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EDITORIALS

Paying Future Dividends

Standing on the shore of Old Fort Pond in Shinnecock Hills one Saturday afternoon in September 2005, State University of New York at Stony Brook officials boasted that, with the official takeover of the Southampton College Marine Sciences Center, Stony Brook would be the only university in the state to offer a marine science major as part of an undergraduate degree. Not addressed on that joyous day, held only a few weeks before Stony Brook University officially purchased the entire 82-acre campus from Long Island University, was that the maritime facility, like the main campus itself, was in dire need of a major overhaul.

And while it has taken just over two and a half years for them to follow through on their pledge, state officials once again showed this week that they are committed to continuing to invest money in a facility that, once all of the work is completed, is poised to become the crown jewel of all the maritime research facilities on the entire East Coast. Thanks once again to the efforts of State Senator Kenneth LaValle and State Assemblyman Fred Thiele Jr., Stony Brook Southampton will now receive a \$6.9 million slice of a freshly made \$14.4 million pie to update the Marine Sciences Center. The remaining \$7.5 million will go toward the expansion of the college's Student Center.

Plans call for replacing the existing Marine Sciences Center—parts of which are more than 80 years old—with a 15,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility over the next three to four years. University officials plan to incorporate a new “wet lab” at the research center to allow professors and students to pump seawater into indoor tanks for myriad experiments. The facility will allow researchers to keep specimens alive and experiment with raising shellfish, among other kinds of aquaculture—work that will ultimately benefit everyone from local baymen to those who simply enjoy fresh seafood. The new facilities, combined with the maritime center's “floating” classrooms—the R/V Peconic and R/V Paumanok, research boats that are stationed at the center—will allow instructors and their students to continue studying the cause(s) of the lobster die-off in Long Island Sound, find cures for diseases that can decimate shellfish populations, and more closely monitor the health of the ecosystems in Shinnecock and Peconic bays and beyond.

“It's not what we'd call a state-of-the-art, modern, advanced waterfront laboratory,” offered David Conover, dean of Stony Brook's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, when asked last week to describe the existing, dilapidated facility. It's nice to know that's all about to change.

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