in part, by the recent opening of the Public Service Building. The new building now houses BCCC's Early Childhood and Human Services Technology programs that had been housed, along with the nursing programs, in the Katie Paul Building.

Renovations are underway to totally dedicate the Katie Paul Building, also known as Building 2, to nursing. Those renovations are scheduled to be completed in April.

BCCC also plans to hire two master's-prepared nursing school faculty members and has applied for grants to help fund the new positions with the help of Pitt Memorial and Beaufort County hospitals.

The nursing school expansion is an attempt to not only help address a growing shortage of nurses in the region, but to help meet the demand of students in the area who want to become nurses, Billey said.

Typically, more than 500 people apply for admission each year to BCCC's Associate Degree and Practical Nursing programs. Of these about twice as many are found to be qualified to enter the programs as there are spaces available, according to school officials.

Meanwhile, health care policy makers are predicting a dramatic shortage of nurses over the next two decades as the population ages and health care needs increase and as more nurses begin to retire.