

Valencia Poinciana campus opens smoothly

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By Ken Jackson

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On Monday, the first day of classes at Valencia College, perception turned into reality at the college's new jewel, the Poinciana campus.

After getting the land donated by Osceola County in 2014, the \$23 million to construct it from the state Legislature soon after and breaking ground in 2015, the dream of Valencia administrators, county officials and students on both sides of the Osceola/Polk county became real when the doors swung open to the three-story campus.

The first classes began at 7 a.m., but the main entrance, where the main administration, student services



news-gazette photo/ken jackson

Students at the new Valencia College Poinciana campus get their schedules and other information on Monday.

and the “Answer Center” — where students go to take care of scheduling, financial aid and other issues — was already bustling at 6:30 a.m., said Jennifer Robertson, the campus’ executive dean.

She would know — she was staffing the admin desk.

“I didn’t have anybody else available,” she said, still beaming with energy as Monday’s 11:30 a.m. classes were about to begin.

Order ran the day, as opposed to the chaos that could have been expected with new students coming to a new campus. Parking, for instance, was not an issue Monday morning.

“There were a lot of drop-offs,” said Kathleen Plinske, campus president for Poinciana, as well as Osceola and Lake Nona. “And when many students heard about the free Lynx bus pass when they registered, they got excited.”

While there’s still some dust and dirt outside, and some fixtures are just up on temporarily, classrooms were buzzing with students, the cafeteria was up and running, thanks to a free student welcome breakfast from 9 to 11 a.m., and the tutoring center was ready to go.

“I’m really pleased with how smoothly things have gone,” Robertson said. “There’s millions of little details we’re dealing with that are behind the scene, but we made it a priority for it to be right for students and faculty to get to their classes. Anything we did wrong at 7, we fixed by 8:30.”

Of the 2,200 students in an original database, 1,135 were registered for classes in Poinciana. Nearly all were eligible for a \$500 scholarship just for agreeing to be part of the first Poinciana students, \$1,500 for those in the culinary program.

Derick Mejia graduated from Haines City High School in May, but moved to Kissimmee over the summer — and still

wanted to come to the new campus. His class schedule, which kept him on campus into the evening, was the lock screen on his phone.

“Every time I passed this place I knew I wanted to go here,” he said while in the cafeteria.