

Students laud features in MCC's newly renovated **Kenneth J. Smith Building**

By Renae Gould

Marilyn Darling ran her own science experiment at home using lessons she learned at Montcalm Community College, and the results surprised her.

Darling is enrolled in Microbiology class this spring, taught by Biology Instructor Dr. Michelle Gibson in a lab in the newly renovated Kenneth J. Smith Building on the college's Sidney campus. Through the \$5 million building renovation, which was completed in January, students and instructors enjoy leading-edge facilities and equipment for course delivery.

As part of their lab activities, students use a nutrient agar to grow bacteria in petri dishes and analyze the microorganisms under microscopes.

Darling said she swabbed the kitchen counter of her Stanton-area home after her sister prepared a cake to bake. Darling thought the surface would be relatively clean since it was wiped down before and during the process.

"It was gross how much bacteria was on it," she said.

It's not an experience she would have had if not for her enrollment at MCC.

Elizabeth Underhill, of Lakeview, came to MCC from a homeschool environment. She said the technology and access to equipment in the new facility is exciting for her because she has not had access to these tools in the past.

"I like looking at microbes under the microscopes," Underhill said. "We never had that stuff available. I am learning how to use them properly."

Elizabeth's sister, Hannah Underhill, of Lakeview, also enjoys using the microscopes.



"It's fascinating to see more detail in the different types of bacteria and how they grow."

– Hannah Underhill

"It's fascinating to see more detail in the different types of bacteria and how they grow," she said.

Originally built in 1966 and last updated in 1999, the Smith Building is home to half of the college's instructional space on its Sidney campus. It features specialized classrooms, advanced labs and inviting student spaces to give MCC's students top-class STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) learning experiences. Home to the college's nursing, allied health and science offerings, this facility boasts high-tech science and nursing simulation tools, lab equipment, high-speed Internet access and more.

Christine Willett, of Howard City, said the new technology makes it easier for her to learn.

"I like the TVs," Willett said of large monitors mounted at the end of each of the work stations in the science lab. "It's easier for me to see things. When you have something right in front of you that you can see, you can see the teacher's notes, instead of looking at it on your laptop."

Destiney Covey, of Stanwood, has been attending MCC since 2019, so she has seen how much the Smith Building has changed.

"This building has changed a lot," Covey said. "It's a lot newer and safer. It's warmer. There is better Internet and the computers work better now. The microscopes are new and you can see more."

Along with state-of-the-art technology, the building has plenty of inviting spaces for studying and relaxing.

"Before, the study spaces were really crowded," said Carly Giessman, of Greenville. "Now you can find your own spot in the smaller study rooms."

Leiah Matthes, of Vestaburg, also enjoys the new student spaces.

"The extra study areas are nice," Matthes said. "I'm a quiet study person and it's nice to be able to find an area that's quiet and not occupied already. Also, the extra outlets and options to charge your computer or phone are nice."

Tinessa Armock, of Stanton, likes the versatility of the new study areas.

"They're secluded," Armock said. "You can have one-on-one sessions, but there are also sections where you can have larger groups."

Wyatt Cook, of Edmore, likes some of the updated areas in the classrooms.

"The whiteboard cupboards are really nice," he said. "I also love the giant glass window in the corner of the building."



Marilyn Darling, of Stanton, appreciates the hands-on learning environment in the Microbiology class she is enrolled in at Montcalm Community College this semester. The class is taught by Biology Instructor Dr. Michelle Gibson in a lab in the newly renovated Kenneth J. Smith Building on the college's Sidney campus.

The Smith Building project is part of the college's \$7 million "Transforming Lives, Empowering People" campaign, which aims to develop facilities and programs to help students gain access and be successful during their journey at MCC and beyond.

In addition to the Smith Building renovation, other campaign initiatives include:

- \$500,000 toward a STEM Program Development and Technology Fund for equipment, technology and curriculum to support teaching and learning.
- \$500,000 toward First-Generation Scholarships to benefit students who are the first in their family to go to college.
- \$250,000 toward Mid-Career Scholarships to benefit middle-income students who do not qualify for financial aid, but also do not have the means to pay cash for college.
- \$450,000 toward Program-Specific Scholarships to benefit students in specific program pathways.
- \$300,000 toward the MCC Express Conductor Program to provide a point of contact (conductor) to work with students from their first point of contact with the college to the time they enter classes and throughout their time at MCC. ■

For more information

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