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MSCC Receives \$784,010 Hazard Mitigation Grant for ‘Safe Room’

Mid-South Community College has been awarded \$784,010 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to construct a “safe room” designed to protect students, employees and local residents from severe wind and tornadoes.

MSCC will “match” the grant with \$261,336 of its own financial resources to take the overall project expense to \$1,045,346. The safe room will include nearly 10,000 square feet and will be able to accommodate almost 2,000 people. The facility size is driven by the number of people who can reach it within 10 minutes of a severe weather notification.

The Hazard Mitigation staff at FEMA, Region VI, recently reviewed and approved MSCC’s grant proposal for a free-standing structure on the South Campus. The State of Arkansas Department of Emergency Management notified the College that funds have been obligated through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).

HMGP provides funding for implementation of long-term hazard mitigation measures with a goal of reducing the loss of life and property due to natural disasters.

“Mid-South Community College believes it is vitally important not only to provide a safe environment for education but also to promote confidence within the community about the safety and security of their students and citizens,” said Dr. Glen Fenter, MSCC president.

“Shelters of this design provide peace of mind to college officials, parents and the general public and, more importantly, protect students, children, and the elderly who live in close proximity to the College.”

The safe room, which will take approximately a year to build, will be technologically connected to the area’s warning systems so that when an alarm is sounded, whether day or night, the facility lights will come on and the doors will open automatically.

“Anyone in the area can seek shelter in the building and be protected from the elements,” Dr. Fenter said. “The safe room is designed to withstand all sorts of weather conditions.”

When the shelter is not needed to protect students, employees, and area residents from severe weather, MSCC will use it as a multipurpose building. It will likely include some physical education/wellness equipment and will serve as a gathering place for community events.

“The facility will provide us with some great flexibility,” Dr. Fenter said.

The building will be capable of seating 700-800 people with moveable chairs and tables for larger events. It could also become the cornerstone of additional construction on the College’s South Campus.

“We are certainly interested in growing the building as we find the resources,” Dr. Fenter said. “It has been designed in such a way that it can be expanded to the east, which would put us in a position, as we find more money, to grow this into the Wellness Center that we’ve always talked about having. This will certainly give us the first stages of that center fairly quickly.”

Established by executive order in 1979, FEMA has dedicated itself to helping communities nationwide prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural and manmade disasters. Its overall mission is to reduce the loss of life and property and protect communities nationwide from all hazards.