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## **Cooley Law School to expand in Oakland County**

By Taryn Hartman  
Legal News

As the nation's largest law school continues to grow, officials from Cooley Law School broke ground Nov. 8 on a new Oakland County facility to accommodate its swelling enrollment in the region.

With three campuses in Michigan, Cooley boasts an enrollment of 587 students at its existing Oakland County location on the campus of Oakland University. But the school has grown so fast, according to Associate Dean John Nussbaumer, that OU could no longer offer Cooley the space it required. Enrollment in January 2008, when Cooley's Oakland County operation will move to its new location in Auburn Hills, is expected to increase to 650 Oakland-based students.

But the new facility at 2630 Featherstone Rd., the former GM/UAW and then DaimlerChrysler training facility, should have no problem accommodating all of Cooley's students, especially once a 62,000-square-foot addition is finished in January 2009.

"We've always planned for a campus of something between 750-900 students in the Oakland area," said Don LeDuc, president and dean of all three campuses.

He added that the school has been looking to expand in Oakland County for some time, but always found itself waiting for the right location to become available.

Indeed, at the groundbreaking ceremony, Associate Dean Nussbaumer praised LeDuc's long-term planning skills, asserting that LeDuc has been thinking about this program since the 1980s.

Renovations on the existing building began as soon as the sale of the 67-acre property was finalized in July to ready it for the school's big move at the end of the current term.

The expansion is not only seen as a positive change for the law school, but also for the City of Auburn Hills and all of Oakland County, officials indicated. Associate City Manager Tom Tanghe spoke about the benefits of Cooley's relocation at the groundbreaking ceremony, including the fact that the law school offers students with

bachelor's and higher degrees an educational option that had not previously existed in the county.

"This is a win-win for everyone involved," Tanghe said.

LeDuc echoed the statement, stating that the law school is a "good fit" in Oakland County amid other schools in the area like Davenport University, Baker College, and, of course, Oakland University, with which Cooley plans to continue its partnership after the move to Auburn Hills. LeDuc said Cooley and OU currently offer some joint-degree programs and are hoping to expand these offerings even though Cooley will no longer physically be on Oakland's campus.

"It's a very dynamic relationship as soon as you have a law school in the community," LeDuc said.

The actual construction of the new facility also has the potential to bolster the local economy. Mike Maier, president of Rockford Development, the firm overseeing the renovations of the current building and construction of the new facility, said the project will use as many locally-produced resources as possible.

Maier also said the new facility will be progressively "green," as construction will adhere to guidelines put forth by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) ratings system for environmentally friendly buildings. There are currently 23 LEED projects at the new site that are already complete or under construction, the most obvious of which is the use of an existing structure that had been vacant for several years. Renewable resources like bamboo and recycled building materials, including the carpeting, will be used in the renovations and the addition. And the current structure will feature a reflective white roof and the new building will sport a seeded green roof, both of which will help cut down on the facility's energy costs.

"Fundamentally, it not only makes common sense to build green, but it makes dollars and cents to build green," Maier said.

Also part of Cooley's green initiative will be the replacement of any trees that need to be cut down in order to accommodate elements of the addition like parking lots. The property itself is a wooded area secluded from the rest of the business developments that line Featherstone Road. It even boasts its very own herd of deer, and on the day of the groundbreaking, Maier spotted a six-point buck roaming the estate on his way up the driveway.

Nussbaumer said renovating an existing building as the basis for the new facility saved a "tremendous amount" of money. The entire cost of the project, including purchase of the property, the price of updating the current structure, and constructing the addition is projected at \$36 million and will be covered entirely by a bond issue through the Michigan Higher Education Facilities Authority. Since the school is highly rated by Standard and Poor's the bonds will have a lower interest rate, resulting in lower annual

costs than would have been the case if the school had continued to rent space or used conventional financing, Nussbaumer said. He praised Cooley's general counsel, Jim Robb for smoothly and quickly negotiating the building's purchase and the bond financing.

The newly remodeled structure will house all classrooms and office space as well as the school's library after the move in January. Exactly one year later, the addition will be used primarily for classroom space and the remaining space in the current building will become the library. Cooley has been building a library collection for the past several years in its current location at OU. The new library will have space for up to 200,000 print volumes as well as improved technological resources available to students at all three Cooley campuses. The entire Cooley library system spanning the Lansing, Grand Rapids and Auburn Hills campuses will feature access to a total of 600,000 volumes, said Duane Strojny, associate dean of Library Services. Strojny added that Cooley's resources place its library among the top 50 law libraries in the nation. After the expansion, the system's library will be ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> largest nationally in terms of space.

As a federal depository facility, the library is open to lawyers (all they need to do is present their bar card to have access to all the library's resources) as well as the general public.

"We love having lawyers in the library," Nussbaumer said. "It sets a good example for students."

The campus will offer wireless internet and feature electronic classrooms that teach aspiring lawyers how to successfully conduct electronic research. A number of small group study rooms also will be offered to accommodate sessions that have become popular in law schools, Strojny said.

The Auburn Hills campus also will give Cooley the opportunity to expand its clinical programs, Nussbaumer indicated. Cooley currently offers a domestic violence family law program and an estate planning clinic for senior citizens, and is hoping to establish more public programs. The new facility will include a dedicated "clinical suite" with offices and computer work stations for students, faculty and staff, plus conference and interview rooms across the hall.

The courtroom complex figures to be the most "cutting-edge" aspect of the addition, according to Cooley officials. It will include a "state-of-the-art" trial courtroom that will feature an array of electronic options designed to bring justice into the digital age. Housing approximately 60 students, it will function as a teaching courtroom in which professors will conduct class before sending students to one of several practice courtrooms in which they can practice their newly acquired skills like cross-examination. This format is in line with what Nussbaumer calls the active-skills teaching method practiced at Cooley. He said the school would eventually like to lure local judges into the courtroom to perform actual trials there.

“The courtroom will be constructed with everything needed to be a full practicing courtroom,” including a jury box and secure jury room, Nussbaumer said.

Adjacent to the trial courtroom will be an appellate court that will house Cooley’s moot court program. The space will have seating for several judges and a gallery accommodating 120 observers. Similar to the trial courtroom, the appellate courtroom is being designed in a way that will hopefully lure the Michigan Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, and federal appellate courts to hear actual cases there.

Nussbaumer said the school works closely with the surrounding community, reaching out to practicing attorneys and judges, as part of its mission statement, which boasts of “practical legal scholarship.” Several federal judges teach courses in evidence at Cooley, which Nussbaumer said leaves Cooley graduates with an advantage when they enter the legal workforce.

“Our graduates walk out of those classes better prepared to be lawyers,” he said.

In addition to fulfilling its mission statement and practicing the active-skills method of teaching, Cooley also has set a goal to be the least-expensive private law school in the nation, according to Nussbaumer. It currently ranks as the 12<sup>th</sup> least-expensive out of approximately 100 private law schools across the country, Nussbaumer said. He highlighted the cost-saving measures that have been instituted in the construction of the new Oakland County campus as evidence that the school is working diligently to achieve this goal.