

# BANGOR DAILY NEWS

## Community college finalizes transfer of land, clearing way for more students, new programs

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BRUNSWICK, Maine — The transfer of former Navy property to the Southern Maine Community College midcoast campus was finalized Monday morning, clearing the way for the creation of new programs designed to meet the needs of Maine's work force.

Maine Community College System President John Fitzsimmons said he signed documents finalizing the transfers Monday morning and intended to make a formal announcement to the system's board of trustees on Wednesday.

"This has been more than two years in the making," said Fitzsimmons in a telephone interview. "It's official now that it's our property."

In all, the Navy has turned over some \$78 million worth of buildings and 22 acres of land at the former Brunswick Naval Air Station to the community college system. Navy operations at the airfield have been decreasing for the past few years because of a 2005 decision to close it. The final Navy entities left the base earlier this year. BNAS was the last active-duty Department of Defense airfield in the northeastern United States and at its height was home to five active-duty squadrons and two reserve squadrons.

SMCC's midcoast campus is already home to about [100 students who started classes there this fall](#), but Fitzsimmons said the new land and buildings will allow the system to serve up to 2,500 students at the former air base, which is now known as Brunswick Landing.

In July of this year, the Navy turned over two buildings — a hotel-like structure that was the BNAS Bachelor Officers Quarters and a nearby structure known as Building 150. Monday's transfer was for three more nearby buildings which will house a new first-of-its-kind composites technology program and the Maine Advanced Technology & Engineering Center. By creating Maine's first pre-engineering program, which will allow students to study engineering for two years before transferring to the university system for further study, the community college system hopes to pull Maine from its 49th-in-the-nation rank for the number of engineers in the state.

The college also intends to expand its offerings in the area of heavy equipment maintenance and operations, which will be taught in a building formerly used by Navy pilots to train on a flight simulator of a P-3 Orion reconnaissance aircraft. Among other new or expanded programs offered at the Brunswick site are multiaxis machining and nursing. Between now and next fall, the buildings will be converted for educational use.

"These are magnificent buildings and they are in great shape," said Fitzsimmons. "It already looks like it was built to be a small college. We're very fortunate and it's going to be a wonderful new home."

Fitzsimmons said the system's trustees have already approved the new programs and the transfer of land and buildings.

The Navy transferred the property to the college at a cost of \$1 and Maine voters approved a bond in June 2010 for \$4.7 million to convert the buildings for education use.

Southern Maine Community College, which oversees the Brunswick campus, also has campuses in South Portland and Bath. SMCC already ranks as Maine's third-largest college behind the University of Maine at Orono and University of Southern Maine with about 7,200 students. Since 2001, enrollment at SMCC's facilities has grown by 146 percent, but that number will jump by more than 2,000 students in the next few years. Fitzsimmons said this fall, the community college system was forced to turn away more than 4,000 qualified students because of lack of space and resources such as professors and instructors.

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