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## Let's finish the job; Jan. 17 target for opening WIU-QC first building

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**By Thomas Robinson**

If you take a spring walk along River Drive in Moline, you'll notice the beginnings of the new Western Illinois University-Quad City Riverfront Campus just west of 34th Street.

The riverfront campus is springing up because of enthusiastic support from the Quad-Cities community -- leaders from business, labor, economic development, higher education, to name a few. We are blessed to have strong support from our QC-area legislators, past and present, and our governor and Illinois Board of Higher Education.



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**Photo: Todd Mizener**

The construction of the new Western Illinois University Quad-Cities Riverfront Campus, on River Drive in Moline, is currently on schedule.

To gain support from the State of Illinois, we built a regional coalition that advocated on a regional, and regular, basis. The heart of that strategy -- to convince state and federal policymakers that building the WIU-QC Riverfront Campus will help transform our Q-C regional economy -- was hatched mostly in meetings at Renew Moline where leaders from WIU, the chamber of commerce, the City of Moline, Deere & Co., the Moline Foundation and others brainstormed about ways to generate support for a capital bill that included full funding for the WIU-QC Riverfront Campus.

We made the key arguments in a multitude of media communications and in our community meetings and our trips to Springfield. Those key arguments are as true today as they were a few years ago when we launched the campaign: The new campus will help our region close the workforce gap, will expand affordable higher educational course offerings to the young people in our region, will help regional employers by educating and training future employees in engineering, will build on our region's strong manufacturing base by offering advanced manufacturing technology courses, will help spark a new riverfront technology corridor comprised of both private-and-public-sector jobs, will help us transition to a knowledge-based economy, will fortify our regional economy at a time when global economic factors are challenging every community.

And, perhaps most importantly, the new campus will help attract and retain talented young people in our Q-C region.

We won the first round of debates with passage of the 2009 Illinois Jobs Now bill that included \$57.8 million for WIU to proceed with the majority of the new Q-C riverfront campus. Thanks to that dramatic legislative victory, construction of Phase One (remodeling of the former 60,000 square foot Deere & Co. Technical Center will be completed this fall, in

time for classes to begin on Jan. 17, 2012. Design of Phase Two (five new buildings) is underway and will be finished by January 2012, just as the new campus opens its doors to students in the new year.

That is the great news on the riverfront. But to "finish the job" we have more work to be done. The time has come to refine our message, renew our mission and refresh our momentum.

There are a couple critical items on our unfinished agenda to complete the WIU-QC Riverfront Campus:

First, \$10.1 million is needed to expand the Riverfront Campus from current levels to 3,000 students. The university, which is seeking \$4.5 million from the state for operations and maintenance, will be investing \$5.6 million from its budget to transform the vision of a full functioning Riverfront Campus a reality;

Second, WIU needs the release of the previously appropriated funds for the construction of Phase II, and third, \$30 million for design and construction of Phase III.

We can't rest on our laurels. Now is the time to remind legislators, legislative leaders and Gov. Pat Quinn that these funding requests are required in order for us to "finish the job" on the riverfront.

Thomas Robinson is chairman of the Board of Renew Moline