



Cash-strapped college pledges no layoffs

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By: Rebecca Unger, Hi-Desert Star

JOSHUA TREE — Copper Mountain College trustees approved a budget with a \$121,777 shortfall and \$900,000 in reserves Thursday, Sept. 27.

The college expects to take in \$3 million in revenues and to spend \$3.1 million next year.

The gap between revenues and expenses closed considerably from the \$642,376 projected in a draft released June 21.

“We’re not going to have any layoffs,” Superintendent Roger Wagner assured the trustees and staff. “We’ve got too many backup plans.”

Speaking from his desk after the meeting, Wagner enumerated some coping strategies that will strengthen his commitment to employees.

“We will probably defer some technology plans, such as transitioning to ‘the cloud,’ which will save several hundreds of thousands of dollars,” Wagner said.

While some facility upgrades will be deferred, Wagner is adamant about keeping one on the table.

“We will continue our plans to turn the temporary library into a student center,” he said. “It’s a \$500,000 project, but we can work with the Foundation on a major gift campaign.”

The college can also get creative with its hours of operation.

“We will take a second look at course management, and allocate resources based on trends for peak days and times. For instance, Tuesday afternoons we see the greatest demand by students, so we would schedule high-demand classes then to make sure they’re filled to capacity,” Wagner explained. “Fridays are not exactly popular with students, so perhaps a four-day, 10-hour day or a half-day on Friday would work.”

The campus may test a week of four 10-hour days during the summer. Closing the campus Fridays could bring big savings on utilities.

“We have the greatest employees, and we’re not going to let this budget deficit impact them,” Wagner reaffirmed. “They have already stated their willingness to open their union contracts and see where they can help us. I know that 99 percent of colleges wouldn’t see that.”

The college has not provided cost of living increases for staff since 2007-08.

The college’s commitment extends to the community’s students.

“We’re already taking on more than we can afford by letting our enrollment exceed the enrollment cap,” Wagner pointed out.

Community colleges rely heavily on state funding that is apportioned according to enrollment of full time equivalent students, but is capped regardless of the actual number of full-time students. For Copper Mountain College, the cap is at 1,537, but historically enrollments have exceeded that figure.

Last year, the 100 unfunded full-time student equivalents equaled \$456,482.

The state will also be a looming presence on election day, Nov. 6, with competing tax initiatives Proposition 30 and 38.

“I think there’s a sense that if Prop. 30 passes, the colleges will get a lot more money,” Wagner said as he presented the item at Thursday’s meeting. “The reality is it will prevent trigger cuts. If it fails, it will cost us \$407,000 on top of the 12 percent cut we’ve taken since 2008, on top of \$192,000 raise to our health care costs. It adds up to a lot of money.”

The trustees voted to support Proposition 30.

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