

Career center could be national model

By Patty Brant

It has been said that Immokalee is the heart of Collier County's future workforce. If that's true, the Collier County School District is in the midst of planning a large part of that future with an innovative education center currently known as the Immokalee Career Center.

The proposed center will be located by Immokalee High School and will provide for both high school students and adults. It is expected to open for the 2008-09 school year.

Dorin Oxender, currently at Bethune, has been chosen as the principal for this new school. Mr. Oxender has worked at Immokalee schools for 11 years in various capacities: as a vocational teacher, department chairman, dean and assistant principal at Immokalee High School and currently at Bethune. He holds a degree in business administration, is certified in business education, diversified career technology, is a teacher/coordinator of cooperative education and a teacher/coordinator of work experience programs. In addition, he holds a masters' in educational leadership.



Collier County Commissioner Jim Coletta touches base with Dorin Oxender, who has been chosen as the first principal of the proposed Immokalee Career Center. The two spoke during a recent tour of the Immokalee area by the Economic Development Council. Immokalee Bulletin/Patty Brant

Mr. Oxender spoke to members of a recent Immokalee area tour put on by the Collier County Economic Development Council. He said the high school students will be able to walk over to the career center from their regular classes to take advantage of career-oriented training. The main focus at the center will be on construction and health care training, he said. Proposed courses include: carpentry, drafting, auto technology, certified nursing assistant, patient care technology, licensed practical nursing, computer engineering, information technology, business education, cosmetology, culinary arts and early childhood education. Proposed adult classes also include ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and GED preparation.

There will be day and evening classes, with weekend classes for adults in apprenticeship training, such as for the electrical, plumbing, heating/air conditioning and masonry industries.

One of the unique facts of this school, Mr. Oxender points out, will be actual storefronts giving students real-world experience. Plans include a bakery restaurant, hair salon, auto mechanic and even a practicing medical office where students can gain experience in clinical work. They also hope to have a drive through bank on campus. The bank and medical offices would be private, while the other businesses would be owned by the school district, with proceeds from those businesses going to support the individual program.

The career center will be different from the Lorenzo Walker Technology Center because it will be set up as an actual retail business area. It will be a "fresher approach," he said, intended to "dress up" the learning experience and be user friendly. The skills learned in this setting will mimic the real world, he pointed out.

Career center will seek accreditation through the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education. Mr. Oxender hopes that in ten years the career center will become a national model for career education.

He adds, "A high school education is step number one. We know that many local students will not go on to college so this center will offer job-specific training in high wage fields."