



**CONTACT:** Della Elliott, GCCCD Public Information, (619) 644-7690  
[della.elliott@gcccd.edu](mailto:della.elliott@gcccd.edu)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Jan. 18, 2008**

# Cuyamaca College grand opening set for Communication Arts Center

*Landmark \$44 million facility brings program improvements,  
performance venue to campus*

**EL CAJON** – Nearly 2½ years after a groundbreaking for a facility that will transform Cuyamaca College’s communication and fine arts programs and enrich the cultural life of the region, preparations are under way for the grand opening of the 90,000-square-foot, \$44 million communication arts center, the latest and one of the most ambitious of the college district’s Prop. R projects.

The \$207 million bond measure passed by East County voters in 2002, combined with state bond and capital improvement dollars, has funded the massive construction over the last few years that has dramatically changed the faces of both Cuyamaca and Grossmont colleges.

After Cuyamaca’s interminable wait for the communications arts center -- a facility pivotal to the college’s continuing expansion and critical to its mission of providing a comprehensive education -- event organizers decided the customary ribbon-cutting didn’t do justice to what’s been described as the jewel of East County. Planned for the Jan. 31 unveiling is a 10 a.m. official ceremony interspersed by performances to showcase the elegance of the college’s stunning new 360-seat theater. Later in the evening, a grand opening premiere featuring a lineup of performances, recitals, exhibits and demonstrations is sure to stir the creative juices of the region’s thespians, artists, writers, musicians, dancers, orators and others.

Both the 10-11 a.m. ceremony and the 6-9 p.m. premiere are free and open to the public. On Friday, Feb. 1, high-school and middle-school students will be bused in for performances by the Helix High School Highlanders; Cuyamaca's American Sign Language Choir; the Young Actors, a Spring Valley troupe of middle-school to college-age actors, performing "Grease;" a "world-style" debate to introduce students to the speech program, as well as tours of art studios and performing arts spaces.

### **Comprehensive education**

Chancellor Omero Suarez noted that the center is the first project to address the needs of the arts and communication disciplines and will help remedy the college's shortage of laboratory and independent-learning facilities.

"When the college was built in 1977, only basic classroom facilities were provided with very few labs," he said. "This center is critical to the college's mission to offer a comprehensive education to students. Without it, Cuyamaca could not meet the current and future needs of our students and the district would be limited in its ability to meet the educational needs of the community."

Governing Board President Bill Garrett said the grand opening event was planned with the community foremost in mind because of the positive, reciprocal relationship between the public and Cuyamaca and Grossmont colleges.

"This facility is a tremendous investment in our college by East County taxpayers," he said. "We are now challenged to use this investment to enrich the educational and cultural lives of our students and the broader community. Everyone will benefit."

### **Programs transformed**

The sweeping expanse of the center is rivaled only by the transformation of the programs and departments housed in the new facility. The general-education classes required for transferring to four-year universities will broaden in scope, educators say, with all that the facility will now offer.

For the 8,000-plus students at Cuyamaca, where enrollment is expected to reach 15,000 by 2015, the center's significance goes beyond aesthetics or the "gee-whiz" factor of all the new amenities.

The Communication Arts Center will greatly enhance learning opportunities, said college President Geraldine M. Perri.

“This facility enables us to implement a program in music education and to plan additional programs such as music industry studies and music technology. We are now offering performing ensembles such as the chorus, the rock, pop and soul ensemble, and in the fall, concert band. In addition to our general education classes and instruction in voice, piano, and guitar, we are now offering classes in music theory and music technology.”

The music program, which previously featured a single classroom, a single piano lab, and no performance venue, rehearsal space or practice rooms, now enjoys the resources needed for students to develop a solid foundation in music.

Instructor Pat Setzer said the addition of the assembly hall and the practice and rehearsal spaces make it possible for the college to offer a music education transfer degree fully articulated, or recognized by San Diego State University. Setzer added that the program, which targets students interested in becoming music teachers, complements without duplicating the music program at Grossmont College.

“The instrumental and vocal ensembles that are a critical part of this program could not be offered without the rehearsal facilities of this center; similarly, the practice rooms, music library and assembly hall are all essential components of any music major program – components that were completely absent in our previous facilities,” Setzer said.

For the performing arts department, the center provides a host of opportunities that were also previously non-existent, said Setzer, who described as “thrilling” the center’s transformation from a vacant hillside from which 57,000 cubic yards of soil were excavated to the three-story landmark it is today. “Everything in this building – rehearsal rooms, practice rooms, musical instruments, an assembly hall suitable for concerts and theater performances – is something that we have simply never had before on this campus in its 30-year history,” he said.

Setzer is especially fond of the assembly hall, which, with its curved, faux-wood paneling and ceiling clouds – suspended ceiling panels designed to reduce reflective sound -- exudes an inviting warmth to complement the acoustical treatments.

“It is a beautiful venue for concerts, and I am excited that we will finally have performances on our campus,” he said. “Instead of sending our students to other places to attend concerts, we will be able to bring the concerts right here to them.”

Mirroring the expansion of the music program is the fine arts program, once relegated to a single, cramped art studio and an adjoining classroom. It now boasts four spacious studios with high ceilings and a plenitude of windows maximizing the rooms’ natural lighting.

### **‘Jewel of the region’**

The classrooms, laboratories and independent learning facilities designed by architect NTD/Stichler will exponentially expand and improve Cuyamaca’s offerings in English, English as a Second Language, reading, speech, American Sign Language, music, fine arts, theater arts, and assisted learning. In addition to the theater/assembly hall, the center features a 100-seat digital theater with a 27-foot screen and superior surround sound audio for multimedia presentations. Also included are the four art studios, eight music classrooms, 11 practice rooms for music, 16 classrooms, and a writing center, as well as a ballet studio, offices and ample storage areas and dressing rooms.

“This building will be a jewel to the region,” former GCCCD Governing Board President Wendell Cutting predicted at the center’s September 2005 groundbreaking ceremony.

A total 31 new sections of classes in ASL, art, communication, English, ESL, music, and theater arts will be taught in the center, which opens the same week as the start of the spring semester. Some 218 sections of classes will be offered in the center, where every program, for the first time ever, will have its own dedicated classrooms, rather than shared space that is less than ideal for learning and instruction.

This benefits programs like ASL, which can now configure its classroom with students seated in a semicircle, rather than rows, to allow for better sightlines.

“Ours is a visual language, obviously, rather than auditory, so we need to see each other clearly, and not have students craning their necks to see around the people in front,” said instructor Kelly Nielsen.

She explained that in addition to its own classroom, ASL will have at its disposal TTY, or text telephone, equipment and videophone technology. The videotelephone equipment will give students the unique capability of having real-time conversations in ASL with those on the East Coast at Gallaudet University, the only liberal arts college in the world for the deaf. Dr. Jerald

Jordan, past president of the World Games for the Deaf and a retired administrator of Gallaudet, arranged for the donation of equipment to Cuyamaca.

The chair of the ASL program, Dr. Therese Botz, said the functional design of the ASL lab and classroom is a credit to her faculty and students, as well as the local deaf community, for their input and recommendations.

“The growing segment of our population that is interested in learning American Sign Language -- a complex and beautifully visual means of communication -- will be able to do so in high-tech labs,” Botz said. “Interest has increased in ASL ever since it obtained the status of satisfying the foreign language requirement at local high schools, colleges and universities.”

Like the ASL program, also to benefit from dedicated classrooms and the latest teaching tools is the communications program. The two classrooms and one speech forensics lab have recording studios so that students can be taped and critiqued on their speeches.

The same theme of enhancement and improved offerings is reflected in other programs and departments: a reading lab that was previously little more than a bookshelf now has ample room for titles; the staff of the student newspaper, The Coyote Express, now actually has an office.

With the spring semester starting Jan. 28, there's still time to register for classes at either Cuyamaca or Grossmont colleges. Online application and registration is available through college Web sites, [www.grossmont.edu](http://www.grossmont.edu) and [www.cuyamaca.edu](http://www.cuyamaca.edu). Cuyamaca College is located at 900 Rancho San Diego Parkway in Rancho San Diego. Grossmont College is at 8800 Grossmont College Drive in El Cajon.

---

Intergovernmental Relations, Economic Development, and Public Information

8800 Grossmont College Drive El Cajon, CA 92020-1799 Phone 619-644-7573 Fax 619-644-7924; [www.gcccd.edu](http://www.gcccd.edu)