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HCC plans to open branch at former Fort Ritchie Army base

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Hagerstown Community College plans to open a branch at the former Fort Ritchie U.S. Army base by March 2008, HCC President Guy Altieri said Wednesday.

The branch will offer for-credit, general studies classes and will serve as a training center for businesses that move into the former base that is being redeveloped with homes, offices and shops.

HCC expects 70 to 120 students to enroll at the Fort Ritchie campus next spring.

Altieri said he hopes to see enrollment triple as homes are built on the property.

"This campus is going to expand with the community and will cater to their needs," Altieri said.

HCC will add noncredit, continuing education courses to the campus to meet the needs of businesses that relocate to the former base, Altieri said.

In addition, Altieri said he hopes to add programs for local residents with special interests, like courses in flower arranging or conversational language classes.

Rich Rook, executive director of PenMar Development Corp., which is managing Fort Ritchie, said the new campus fits perfectly with his company's mission to bring economic development to the property.

"Anything that brings people in is a positive thing. And it's really going to benefit the entire community," Rook said.

PenMar agreed to pay more than \$60,000 to renovate the former religious education building on the property to make room for the branch.

The college's board of trustees voted Tuesday to approve the campus and likely will sign a lease next week with Corporate Office Properties Trust, the property's developer.

The branch will include three classrooms, a computer lab and office space.

HCC operated a branch campus at Fort Ritchie from 1969 to 1997 when the property was used as an Army base.

Fort Ritchie was closed in 1998 as part of the federal Base Realignment and Closure program.

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