



STAFF PHOTOS/JERREY ROBERTS

Gov. Charlie Baker talks Friday with members of the Holyoke Community College Diversity Board and their adviser, Terice Kelly, left, Liz Golen, Jose Perez, who is also a student senator, and Jasmine Kligenbeck while touring the Campus Center during its grand opening celebration.

HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Remade Campus Center shines

Governor joins students, staff, legislators in celebrating new HCC center at grand opening

By JACQUELYN VOGHEL
Staff Writer

HOLYOKE — When Maiv Lee-Ruiz started as a student at Holyoke Community College in the fall of 2016, the Campus Center was not a highlight of her tour.

“I remember following the student leader into Campus Center and thinking, ‘This place is dark,’” Lee-Ruiz said. Her tour guide was friendly, but “the halls were gloomy and felt like a cave.”

But speaking at the newly renovated Campus Center’s grand opening Friday afternoon, Lee-Ruiz described the updated space as “light,



El Centro, left, and Student Engagement are new additions to the Holyoke Community College Campus Center.

open and spacious.”

“Kind of like an Apple Store,” she added to laughter from the audi-

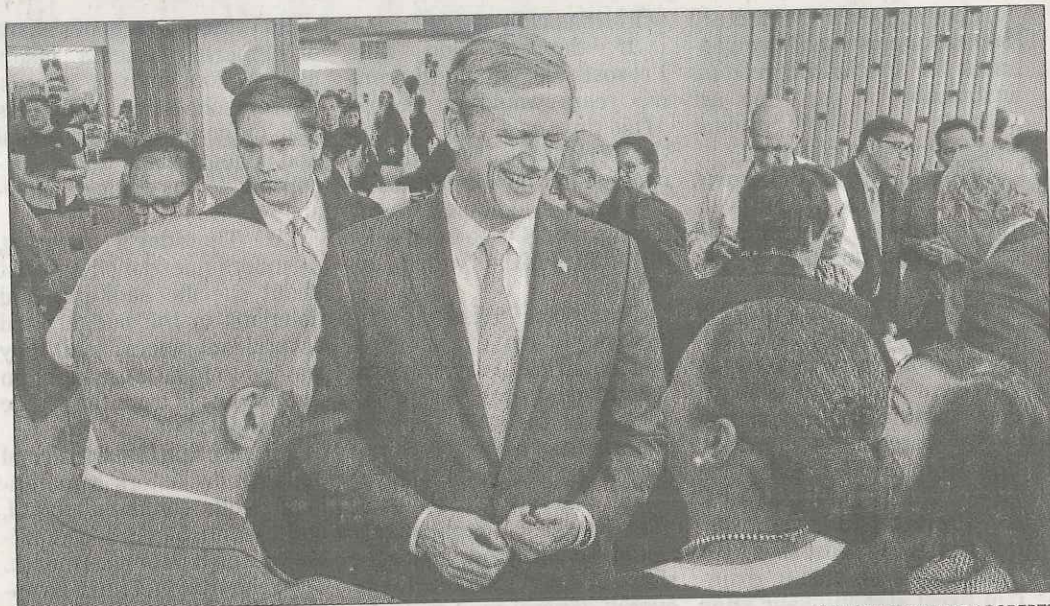
ence. Lee-Ruiz spoke before a crowd of faculty, staff, students, administrators, and local and state legisla-

tors to celebrate the opening, which came after two years of construction and decades of leaks and water damage.

Now, the space previously described as drab has pops of blue, green and orange coloring, open spaces and plentiful natural light from large windows that span an entire length of one part of the building. The three-floor, 66,000-square-foot facility opened for use in the fall as construction crews finished the last phases of the \$43.5 million project, which was funded by the state Division of Capital Asset Management & Maintenance.

Aside from aesthetic improvements, the building has also seen functional renovations such as an expanded dining area, waterproof exteriors, an added atrium entrance at the courtyard on

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STAFF PHOTO/JERREY ROBERTS

Gov. Charlie Baker speaks with a group of people during the grand opening celebration for the Campus Center.

New Campus Center applauded

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the west side of campus, better energy efficiency, accessibility improvements, and an added bridge over Tannery Brook to connect the visitors parking lot and welcome center. Overall, the project added around 9,000 square feet to the area of the old Campus Center.

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker, who also spoke at the event, had not visited the Campus Center since 2015. Upon returning to the building Friday, he described the difference between the old and new facility as “breathtaking,” highlighting the center’s lighting, open space and opportunities for collaborative learning and discussion.

“One of the things that makes space like this so important and so precious is it gives young people a place they can call their own,” Baker said.

Holyoke Community College President Christina Royal called the Campus Center “not just another building project,” but “the heartbeat of our campus.” With the renovations, Royal expects to see improvements across all aspects

of student life.

“Our students deserve environments where they feel safe, welcome, inspired and worthy,” Royal said. “When students feel deserving, they begin to see their own self-worth and they believe in the power of their dreams.”

At the event, Royal also announced a \$7.5 million Marieb Foundation donation to the college’s Center for Life Sciences.

“This is the largest private donation in HCC’s nearly 75-year history,” Royal said, “and to our knowledge, it is the largest private contribution to any community college in the commonwealth.”

Students also expressed their approval of the new Campus Center.

“I wish every building was like this,” said first-year HCC student Carolyn Sicbaldi, adding that the large windows are a particularly impactful feature. “It’s very clean and refreshing.”

Oliver Haas, also first-year HCC student, said he uses the Campus Center almost every day, praising the building as “very well streamlined, very clean.”

“A lot of people in your other classes will be hanging out as well,” he added, providing opportunities for academic collaboration.

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