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Campus Center One Step Closer

By Jeff Bendix

CWRU has begun detailed planning for an exciting new, \$50-million campus center. When completed, it will be approximately twice the size of the current center and contain a wide variety of eating places, retail outlets, recreational spaces and offices for student services and activities.

Trustees recently approved a "project in concept," which authorizes University administrators to begin searching for an architect, proceed with design and financial planning and start raising funds for the project.

"Case Western Reserve has committed itself to a dramatic vision of a campus with outstanding facilities and an environment that supports living and learning," said Glenn Nicholls, vice president of student affairs. "The ability to begin planning and developing a new facility represents an important step toward realizing that vision. When it is done, we fully expect the facility to become the true focus of activity for all segments of our campus community."

The new center will contain about 160,000 gross square feet and will be located on the site of the current center, 11111 Euclid Ave. It will house social/recreational facilities; student organizations; offices for student services; performance spaces, including a theater of up to 400 seats; conference and meeting facilities; a sit-down restaurant and a variety of "grab and go" eateries; and retail space. The current facility, Thwing Center, is approximately 82,000 square feet.

The new center will not include space for a bookstore, which will instead be part of a retail "college town" development proposed for the Euclid/Mayfield intersection.

"By placing the bookstore elsewhere we free up space for a great many other activities," Nicholls said.

The decision of what to include in the new center resulted from more than a year of study, which included focus groups and interviews with CWRU students, faculty and staff, by the Washington, D.C. consulting firm of Brailsford and Dunlavy.

"We want to build a facility that meets the needs of all groups on our campus," Nicholls said. "In order to do that we asked our consultants to conduct focus groups and in-depth interviews with a broad cross-section of individuals and groups to find out what they would like to see included in the center."

In 2000 trustees approved a resolution to renovate and expand the student center at a cost of \$32 million. That proposal would have created a facility of 130,000 square feet and included a bookstore.

The construction timetable for the new campus center will depend on how quickly the University can raise money for the project, Nicholls said.

Chairing the fund-raising drive will be Theodore J. "Dr. Ted" Castele, a graduate of Adelbert College of Western Reserve University and the School of Medicine, and a long-time trustee of the University.

"I'm very excited to be a part of this effort," Castele said. "This is going to be a magnificent facility, located right in the heart of our campus. I think it will have the potential to transform student life on our campus."

Castele said he's been talking about the project informally with alumni and other constituent groups.

"There's a great deal of enthusiasm out there. Lots of people have been asking when it will start and what they can do to help it along," he said.

Thwing Center consists of two buildings, Hitchcock House on the west, built in 1897, and Thwing Hall on the east, built in 1913, which in the past has served as the University's library and student center. In 1980 the two were linked by an atrium.

Plans for the new center call for razing all three components of Thwing Center, but saving many of the interior and exterior architectural details of Hitchcock for use in a new alumni center.