

Projects celebrated on USI campus

Business Center topped off, ground broken for Student Center

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A pair of transformational construction projects — one in progress and one soon to begin — were celebrated Thursday at the University of Southern Indiana.

Moments after the last steel girder was put in place on the Business and Engineering Center, scheduled for completion in late 2010, USI trustees and students broke ground on the planned expansion of USI's University Center.



Elizabeth Courtney Randolph / USI Workers with Weddle Brothers Construction Co. of Evansville lower the final beam on the University of Southern Indiana's new Business and Engineering Center on Thursday, during a "topping off" ceremony. Immediately afterward, ground was broken for USI's University Center expansion.



LaVerne Jones / USI Mohammed Khayum, dean of the USI College of Business, and Julie Edmister, dean of the USI Bower-Suhrheinrich College of Education and Human Service, sign the final beam for the University of Southern Indiana's new Business and Engineering Center during a "Topping off ceremony" on Thursday. After the final beam was put in place, a ground breaking ceremony was held for the university's University Center expansion.

Upon completion, the two projects will put the finishing touches on a quadrangle that also includes the David L. Rice Library and the Liberal Arts Center.

The \$17.7 million University Center project will add 77,000 square feet of space for dining, conferencing and student organizations.

The center will be built on the site of the old Rice Library, and a walkway between that building and the current University Center is to be demolished.

The University Center is the "hub of campus," USI student trustee Jamie Johnson said, but as enrollment has topped 10,000 students, the current building has become crowded.

"It's a very busy place. It's so busy that oftentimes it's tough to find a place to sit," Johnson said.

The expansion will have a distinct look. It will include a 97-foot conical shape.

Construction will take two years, and it will utilize local materials and contractors, said Linda Bennett, USI's incoming president.

Work on the Business and Engineering Center, meanwhile, continues. The structure's final steel girder sat on a sidewalk in recent days, and students, teachers and staff were encouraged to sign it.

The \$31 million building will have shared classroom and library space for USI's business and engineering schools.

While each department will have its own space, the building's design also will provide for collaborations, USI officials say.