Nova Southeastern University's online classes have plenty of clicks, but the bricks are piling up, too.

The university plans to start construction early next year on a 140,000-square-foot student center that will cost $35 million to $40 million and include the second-largest indoor athletic center in Broward County, university President Ray Ferrero Jr. said.

The center, which will seat 4,707 for basketball and 5,457 for stage performances, is symbolic of the university's evolution. The view from the second-floor balcony by Ferrero's office shows a full-fledged campus instead of the handful of buildings that were there a few decades ago.

The latest buildings are a legacy to contributions by some of the region's most successful business leaders.

Ferrero can look across a lake from the balcony and see the Alvin Sherman Library, Research and Information Technology Center, the largest library building in the state. Sherman, a developer, recently contributed $7 million to the university.

Just to the right, workers are putting the finishing touches on the Carl DeSantis Building, home of the H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship. Rexall Sundown founder DeSantis contributed $2 million for the building while the Huizenga Family Foundation contributed $4 million.

Next door is the Shepherd Broad Law Center, named after the late Miami-Dade lawyer, and located in Leo Goodwin Sr. Hall, named after the founder of Geico Insurance. Goodwin moved to the Fort Lauderdale area after founding the company.

On the southwest corner of the campus, the Jim & Jan Moran Family Center Village was boosted by a $3.5 million contribution by the founder of Southeast Toyota.

The William and Norma Horvitz administration building bears the name of the owner of Hollywood Inc., the development company that was the driving force behind the city's growth.

**Your name on the student center**

If getting one's name on a university building represents a form of immortality, Ferrero is holding out the biggest opportunity yet. The student center will have a number of naming rights opportunities, starting with asking prices of $20 million for the overall building and $10 million each for the arena, the attached performing arts center and aquatic center.

Thomas E. Dieters, executive director of development for the university, is the point person on seeking donations. The university is right under the flight path to Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, so a big rooftop logo like the one on top of the American Airlines Arena is a possibility, Dieters happily notes.

"In Broward County, I think this could be the best naming rights available," he said.

Ferrero said the student center might interest a philanthropist who might not have been as excited about donating for a business school or the library.

When asked about biting off another major project so soon after the library and the Huizenga School, Ferrero, a lawyer and one-time Marine, said, "I believe in momentum and I believe the time is right for this."

University research shows building a library and student center helps retain and attract students, he said.
The student center will have an indoor running track, fitness areas, racquetball courts, classrooms, conference rooms, tennis courts, aquatics, basketball courts, volleyball courts and a rock-climbing wall. An arts and entertainment wing will have a theater and rehearsal space.

Ferrero and Dieters expect a heavy flow of visitors from outside the university for events, which doesn’t hurt marketing. Ferrero hopes to host an NCAA Division II national tournament and expects the venue will be used for concerts. “It would bring more people on campus and that has been part of my strategy,” he said, noting a distinguished lecture series that has included former General Electric leader Jack Welch, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and an upcoming appearance by General Motors CEO Rick Waggoner.

The school’s clinics – including medical, dental and legal – saw 312,000 people last year, which is about a fifth of the county’s population, he said. The library was built with county funding and about 19,000 residents have the free cards that allow them to check out books, accounting for about 56 percent of the circulation.

For the student center, the university is finalizing a funding plan that will likely include issuing bonds.

The student center fits in with overall growth plans, which put increasing emphasis on undergraduates.

The university has about 1,400 undergrads now, but Ferrero expects that to grow to 2,200 to 2,500 in the next few years.

With an enrollment of more than 10,000 on four South Florida campuses, the university is “light years” beyond the 17 doctoral candidates it started with nearly 40 years ago, he said. “We’re now the 10th largest independent non-profit in the United States.”

The merger between Nova University and Southeastern University of the Health Sciences in January 1994 brought an array of health care programs – dentistry, optometry, osteopathic medicine, psychology, nursing and physical therapy, among others – whose buildings are on the main campus along the east side of University Drive.

Educating educators

Education is another mainstay with 8,000 students, centered on the Fischler Graduate School of Education in North Miami Beach. Abe Fischler was president of Nova University from 1970 to 1992 and also has a street on the main campus named after him.

The university also has education centers in Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa and West Palm Beach and sites in 22 other states and Puerto Rico. Ferrero is expecting a certificate of occupancy later this month on a 60,000-square-foot building in Orlando. “Where we identify a need, we should pursue that, but not just to pursue my ego,” Ferrero said.

Those sites all have full-time directors and IT personnel, which fits in with the university’s strategy of using technology – 52 electronic classrooms with 2,310 computers, 90 classrooms with computers and video projection screens for instructors and 54 classrooms with compressed video – for distance learning.


The student center is not the last expansion Ferrero is planning.

A few years ago, the university became a 50 percent owner of University Park Plaza, a retail center on University Drive. That will disappear and be replaced by a mixed-used development during the next three to five years. It is expected to include a hotel, which would help facilitate conferences, a large Barnes & Noble bookstore, more classrooms and possibly residential high-rises.

The university is working with the city of Davie to get the right zoning, he said.

That’s a lot on Ferrero’s plate, but he has a quip that sums it all up: “We’re a real click-and-brick institution.”

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