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Rio Hondo College Doubles Footprint for Santa Fe Springs Firefighting, Homeland Security Training Facility

WHITTIER – Rio Hondo College is doubling the size of its Santa Fe Springs training facility for firefighters and homeland security programs, acquiring 3 acres previously leased.

The expanded 6.1-acre footprint gives the College greater flexibility in its development of what many already consider to be the area's top center for teaching firefighter cadets and training first responders in advanced techniques for natural disasters, hazardous material spills and terrorist attacks.

The College has used the land under a lease agreement for nearly nine years, constructing \$2.1 million in training props and infrastructure. In 2012, the College worked in collaboration with the Santa Fe Springs Fire Department to open a regional Homeland Security Training Center to serve Los Angeles County on the property.

"This purchase is a natural evolution of our use of the land, cementing our role as a regional training center and ensuring we have the control needed to continue providing superior training services for our students and our community," Rio Hondo College Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said.

Rio Hondo Fire Academy Coordinator Tracy Rickman said the center is used non-stop by area firefighters and public safety agencies, including area SWAT teams.

"There's always something going on here, some kind of training, seven days a week," Rickman said. "This purchase is going to make it easier for us to configure the property any way we need."

The center includes a rail car and a tanker truck that are used to simulate hazardous material spills, a replica of a home and garage, and other tools for training firefighters, emergency medical technicians and SWAT teams.

MORE

Rio Hondo College, located in Whittier, California, is committed to the success of its diverse students and communities by providing dynamic educational opportunities and resources that lead to degrees, certificates, transfer, career and technical pathways, basic skills proficiency, and lifelong learning. For information on the College or its programs, please call 562-692-0921 or visit www.riohondo.edu.

Much of the development was funded by grants – which Rickman noted are easier to obtain when the agency seeking funding owns the land where the funds will be spent.

One of the newest programs is the California State Training Institute, which conducts the hazardous materials training. Graduates of the six-week course are certified as hazmat specialists, the highest level of training possible. The skill set includes training for handling weapons of mass destruction.

“Our Santa Fe Spring facility is one of the signature elements that sets Rio Hondo College apart,” said Board of Trustees President Mary Ann Pacheco. “It’s part of the reason why our public safety program – and especially our fire academy, wildland fire academy and advanced techniques training programs – is so sought after.”

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