Business expansion

GIFTS HELP EXPAND UWG’S BUSINESS, BIOLOGY BUILDINGS

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In August, the University of West Georgia (UWG) announced plans to construct a new, state-of-the-art building to house the Richards College of Business.

Those plans were jump-started by a “significant donation” from David A. Johnson, co-founder of Cane Bay Partners, a financial services and consulting company based in St. Croix, Minn.

“I heard about the plans to construct a new facility in 2015,” Johnson said. “I felt that I could help out in some way, but I was not sure how. After meeting with UWG officials, Johnson decided he could “make the first large gift and provide necessary traction to help make this new business school project a reality.” While the donation amount is undisclosed, plans for the 60,000-square-foot facility include dedicated space for the college’s various centers, such as the Small Business Development Center and Center for Economic Education, as well as flexible learning spaces, additional space for staff and faculty, and more spacious areas to house student learning labs and common spaces.

“The new building will be a physical symbol of the importance and stature of the college and is a critical facility addition at UWG for several reasons, particularly our growing enrollment numbers,” said UWG President Kyle Marrero.

Enrollment at UWG stands at 13,300, according to UWG records, with a projected increase to 15,000 by 2020. Currently, the business college faculty, staff and students are split into two buildings: Adamson and Miller halls. The new facility will bring the business college under one roof for the first time in a decade while the vacated buildings will be repurposed for other academic programs.

“The new building will facilitate more cross-disciplinary collaboration among students and faculty,” said Faye McIntyre, dean of the business college and Sewell Chair of Private Enterprise. “It will also allow us to be a more integral part of the business community with space for programs open to everyone.”

The funds earmarked for the Richards College of Business project is the fourth such donation by Johnson, a UWG graduate, class of ’96. The first one came in 2011 when Johnson endowed a presidential scholarship in a gesture of gratitude for the same honorific he received as a freshman in 1991. Also in 2011 came Johnson’s first gift specifically benefitting the business college, which endowed the David A. Johnson Applied Econometrics and Analytics Fund.

“At the time, I was building an analytics and business intelligence team and having trouble finding the right talent in metro Atlanta,” Johnson said. “I did some research and realized that the people I needed to hire had training and experience in econometrics and software, such as SAS.” When Johnson failed to find schools in the region offering undergraduate classes that covered topics in the category, he “challenged UWG to find a way offer this type of class.”

After Johnson provided the school with a course syllabus for a graduate level class in econometrics, the program was introduced. In 2014, Johnson made an additional contribution to endow the program with a professorship. The fourth financial gift to UWG came in 2015, when Johnson included the university and the business college’s economics department in his estate plan.

The business college is not the only area of academic study at UWG slated to benefit from philanthropic funding for infrastructure projects. Renovation and expansion of the college’s economics department will begin in January 2017 with a projected completion date of August 2018. The renovation will cover more than 70,000 square feet of the original building, combined with construction of a 10,000-square-foot addition to the department’s physical plant. The $25 million project is partly funded by $2 million of philanthropic support.

“I think this is a ‘poster child’ project in many ways,” said Marrero. “Biology is one of our largest majors (over 800 students) and serves multiple other STEM and health-care disciplines at UWG, which include our pre-nursing students who will continue clinical studies at the UWG Tanner School of Nursing and eventually feed into the regional or state health-care workforce where there is a great need.”

Recently completed projects at UWG include a facility for Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Master of Science in Nursing and Doctor of Nursing Education programs; the Murphy Building renovation and expansion for University System of Georgia eCore and eMajor/eCampus programs; and the Newman Center, which opened in fall 2015. As a result of these activities, UWG has hired 99 new faculty and staff in the last three years while the regional economic impact of the university has increased from $418 million to $518 million annually.

“The campus itself was always beautiful to me but now it’s really amazing,” Johnson said. “There are new buildings and facilities popping up and other changes, which make me excited to come back and proud to be an alumnus.”