

COA aviation center takes flight

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MAPLE — Trees have been cleared and sand now marks the spot where the new Regional Aviation Technical Training Center will be built in Maple.

On Thursday, that work became official as dignitaries from Currituck County, College of the Albemarle and across the region broke ground for the \$6.8 million facility scheduled to open next year.

Officials touted the project's two major benefits — economic growth and job opportunities for the region — during a ceremony that began at the Cooperative Extension Center and ended with the ground-breaking at the construction site off Airport Road.

COA President Kandi Deitemeyer said the center will train students for high-paying jobs in the aviation industry. Students who land aviation jobs can expect salaries starting at \$30,000 and climbing to \$50,000 with experience, she noted.

“We are going to change lives,” said Deitemeyer.

A state-of-the-art facility and hands-on teaching “will make sure the next campus and the next generation of students will be served in a very different way,” Deitemeyer said.

The 40,000-square-foot center will become the community college's fourth location within its seven-county service area. Plans for the center include not only aviation technical training, but also sheet metal, mechanical drafting and machining programs.

The high-tech training will bring economic benefits to the region, Deitemeyer said. The new facility should lure businesses in the aviation industry that may have looked elsewhere in the state before, she said.

John Rorer, chairman of the Currituck Board of Commissioners touted the new business possibilities.

“Northeastern North Carolina has the ability to be an important player in the growth of aerospace/aviation industry, to bring these companies to our area and to capture a share of its current and future success for our citizens,” said Rorer. He pointed to 60 percent growth in aviation jobs between 2002 and 2007 as one reason for his optimism.

Fellow commissioner Paul Martin, a member of the COA board of trustees, said the new center will impact not only Currituck County, but the entire region.

“The economic impact and the prosperity that will come with this training center will not be calculated in dollars and cents, but in the quality of life in the region,” said Martin.

Renderings of the new facility flashed on a screen while officials praised the COA-Currituck County partnership and thanked a variety of local, regional and state supporters.

State Rep. Bill Owens, D-Pasquotank, was one of several legislators, state and local officials, Deitemeyer thanked for their support.

Owens thanked Currituck “for stepping up to the plate” to build the new center. He said the facility, along with the aviation program at Elizabeth City State University, adds to a promising future for the region.

“Aviation is going to be a big part of this region,” said Owens.

Deitemeyer also thanked the Golden LEAF Foundation for contributing about \$1 million to help equip the new facility.

Roger Lambertson, chairman of the COA board of trustees, said regional support for aviation programs will have far-reaching benefits.

“This is a win-win situation for all,” he said.