

Central Oregon Community College is making big changes to its Redmond campus by expanding some spaces and using sheep to clear weeds in others.

The college is preparing for a \$8 million renovation and expansion of its manufacturing and applied technology building.

That work is currently out to bid and the project is expected to be finished and ready for students by March 2027, said Amy Ward, director of COCC Redmond. New classrooms, work spaces and exterior storage will be added to what is already one of the larger buildings on the the Redmond campus.

The project will use \$4 million granted by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, which the Legislature approved last year. COCC will match that with \$4 million from its own capital projects fund.

"It's a big project," said Ward. "It's a great opportunity to serve our community and to help students to be ready to be employable in some really rewarding and academic careers," Ward said.

The project also plans on adding new equipment to the building, with which students can learn machining, welding, 3D modeling and designing. Ward said with new equipment, the curriculum will transition from a self-paced program to an in-person delivery method.

Ward doesn't know if students need to be relocated during construction but is brainstorming locations if that's the case.

New equipment specifics are to be determined. The curriculum is still being revised and updated, Ward said.

COCC is working with an architect to design the remodel and expansion. Ward said they'll use input from stakeholders and faculty to determine the final design.

"Our existing facility space limits our ability to meet the need of the local employers," Ward said. "We want to bring in new equipment to have opportunities to expand and update our curriculum and to train more students."

COCC also plans to offer new sections to entry-level courses when the new facility opens. Ward said it's estimated to double first-year enrollment and retain more second-year students.

#### Sheep clear weeds

More than 60 sheep arrived at Central Oregon Community College's Redmond campus on Sept. 1 to remove weeds and invasive plants on a little more than 3 acres near the college's solar array.

They cleared up the weeds in about a week.

The sheep are Dorper sheep from Martin Ranch in Terrebonne. Ranch owner Scott Martin and COCC **Sustainability** Coordinator Noelle Copley partnered with United Agrivoltaics, a firm that promotes sheep grazing around solar farms.

"We're always looking for ways to reduce our ecological footprint, reduce carbon emissions, and overall, just lessen our impact on the planet," said Lucas Alberg, COCC's director of marketing and public relations.

The sheep are a more sustainable way to remove weeds and are ore safe for the expensive machinery on site. Additionally, there is no loud noise interfering with student learning and the steady bleat of the sheep brings a sense of tranquility to campus, Alberg said.

The sheep are cleaning the area around the Redmond Solar Array, another initiative to make COCC eco-friendly. The 3.19 acres consists of 1,500 SolarWorld panels and inverters that directly supply the college with electricity.

According to Alberg, COCC saved more than 426 trees and 886,000 pounds of carbon offset through its solar usage. The solar array offsets nearly 80% of the campus's electrical consumption.

"It's a pretty neat thing," Alberg said.

The vegetation reaches up to the sheep's shoulders, so it was time to do some weed management to make the area cleaner and reduce the risk of fire. The weeds don't interfere with the solar array, but could cause concern if they continued growing.

The dorper sheep have a similar diet to goats. Alberg said and will "pretty much eat everything."

The COCC has never done a project like this before but Ward said the sheep will be back this spring. They will come twice a year from now on to maintain weeds.

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