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Friday, November 1st, 2024

RCC bond ballot measure would expand job training opportunities

By Vickie Aldous of the Daily Courier

Rogue Community College is asking voters to approve a measure that would allow for the expansion of job training programs, from EMT to welder.

The RCC District encompasses both Josephine and Jackson counties.

If the bond measure passes on Nov. 5, Josephine County residents would go from paying 4 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value to paying 13 cents.

For a home assessed at \$226,000 — the average in Josephine County — the measure's passage would increase a property tax bill by \$20.34 per year.

Jackson County residents, who are already paying a 13-cent rate, would continue to pay that amount if the measure passes. If the measure fails, their taxes would drop to a 4-cent rate as a previous 9 cent Jackson County-only bond expires.

The Rogue Valley and nation face shortages of trained workers in fields like commercial truck driving, emergency medical services, welding, automotive technology and more, according to RCC.

RCC President Randy Weber said the college examines economic data and consults with local industry experts to create training programs for in-demand careers.

"An economy thrives when you have a skilled workforce," he said.

Those workers help power existing companies. Businesses interested in starting up or relocating to the Rogue Valley also need skilled employees, Weber said.

Students who take RCC's career classes improve their earning power, benefiting themselves and their families, Weber said.

Certified nursing assistants, for example, can double their income by taking courses to advance up the nursing career ladder, he said.

"We see ourselves as workforce providers for our region. We look forward to continuing to be a solution for workforce training needs," he said. "So many Southern Oregon citizens say, 'I want a better life.' But they're not sure how to do that. The advice they get too is, 'Go to RCC.'"

RCC said it doesn't have enough space to meet the demand for career training programs.

The bond measure would raise \$60 million, and the state of Oregon would kick in another \$15 million, according to RCC.

Improvements at RCC's campus in Grants Pass would include a new transportation technology center where students could learn a variety of automotive skills, including handling diesel and electric vehicle technology.

The college would renovate an existing building to expand industrial technology programs, including welding, hydraulics, drafting, design and machine operation.

Weber said welding is one of RCC's fast-growing programs, with enrollment doubling across the district.

RCC would add an emergency medical services program in Grants Pass, setting students up for jobs like emergency medical technician, or EMT.

"The programs that are identified are areas where we've seen significant growth and where there will be future demand for those jobs," Weber said.

White City campus improvements would include a new commercial truck driver training facility, new automotive and diesel programs, and upgrades to support apprenticeships in welding and other fields.

Among other improvements, the Medford campus would get a new student success center.

Other improvements for the RCC district would include safety and security upgrades, improved accessibility for people with disabilities, and better equipment, classrooms and labs.

A variety of businesses in health care, agriculture, trucking, aviation and other industries are urging voters to support the funding measure.

Reach reporter Vickie Aldous at 541-474-3813 or valdous@thedailycourier.com..

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