

Thomas College to unveil auditorium

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By Mike Laberge, Of the NEWS Staff

WATERVILLE — Thomas College this evening will dedicate a \$1.7 million auditorium and classroom complex that will allow students and visitors to tap into the Internet without leaving their seats.

The Laurette Ayotte Auditorium will offer 301 seats, nearly one-third of them wired for laptop computers.

College officials are calling the facility one of the most advanced in the Northeast, offering technology that will allow for interactive presentations using a variety of media, including the Internet.

The complex will give the business college something it has sorely lacked since it was founded in Waterville more than a century ago: a first-class space for lectures, conferences, entertainment and other special events.

Thomas officials hope the auditorium will become a gem for the Kennebec River valley region, helping to promote the college as a resource for Maine businesses.

“They’ll be able to put together presentations that are more sophisticated than what they were able to do before,” said Beth Gibbs, the college’s vice president for financial affairs.

The auditorium is named for the mother of Conrad Ayotte of Manchester, an alumnus and chairman of the college’s board of trustees. She raised 12 children alone after her husband died, and she sent all of them on to higher education.

Four are Thomas College graduates.

For the college, the auditorium represents the crowning achievement of its first-ever capital campaign.

The three-year effort has raised more than \$2 million to renovate the student center, create three new ball fields and develop the auditorium.

The new complex offers, among other things:

- Ninety seats in the auditorium fitted with data ports for laptop computers, allowing users to tap into the college’s computer network, library or the Internet.
- Two adjoining classrooms with 70 electrical and data ports for laptop computers and Internet access. The classrooms will include a video system connected to the campus cable network.
- A central control system that will allow auditorium lecturers to give complex multimedia presentations. The stage offers a 16-by-16 foot screen and a projector that can transmit images from a computer, the Internet or a video disc.
- Audiovisual feeds to the outside that will allow television crews to record and televise auditorium events.

Chris Rhoda, the college’s director of information technology, said the interactive nature of the auditorium makes it one of the most sophisticated in the state, if not the Northeast region.

“Not only can the presenter tap into the data here, so can the audience, which is a fairly unique feature,” Rhoda said.

“We’ve designed [the complex] so that whatever new technology comes along in the next five to 10 years, we can easily plug that in,” he said.

The grand opening celebration of the Laurette Ayotte Auditorium is planned for 5-8 p.m. today at the college’s Waterville campus. The dedication is set for 6:30 p.m.