

Aviation center a full COA campus?

By Reggie Ponder
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MAPLE — College of The Albemarle's Regional Aviation and Technical Training Center in Currituck is expected to help fill a variety of educational needs. But will it ever become a full-fledged satellite campus of COA?

It's hard to say right now, according to both Currituck and COA officials.

COA President Kandi Deitemeyer notes that COA has always maintained that if the enrollment is sufficient the college could offer a computer, math or general education class at the Currituck site, which is set to open this summer.

But the focus right now is squarely on the specific technical programs the 40,000-square-foot facility was designed for: computer integrated machining, architectural technology, mechanical engineering technology, and aviation systems technology.

COA plans to launch its airframe and power plant maintenance certification program at the Currituck center in August. Right now, college officials are awaiting Federal Aviation Administration approval of the program, which is required before COA can award the certification.

Deitemeyer said it probably will be June before the FAA is on-site in Currituck, and it will be sometime after that before the college gets the go-ahead from the federal agency.

Deitemeyer said the college will assess demand for other offerings as the center opens and begins offering classes.

Meanwhile, COA officials have met with superintendents of school districts in the college's seven-county service area, talking to them about COA's plan to offer high school students expanded access to college courses.

"We don't have to do things in the traditional way," Deitemeyer said, explaining the high-level technology in the Currituck center likely will present new opportunities that no one even has thought about yet.

One thing that COA and Currituck County officials alike have thought about is the prospect of providing workforce development and continuing education at the facility.

Currituck Schools Superintendent Allison Sholar told the county Board of Education recently that the school district is working to get Currituck students enrolled in programs at COA's new facility. Besides the programs in aviation and a handful of other technical fields, Sholar is hopeful students will be able to take some general education courses there as well.

According to COA officials involved in planning the aviation training facility, there will be some classroom space in the building to accommodate general education courses. But the plan, at least initially, is for those classrooms to be used specifically for students in the training center's own programs.

Currituck Commissioner Paul O'Neal, who also is a member of the COA Board of Trustees, said "there have been no formal conversations" about expanded use of the facility but there has been some informal discussion about expanding the facility in the future.

"I think what the county is interested in is technical courses," O'Neal said. "We're not trying to duplicate what is offered (at COA campuses) in Elizabeth City or Dare."

O'Neal said Currituck officials would like to see building trades programs such as heating, ventilation and air-conditioning, carpentry, electrical and plumbing taught at the Currituck facility.

A large number of students from Currituck would be available for those kinds of technical courses, O'Neal said.

"It's not something we're looking to do right away," he added.

O'Neal said it's important for high schools and community colleges to have a very close working relationship so that students can take some college courses while they are still in high school.

"I think the school system has a very strong interest in that as well," O'Neal said.

Deitemeyer says each of COA's three campuses has "become kind of its own niche." That process will occur at the Currituck facility over the next couple of years, she said.

"That's the part that's exciting," Deitemeyer said. "It will be exciting to see where the campus will be in three years."

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