

\$1,000,000 donation



Photo by Cuate Santos | Laredo Morning Times

Rod Lewis, president and CEO of Lewis Energy Group and an alumnus of Laredo Junior College, speaks at a topping-out ceremony for the Lewis Energy Group Academic Center on Monday morning at the LCC Fort McIntosh campus.

Drilling company supporting building at Fort McIntosh

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Arriving in a helicopter at LCC, Rod Lewis, president, CEO and founder of energy giant Lewis Energy Group, looked unassuming in tan slacks, a baseball cap, a button-down shirt and cowboy boots.

He spoke Monday morning about his company's \$1 million donation to Laredo Community College to support the purchase of equipment and furnishings for the Fort McIntosh campus's first three-story building, which will be named the Lewis Energy Group Academic Center.

Recalling his days as a student at Laredo Junior College, he said, "I am very honored.

This is kind of where it all started."

He chuckled, adding that he had good professors and it worked out "because I've got a lot of big guys from big universities working for me."

Lewis said the donation was about giving back to his roots and giving local students a chance to succeed.

"It's important for young adults to have the best opportunity locally if they can't go out of town," Lewis said.

"They can get a good education locally. They can do anything they want in the world."

Lewis is proof of that.

He started out as a gauger and worked his way up to build an empire that now employs 750 people domestically and has expanded into Colombia.

He and his wife, Kim, live in San Antonio and have four children.

About 60 school and community officials gathered at the campus for the ceremony, where the center's last beam was signed by college officials and Lewis, who was accompanied by his wife and his father, Duane, who also took classes at the college when he was younger.

Located on the north side of the Fort McIntosh campus, the 111,045 square-foot facility is part of phase I of the school's Facilities Master Plan,

which includes the construction of a \$9.6 million Visual and Performing Arts Center and the \$3.8 million renovation and expansion of the Moore Vocational Building.

The \$14.7 million academic center will serve as the new home for the departments of social and behavioral sciences and distance learning.

Some of the courses offered by the Kinesiology Department will be housed on the first floor.

Construction should be completed in December, and the center should be occupied in January.

Lewis isn't the only energy company giving out donations these days.

Lately, because of the high activity in the Eagle Ford Shale, energy companies have been cutting checks to small communities in an attempt to become good corporate citizens.

On Friday, Chesapeake Energy gave \$5,000 to Dimmit County EMS and \$5,000 to the Concho Valley Boy Scouts in Uvalde.

The company also donated \$7,000 to some of Texas A&M International University's incoming students who are interested in engineering.

"This is a great, great program for us to support and, especially with Eagle Ford, it is good to invest in science and technology for the kids," said Silver Vasquez, communications coordinator with Chesapeake.

The company has also donated a lot of retired vehicles to county sheriff and police departments and volunteer firefighter programs.

"When we come into an area, we really try to become part of a community and do our part and be a responsible citizen," Vasquez said.

"We hire a lot of locals, we live here and work here, and our families are going to be here. That is just what we do."

Vasquez and other community officials said they expect to see more donations as energy companies keep drilling.

"This is just the tip of the iceberg," Vasquez said.

"You will see donations. You will definitely see more."

Jimmie Lopez, president of the Dimmit County Chamber of Commerce, said he called Zapata County community officials for advice based on their own oil boom years ago.

"Not knowing how to react or act, we called them to engage (with) them in trying to help the community," Lopez said. "It was a sad note.

They said you better get everything you can get from these oil companies because once they're gone, they only thing you will hear is the crickets."

At a recent chamber mixer attended by oil company officials, Lopez made clear that Carrizo Springs had a vision.

"Our theme (for the mixer) was „Share the Vision,“ and I told the chamber we were going to have some goals, have some (vision) and move forward on those goals.

We're going to present a blueprint and sketch to members for a new proposed rodeo arena fairgrounds that we are going to build."

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