Cabrillo hosts Solari opening

Solari Green Technology Center opened Friday on Cabrillo College’s Watsonville campus.

DEMONSTRATIONS HIGHLIGHT BUILDING’S ENERGY-EFFICIENT FEATURES

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WATSONVILLE — With a full load of classes this semester, 11-year-old Alejandro Cerda is more than halfway through the coursework that will lead him to career as a construction project manager.

The skills he’s learning now will give him the knowledge that’s necessary to direct his future career to the highest professional standards—a quality he sees as nearly lacking in today’s construction industry.

Cerda was among the roughly 100 students, faculty staff and local officials who attended the grand opening of the 16,000-square-foot Solar Green Technology Center. A ribbon-cutting ceremony and tour kicked off during the dedication ceremony. Between the Apts and Watsonville campuses, 400 students are enrolled in the construction and energy management programs, with half of them now enrolled in the two-year courses at the Solari Center, said Claud Mortazavi, an instructor and the program’s chair.

The event drew a spate of speakers representing the county and the college, as well as a special appearance by Rose Ann Woolpert, a mechanical engineering professor at UC Santa Cruz, and other campus leaders.

"We’re very excited about the energy, enthusiasm, and potential of this program," Woolpert said. "It’s really a remarkable opportunity to expose students to opportunities in the world of sustainable energy and renewable technologies." The center will serve as the engine that moves the programs to providing research opportunities for local jobs in energy conservation, sustainability, and development.

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sustainable design and other green-related fields. Bryan Wool, deputy superintendent for the county Office of Education, noted that the specialized training offered at facilities such as the Solar Center tend to pay more than those without any career technical education courses under their belts, and they tend to move up the ranks faster.

Funding for the $8.5 million project came from various sources, including a federal grant, local bonds, and private donations. The building’s namesakes, Mary Solari and her late husband, Dick, also donated $220,000 to create a endowed fund to support the center.

After the remarks, Solari stood beside the group in an outdoor courtyard, then raised a ceremonial shovel from "off" to "on." Second-year architecture student Adam Thompson was out of a small fountain sitting at her feet, symbolizing the power of a nearby matrix of solar panels to bring the building to life.

Solar panels are among the many energy-saving features of the building, which officials say was built to the highest environmental standard for construction. Solar energy also partially heats the water, and the building itself is designed to reduce air and water pollution.

Solari Center President Victor King, lower right, welcomes guests to the grand opening of the Solar Green Technology Center on Cabrillo’s Watsonville campus Friday.