

Texas A&M University - Texarkana Gazette

EDUCATION

A&M's vision continues

Officials begin raising money for proposed wing

By **MARIE MARTIN**
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A proposed new wing at Texas A&M University-Texarkana will be the hub of campus life for students, officials said Tuesday as they announced fundraising for it.

The Student Engagement Center is critical to building student satisfaction, says Dr. Carlisle "Bix" Rathburn, the university president.

"This center will serve as ... a special events center for campus activities," Rathburn said. "It is designed to be the hub of campus life that will serve to increase student engagement and involvement, which leads to increased student satisfaction in the university experience."

Rathburn said the increased satisfac-



Submitted graphic

■ The proposed \$3.5 million Student Engagement Center is slated for construction after Texas A&M University-Texarkana meets its fundraising goals.

tion assists in student retention and to begin construction, the university improved graduation rates.

To raise the \$3.5 million needed

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is taking donations during the "Vision Continues ... Campaign." The price tag includes construction fees and furniture for the building, officials said.

Guaranty Bond Bank recently donated \$800,000 to bring the fundraising amount to \$680,000.

The center will be constructed at the north end of the University Center Building, overlooking the university's pond. The new center will also be available to the community for large functions and special events, officials said.

"The west wall will provide great views of the campus pond and attach to the west patio of the university center. And (will attach to) the outdoor amphitheater and stage over the pond for large outside special events up to 3,500," Rathburn said.

The list of possible events in the proposed 14,000-square-foot addition is lengthy and includes



Submitted photo

■ Guaranty Bond Bank's Hal Lower, vice president, presents a \$100,000 check to Julie Tidwell, vice president of A&M-Texarkana Foundation Board. Also pictured: Robert Irwin, president of Guaranty Bond Bank; and Scott Bruner, president of A&M-Texarkana Foundation Board. The donation will contribute to building a new wing at the university, called the Student Engagement Center.

concerts, dances, high school proms, career fairs, demonstrations, special events, large dinners, the university's annual leadership summit and freshmen convocation. The space will have

movable stage areas.

The proposed center can seat 700 people for dinner and 1,200 for a ceremony and is likened to a formal ballroom. If Eagle Hall and other university space is added, nearly 2,500 people could be accommodated for indoor events, a university documents states. Last year, a \$800,000 catering kitchen was constructed to provide on-site support for any event at the university including the proposed Student Engagement Center.

By day, the university proposes using the center for daily student recreation activities including two courts for basketball and volleyball and locker-room space.

The building is large enough to handle "basically every campus event except graduation—(it's) not big enough to handle this," Rathburn said. "Right now, we have no student recreation center on campus. Events such as freshmen convocation are too big to host in Eagle Hall."

Eagle Hall is a room of the University Center Building that

is half the size of the proposed center and is used for some of the same functions.

The university has not set a date for a groundbreaking. Officials say that would depend on donations from local donors and supporters.

"This facility, due to its nature, will need to be paid for by private funds. The response to date has been tremendous, as we have just started the campaign," Rathburn said. "This facility is critical to supporting all of our students, especially the students who live on campus in the current residence hall and the second hall to be built next year."

Rathburn is optimistic about the community support for the project.

"I hope we will be able to start construction next year depending on the response to our requests for support," he said.

Rathburn said no loans will be taken out on the funds raised. The funds will pay for the project outright and not be placed in the general fund.