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Many doors open with approval of research center

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Staff writer

Penn State Behrend Provost John Lilley let down his guard for a moment Thursday morning, pausing to savor the fulfillment of a 13-year goal.

"It's the happiest day of my professional life," Lilley said shortly after accepting a \$30 million check from Gov. Tom Ridge that will pay for the construction of the new Research and Economic Development Center at the edge of the Behrend campus.

Lilley has been working since 1987 to secure support and money for the center, which will expand Behrend's School of Business and School of Engineering and Engineering Technology.

Now that the center is a reality, though, Lilley will have few opportunities to leisurely enjoy the achievement. That's because Ridge's announcement kicks off a new phase of development for a college that has witnessed tremendous growth under Lilley's watch.

The most notable new project is a still-developing plan to create new on-campus housing, either as an addition to the recently built Ohio Hall or as the construction of a new building, Behrend officials said Thursday.

The new housing -- slated to open in time for the fall 2003 semester -- would allow Behrend to meet its goal of having half of its student population living on campus, Lilley said.

Behrend also is working to secure private funding to increase its classroom and faculty office space, he said.

What's more, Behrend officials still face the task of setting up the RED-C's new programs, including the creation of formal instruction in information sciences and technology programming and setting up new partnerships with private businesses and with the region's other higher education institutions.

All of the changes offer major challenges for a college that has seen its share of changes in recent years. Still, Lilley said he is both excited and encouraged about its future, especially in light of Thursday's announcement.

"This is just a dream come true," he said. "It's a powerful expression of what the future can bring."

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