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Thomas to dedicate \$1.7M auditorium

By JONATHAN HUMPHREY, Staff Writer

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WATERVILLE — Thomas College will unveil the latest addition to its campus Friday — a \$1.7 million multimedia auditorium that college officials are calling the most advanced in the Northeast, if not the nation.

The Laurette Ayotte Auditorium and classroom complex will be dedicated Friday at a grand opening ceremony beginning at 5 p.m.

Named for the mother of Conrad L. Ayotte, chairman of the school's board of trustees, the 10,300-square-foot facility contains a 301-seat auditorium, two classrooms that can be joined by raising a partition, technical support rooms, and a spacious, well-lit lobby with an enormous skylight.

"There is nothing like this anywhere else," Thomas spokesman Mark Tardif said. "It is one-of-a-kind."

The new auditorium is packed with the latest technology and design innovations and built to host conferences, lectures, entertainment, classes, and other events, according to Beth Gibbs, vice president for financial affairs,

Its features include:

- Ninety of the seats in the auditorium are fitted with data ports for laptop computers, enabling users to tap directly into the college's information network, library, or the Internet. Power outlets are also provided.
- The stage is equipped with remote controls to run 95 percent of the audiovisual features in the auditorium, enabling a lecturer to single-handedly carry off complicated multimedia presentations.
- The auditorium is wired for advanced sound presentation, with superior acoustics and a dynamic speaker layout.
- The stage includes an enormous, retractable movie screen and a projector capable of projecting images from a computer, the Internet, television, videocassette, or DVD disc.
- The podium is fitted with computer data ports and other features to allow speakers to use and share computer information.
- The auditorium boasts audiovisual feeds leading to the exterior of the building that



Staff photo by DAVID LEAMING
Kevin Johnson, of Architectural Skylight Co., Inc., caulks glass Monday on the dome above Laurette Auditorium at Thomas College.

will make it easier for television crews to film and broadcast indoor events, and the facility is also tied directly into the college's cable network so performances or lectures can be broadcast live.

The two classrooms in the building include desktop computer data ports, video display terminals, and other features that will put them in demand among professors, according to Bert Audette in the college's information technology department.

The entire building has been flexibly designed to handle as many functions and tasks as possible, Gibbs said.

"The needs of students are changing, and this facility is designed to meet those needs," Gibbs said. "We've designed it to be multi-use."

Using the features in the auditorium, a speaker could look up a magazine article in the college's electronic library to answer a question in mid-lecture, and then not only refer to it, but display it and any accompanying images to the entire audience, college officials said.

Such capabilities are unprecedented in the region, making the auditorium a bonus not only for Thomas, but for Central Maine as it strives to attract high-tech businesses to the area, Gibbs said.

Eventually, real-time digital video feeds from the two new classrooms will be available to students in their dormitory rooms on days when they are sick or otherwise unable to attend classes, Audette said.

Ayotte Auditorium was built as the result of the first major capital campaign in the college's history, including substantial support from the Ayotte family.

Conrad Ayotte is one of Laurette M. Ayotte's 12 children — all of whom collected a college degree despite her husband's early death. Four of those children graduated from Thomas.

Together, Laurette Ayotte's children chose to dedicate their contribution to her. Despite her husband's death, Laurette Ayotte taught school after her youngest child was of school age. She drilled into her children the attitude that a college education is not optional.