

New training center on Schedule

By John Bartlett

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MEADVILLE -- The skeletal steelwork at the rear of the Bessemer Street complex will soon be the Precision Manufacturing Institute's new center.

Construction was delayed slightly as a complex financing package was finalized, but the project is now on schedule, PMI Executive Director Jerry Knight said.

"It's moving pretty good. Weather wise, it's been perfect for construction and they've done a good job keeping up the schedule even though we were slow on the closing because of final costs," Knight said. "We might be a little bit ahead. Honestly, I'd like to move in in March."

The contract completion date is June.

Billed as a renovation of the rear portion of the main building in the Bessemer Street Complex owned by the Meadville Area Industrial Commission, at this stage of construction it's become clear that it's really a new building. About all that will remain of the original structure is the brick veneer of one wall.

"Basically, it is a new building, but we are not going outside the original footprint, but up a foot and half," Knight said.

The 32,000-square-foot facility will be about triple the size of PMI's training center, now located at the Crawford County Industrial Park.

"We are maxed out space wise," Knight said of the current center. "I have equipment suppliers that want to send equipment and I don't have the space. We are in a holding pattern until we are in the new facility."

PMI has succeeded in getting equipment manufacturers to place their newest manufacturing technology at the center free of charge in order to showcase it for industry. In turn, PMI students learn on the latest equipment.

Total construction costs for the new facility now stands at \$4.2 million. When originally proposed, the project was estimated at \$2.3 million. When PMI went out for bid, the estimate stood at \$3.7 million. When bids came in higher, the organization scrambled to find the additional money.

"The state has been a tremendous help," Knight said. "There will be a few more announcements state officials will be making at some point."

The project might have stalled if not for the support of National City Bank, First National Bank and Citizens Bank, which provided additional bridge financing, he said.

"It was truly a community banking effort," Knight said.

Knight said this summer has proven especially busy for PMI. "We are running one of the largest first-step training programs in three years," Knight said. "I think we will do extremely well this year. It's a combination of the employment opportunities that are out there right now and second is the partnerships we have with Edinboro and Clarion (universities of Pennsylvania)."

The partnerships enable PMI students to work toward associate and bachelor degrees at the two state schools. PMI has a particularly close relationship with Edinboro, which will become even closer -- including physically -- when it moves into its new facility. Edinboro University's new Meadville Center is also at the Bessemer Street Complex. Eventually a new building will be constructed joining the Edinboro Center and PMI.

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