

By Steve Huffman

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Ray Fleming had intended to enroll at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College last fall, but a motorcycle accident put a delay to those plans.

Fleming, 38, a Rockwell resident, lost the lower part of his right leg when his motorcycle was hit by a car. Recovery has taken a year, but Tuesday, Fleming was among the horde of wannabe students who flooded RCCC's North Campus in Salisbury for late registration for the fall semester.

Fleming is hoping to secure training to qualify for a job at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis.

"I'd always planned to be here," he said as he sat waiting his chance to register for biotechnology classes. "It's just taken a little longer than I'd expected."

Officials with RCCC said a slow economy is largely to blame (or credit, depending upon one's point of view) for what they anticipate being the school's largest-ever enrollment. About 5,300 students pre-registered for fall classes.

Late registration was held Tuesday on RCCC's North Campus and will be held from 2 to 6 p.m. today on the South Campus in Concord. Hundreds showed up to register Tuesday. The school's parking lot was overflowing and lines of humanity were the order of the day.

School officials said they expect enrollment on the two campuses to surpass 6,000 this fall. RCCC's previous high enrollment was this past spring semester when about 5,700 registered.

"It's the economy and people back for retraining," said Jeff Lowrance, a spokesman for RCCC. "More and more often these days, people don't have the money to send their children to traditional colleges for four years. They're finding they can get their first two years of college here, and save money at the same time."

He noted that unemployment rates in both Rowan and Cabarrus counties are in double digits, meaning people are having to undergo retraining in order to qualify for different jobs.

Classes at RCCC are scheduled to start Monday, and drop/add will continue through the end of next week. It'll be after that before the school's enrollment is finally determined.

Lowrance said the school will attempt to meet demand for classes whenever possible, adding sections as demand — and the



Ray Fleming of Rockwell signs up for biotechnology classes Tuesday at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College. Fleming, 38, said he hopes to eventually land a job at the N.C. Research Campus. Photo by Steve Huffman. Salisbury Post



David Clark, left, works with John Brand in signing up for computer information technology classes at RCCC on Tuesday. Photo by Steve Huffman, Salisbury Post

availability of instructors — dictates.

"Maths and the sciences are tough areas to find instructors," said Jeanie Moore, RCCC's vice president of continuing education.

Courtney Watts and her mother, Ashley Myers, drove from Concord early Tuesday to make sure they were at the head of the line when late registration opened. Though registration didn't start until 2 p.m., Watts and Myers were waiting by 11 a.m.

"We'd been warned to get here early," Watts said.

She said she planned to pursue an associate's degree in fine arts, with a specialization in photography. This is, Watts said, the first year that RCCC has offered such a specialization. She said she hopes to one day open her own photography studio.

Lowrance said the increase in enrollment at RCCC isn't new. He noted that enrollment this past spring was up 17 percent from a year ago, and enrollment this summer was 50 percent higher than last summer.

Lowrance said enrollment this past spring was higher than last fall's enrollment.

"And that's virtually unheard of for the spring enrollment to be higher than the previous fall's," he said.



Courtney Watts, left, and her mother, Ashley Myers, both of Concord, speak with Lisa Ledbetter, director of financial aid at RCCC, during the school's registration Tuesday. Photo by Steve Huffman, Salisbury Post