



An important positive note for the new year is the start of an expansion at the Robert E. Speir Healthcare Education Center on the Grand Strand campus of Horry-Georgetown Technical College on the former Myrtle Beach Air Force Base. The \$7.4 million addition is a triple play for the area. First, there is the construction itself, expected to start about midyear and continue for 15 or more months. The 22,000-square-foot addition will provide more space for the growing health care programs - still a hot employment market - and a new low-cost dental program. The expansion recently cleared a hurdle with the S.C. Budget and Control Board, which allows the college to finish construction design work and seek bids.

Make no mistake, this addition is a milestone for HGTC's health education programs and for indigent dental services for the community. Phil Render, HGTC assistant vice president and dean of academic affairs explained the significance of the expansion in a recent report in The Sun News. The first floor will house the dental hygiene program and a community dental clinic "where a lot of our folks in the community who simply don't have a dentist and cannot afford private care can come to have their dental needs addressed." HGTC's program providing cleanings and check-ups will be moved from the Conway campus. An upgraded indigent dental clinic "is desperately needed in this area based upon the population that could benefit from those services," according to Marilyn Fore, senior vice president for academic affairs.

- Expansion adding about 22,000 square feet of space to Robert E. Speir Healthcare Education Center for updated laboratories, community dental clinic, lecture hall, classrooms, offices.
Cost | \$7.4 million
Sources of financing | Public and private donations, grants, Horry-Georgetown Technical College share of 1 percent added sales tax for education capital improvements.
Groundbreaking | Mid-year, 2010
Construction | 15 to 18 months

For HGTC students, the Speir expansion will mean "hands-on, on-site experience. We will be able to perform restorative and dental surgical procedures in house," Render said. Now, there are more students than chairs, and students rotate positions during their laboratory work. Having all its allied health programs on the Grand Strand campus will allow better coordination of classes and faculty members' time. The dental hygiene and other health science programs enroll a limited number of

students and programs have waiting lists. Typically, graduates of the health science programs have jobs when they finish their HGTC training. The Speir Center expansion fortunately does not rely on state money; otherwise, given the huge shortfall of state revenue, the Budget and Control Board perhaps would not have granted approval. It is reasonable to question why the board has to be involved absent state funds, but that is another quirk of governance in South Carolina.

The expansion is being financed by a portion of HGTC's share of the 1 percent added sales tax for education capital improvements approved by voters in 2008. Harold Hawley, vice president of business affairs, said public and private donations and grants are the other sources of money for the expansion. "It won't be paid for through a tuition increase and will not be paid for through any state money," Hawley said.