New home for science at CCBC Catonsville

By Heather Norris • Contact Reporter
Catonsville Times

SEPTEMBER 25, 2015, 2:50 PM

The lobby of the Community College of Baltimore County at Catonsville's new STEM building was packed Thursday morning as school and local officials gathered to formally open the $39.7 million Mathematics and Science Hall.

"It really is a very fine building," CCBC President Sandra Kurtinitis said of the hall, which she described as "90,000 square feet of just aesthetic and functional space."

County Executive Kevin Kamenetz, Cathy Engers, aide to District 1 County Councilman Tom Quirk, and Dels. Adrienne Jones and Pat Young, both of whom represent portions of western Baltimore County, were on hand to help cut the ribbon on the space, which began hosting classes at the start of the fall semester.

The building houses the school's math and science departments, along with other classes that require too large a
space to be held in other campus buildings. It combines the school's former library building, which has sat largely vacant for about six years, since the library moved to an updated facility, with a large addition.

The former math and science building, which was one of the first building's on the college's campus, will be renovated for future use by another department, school officials said.

"Fifty is not a bad age for a person," Kurtinitis said to the group of college trustees, contractors, faculty and others gathered for the ceremony. "But it's a terrible age for a building."

With 50 percent more labs and upgraded equipment, the new facility will ensure that students who graduate from CCBC are prepared for the kinds of environments they will see as they move to a four-year university or enter the workforce, said Jean Ashby, dean of CCBC's School of Mathematics and Science.

"It's really to just meet the needs of the students," Ashby said before the ceremony.

Before construction began, the building's architect, GWWO, Inc./Architects, and school officials spent two years planning the facility, she said. In the end, they modeled the space after layouts used by many universities and commonly found at local businesses.

Enrollment in science programs, such as biology, has been increasing, Ashby said, and the new work space will better accommodate students in those programs.

The Catonsville campus of CCBC has an enrollment of about 11,300 in its School of Mathematics and Sciences, she said. More then 2,000 Catonsville students will take biology courses this year while about 6,000 will take a math course. Others enroll in courses in physical sciences, such as chemistry, she said.

Ashby said she expects the new building could encourage more students to consider math and science courses.

The first Friday on which classes began, she heard a student touring the halls of the new space, she said.

"He was hooting and hollering, screaming like a little girl," she said. The student, who was enrolled in one science class, said he was going to have to sign up for more after seeing the new building.

"I just thought that was neat," Ashby said.

For CCBC student Dawn Gurmu, who already was enrolled as a biology major when the building opened this school year, the new labs and work spaces are encouragement that she's prepared for her future plans to attend medical school after she finished at CCBC, she told the ceremony attendees.

"The labs and classrooms are absolutely amazing," she said, adding that they rival any of the labs she's seen at four-year institutions.