

Butler County Community College will buy nearby 6-acre tract

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By Karen Kane

Officials of Butler County Community College had their eyes on the 6-acre tract behind the university's Butler Township campus virtually since the college opened 47 years ago. But, it was privately owned and not on the market.

Thanks to serendipity, though, the land is soon to be part of the BC3 campus.

"It was just like it was meant to be," said spokeswoman Susan Changnon. College President Nick Neupauer was chatting with an acquaintance who happened to mention that he was looking at a prime piece of land near the college. Curiosity demanded further investigation.

"It ended up that the land was the piece that we had always had our eyes on," Ms. Changnon said.

Located at the back of the college campus near the Old Plank Road entrance, the property is owned by Fred and Sue Bennitt, who have entered into an agreement with the college to sell for \$350,000. The BC3 board of trustees approved the sale on Jan. 18.

"It was a no-brainer. Acquisition of the property was part of our long-range plan," Ms. Changnon explained.

For years, the land next to the college represented an opportunity for a growing enterprise such as BC3 to bank some room to expand. But, two problems have arisen over the years that can be resolved by the land acquisition now, Ms. Changnon said.

First, an internal road had to be eliminated to accommodate the public safety structure that opened in 2009. This property is between the Old Plank Road back entrance and the Decatur Drive front entrance, allowing for the potential for a road to connect the two roads.

The second issue developed in 2009, when a tree fell onto the old Armstrong Lodge, creating structural damage that required the building to be razed. That left the Children's Creative Learning Center -- the on-campus day care and preschool for staff and students that had been located in the lodge since early in the 1990s -- without a home. More than 30 children attend the center.

"We had to move them into the our old bookstore, which is a much smaller space that is not meeting their needs. Much of the play equipment has been put in storage," she said. With the

new property, which is next to the old bookstore, the building can be expanded and an outdoor play yard can be created.

Armstrong Lodge opened in the 1980s next to the administration building and was used originally as a student union.

"So, in addition to giving us the opportunity to consider a reconfiguration of the [roadways], we get more space for our day care and preschool," she said.

Additionally, BC3 has plans for a barn, a three-bay garage and a house that are on the property. Plans are to use the barn and garage for storage, eliminating the need to rent off-campus storage, and the house is being considered for use as offices and meeting rooms.

The house was put on the market in the fall.

BC3 hired an outside appraiser that pegged the value of the property at \$350,000 -- a figure that was accepted by the owners. The closing is expected in March.

There's no cost estimate for the expansion of the bookstore, but a feasibility study will be conducted by the college's facilities committee. Ms. Changnon said the college had been facing \$1.2 million to build a new day care/preschool to replace Armstrong Lodge, with the college's portion, after state grants, estimated at \$700,000. "We know this will be less expensive," she said.

The property acquisition is being funded in part through a \$140,000 insurance payment for the damage to Armstrong Lodge. The remainder will come from the college's \$3 million reserve fund, which also could be tapped to pay for the expansion of the old bookstore that is housing the creative learning center.

Ms. Changnon said acquisition of the 6.15 acres had been discussed for decades but was incorporated on the college's 2008 20-year master plan.

Enrollment is about 2,700 at the BC3 main campus.