

# STCC opens new Ira H. Rubenzahl Student Learning Commons

SPRINGFIELD – In a ribbon-cutting ceremony, Springfield Technical Community College on Dec. 11 celebrated the opening of the \$50 million Ira H. Rubenzahl Student Learning Commons, a renovated historic building that will become a vibrant one-stop hub for student services and activities.

The event drew dignitaries including Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker who joined other state and local officials as well as current and past STCC leaders and students.

The more than 100,000-square-foot building – built in the 19th century as a storehouse for supplies – has been revitalized into an energy-efficient facility and center of student life at STCC. The Learning Commons has a modern and inviting interior that maintains the historic character of the structure, which has been known as Building 19.

STCC President John B. Cook said the renovation project, which broke ground two years ago, will transform the student experience at STCC by putting key services under one roof.

“This unique and historic building preserves the character of the original structure and will serve our students for many years to come,” Cook said. “By organizing offices and student services together, we remove barriers, and usher in a new approach to student success. We are very excited about this change, and there is no doubt that the Learning Commons will

have a positive impact on every student enrolled at STCC.”

Christopher Johnson, chair of the STCC Board of Trustees, said, “This day marks a significant milestone in STCC’s history. After over a decade of hard work by college staff, we are proud to introduce our students to the Learning Commons, where they now have easy access to vital services and resources.”

Massachusetts Education Secretary James Peyser said, “This new student center will bring critical resources and services under one roof, increasing students’ ability to easily access everything from tutorial to health services, which in turn should improve graduation rates. The Baker-Polito Administration is very pleased we were able to authorize the funds for the renovation of this extremely important historic building that will improve the overall educational experience for STCC students.”

The Learning Commons will include administrative offices, student services, a student common with activity areas, the library, the campus bookstore, tutoring and social spaces, and health center, and much more. The new facility is named after former STCC President Ira H. Rubenzahl, who collaborated with the Commonwealth on his vision for the renovation of Building 19 into a modern, energy efficient Learning Commons. He retired in 2016.

The plan to renovate Building 19 commenced after a space needs assessment found that STCC is



Left to right: State Sen. James T. Welch, STCC Student Trustee Karolyn M. Burgos-Toribio, Mayor Domenic Sarno, STCC Board of Trustees Chairman Christopher Johnson, STCC President John B. Cook, Retired STCC President Ira H. Rubenzahl, State Rep. Bud L. Williams, and Gov. Charlie Baker.

Photos by Chris Marion for STCC

sorely lacking in student-focused spaces. Critical student resources and services were scattered throughout campus.

The 764-foot-long, 55-foot-wide structure was constructed between 1847 and 1863 and originally used to store gun-barrel stocks for the Springfield Armory, which was closed by Congress in 1968 and is listed as a National Historic Landmark. Building 19 is part of the National Register of Historic Places.

If the building were turned on its side, it would exceed the height of the 749-foot-tall Prudential Tower in Boston.

In most locations, existing masonry, structure and ceilings remain exposed. New landscaping provides an outdoor gathering space for staff and students, increases pedestrian safety and connects Building 19 with Buildings 17, 13 and 2.

In an effort to reduce energy costs and reduce emissions by state facilities, Massachusetts’ LEED Plus standard requires all state buildings larger than 20,000 square feet to achieve LEED certification as well as meet energy performance that is 20 percent better than the existing Massachusetts energy code. LEED certification, which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a certification program for new building projects.

Building 19 will achieve the Silver level of LEED certification and is currently pushing into the Gold criteria numbers. A final LEED certification level will be determined at a later date.

The environmental implications of the site have been carefully considered:

- No potable water is being used to irrigate the landscaping.
- All roof rainwater runoff from the building will be directed through downspouts and channeled into granite runnels along the bottom of the building.
- The architectural team created a six-foot-deep rain garden that extends along the length of the south façade to divert runoff from the combined storm and sewer drainage system.
- Rainwater will be collected into adjacent rain gardens and filtered

naturally by plantings and percolate into the soil, recharging groundwater.

- All parking lot rainwater runoff will be captured by rain gardens located in the parking islands.
- Runoff will be infiltrated by the rain garden and used to replenish groundwater supplies. All selected rain garden plants are native and tolerate both waterlogging and drought.
- Thirty-three percent of the site contains vegetated space.

The interior of the building also includes a number of sustainability features:

- The project has achieved a 30 percent water-use reduction through the selection of efficient water fixtures.
- The project has carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) monitors in all densely occupied spaces to ensure that the ventilation system maintains the design requirements. The monitors have an alert to indicate when the CO<sub>2</sub> levels get too high.
- The building is equipped with new heating, cooling and lighting controls.

At least 50 percent of the new wood in the building is Forest Stewardship Council certified, which ensure that the wood products have come from third-party-certified forests that comply with the council’s principles and criteria.