

## EDUCATION: NEW 3,500SF FACILITY FULLY AUTOMATED Cuyamaca College Horticulture Center Gets a \$19.4M Makeover

By Ray Huard

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A \$19.4 million renovation and expansion of the Cuyamaca College Horticulture Center included a new greenhouse.  
Photo courtesy of Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District.



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Brad Monroe Vice  
President Grossmont-  
Cuyamaca Community  
College District

“I guess that’s because the architect thought it would fit better on the site,” said Brad Monroe, vice president of the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District and former coordinator of the ornamental horticulture program at the El Cajon school.

“There was nobody on site that had a horticulture background,” Monroe said. “We lived with that and we were able to establish a retail nursery and a good program that was a standout.”

The greenhouse mistake has been rectified as part of a \$19.4 million renovation and expansion of the college’s horticulture center that included a new green house that is about twice the size of the original.

### Top Notch

The old horticulture center served the college well, but was a mish-mash of structures, some dating back decades.



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Leah Rottke Coordinator  
Cuyamaca College  
Ornamental Horticulture  
Program

“Some were decrepit, literally coming apart,” said Leah Rottke, coordinator of the college’s ornamental horticulture program.

“We also needed to be able to provide structures with updated technology representative of the current industry,” Rottke said. “The greenhouse is an example.”

At 3,500 square feet, the new greenhouse is made of acrylic panels and is fully automated, said Brian Browning, senior project manager at Gafcon, the company overseeing construction of the horticulture center and other projects that were paid for with Proposition V, a \$398 million bond measure passed by East County voters in 2012.

“It’s a wonderful teaching instrument,” Browning said. “It’s got automated shades, louvers at the top open automatically, and the fans kick on automatically. It also has some blackout racks or tables where they can grow plants such as poinsettias that like a completely dark environment for a few hours a day.”

The new greenhouse also has advanced heating and cooling systems – something missing from the one it replaced.

The renovation and expansion was designed by HMC Architects based in UTC. The general contractor was Straight Line General Contractors based in Oceanside.

“To HMC’s credit, they actually listened and incorporated the things that we wanted,” Monroe said.

The project included gutting and renovating one building to create a design lab and a lab prep room and a large classroom.

Additions included a storage building of about 4,000 square feet, a shade structure of about



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Brian Browning Senior  
Project Manager Gafcon

3,000 square feet, and a large walk-in cooler to store flowers and floral arrangements, and a new commercial nursery that will be open for sales to the public.

“The facility now is top of the line in every aspect,” Monroe said. “It’s just one of the real gems of Cuyamaca College at this point, not only because of the facility, because of how the program has grown for over 40 years. It’s got a good reputation in the community, a good reputation in the industry.”

### **The Program**

When the horticulture center was originally built, it included no storage space.

“They forgot that in a horticulture program, you have a lot of equipment,” Monroe said.

Cuyamaca College started the two-year horticulture program in 1980 and as of February, had 185 students enrolled in the program, Rottke said.

They include students who want careers in horticulture to professionals who want advanced training.

“The field goes from everything from the hydraulics of irrigation systems to plant production as well as soil testing,” Monroe said.



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Jim Bray Project Manager  
Gafcon

The program offers degrees and certificates in arboriculture, floral design, golf course and sports turf management, irrigation technology, landscape design, landscape technology, nursery technology, sustainable urban landscapes, and basic ornamental horticultures.

Many students earn multiple degrees, Rottke said.

Demand for workers trained in horticulture is growing, from landscape design to agriculture to golf course maintenance, Monroe said.

“If you can think of something to do with horticulture, I can guarantee that we have students working in that capacity,” Monroe said.

Jim Bray, Gafcon project manager, said one of the challenges in building the new horticulture center was working around well-established trees and other plants.

“It complicated the project but it kind of was the project as well. We couldn’t just say ‘tear them out and start over,’” Bray said. “They really were part of the project.”

Coordinating construction around class schedules was another complication.

“That was like a whole separate project,” Bray said.

### **Cuyamaca College**

Founded: 1978

President: Julianna Barnes

Headquarters: El Cajon

Business: community college

Enrollment: 8,824

Website: [www.cuyamaca.edu](http://www.cuyamaca.edu) (<http://www.cuyamaca.edu>)

Contact: 619-660-4000

Notable: Cuyamaca College offers a wide scope of career education courses, from water and wastewater management and child development to paralegal training, from computer and information science or ornamental horticulture to automotive technology with 91 degree programs and 74 certificates.