BEAUMONT, Texas — The Lamar Institute of Technology celebrated the grand opening of its new Advanced Technology Center on Monday, a $6.6 million facility aimed at equipping students with hands-on training to meet the demands of Southeast Texas' industrial workforce.

The 15,000 square-foot building was funded in part by the 88th Texas Legislature and higher education funds. Officials say the center was developed in direct response to requests from both local industries and students seeking specialized training.

"This will be the beacon of technology, as far as to make sure that we're on the cutting edge all the time," said Dr. Sidney Valentine, LIT president.

The center offers eight new associate degree programs and one certificate, with fields such as commercial electrical technology, robotics, and automation engineering technician, programs selected based on feedback from area employers.

"We've gone out to industry, asked them what they've needed," said Academic Department Chair, Dr. Valerie Worry. "We're looking to fulfill or fill the places now, but we're also looking down the road as we grow and as the programs grow to provide the employees that companies need."

Designed for immersive learning, the facility allows students to gain real-world insight into their trades.

"The instructors can go out and can point out to them when they're looking at the drawings and say, okay, this is what it looks like up here. This is what it looks like," Dr. Worry explained.

Students can even look inside the walls to examine working equipment firsthand.

"They know that they're in class 100% of the time," added Dr. Valentine.

With many LIT students moving directly into the workforce after graduation, the center is poised to make a lasting impact on both the institute and the surrounding community.

"Industry tells us there's a shortage and that there's a need for training... so this is addressing those needs," Dr. Worry said.

Registration for summer and fall classes opens Tuesday, April 16. More information is available on the university's website.