

## **New riverfront campus comes into focus**

**Kay Luna | Posted: Saturday, November 5, 2011 2:00 am**

Construction workers are hanging bamboo wall coverings, laying flooring and handling other finishing touches in nearly every room and hallway.

But it's easy to get distracted by other sights just outside the new Western Illinois University-Quad-Cities riverfront campus, where a flurry of activity is happening to get it ready for its first classes in January.

Just step inside the new grand atrium, where floor-to-ceiling windows showcase a panoramic view of the Ben Butterworth Parkway area along Moline's riverfront.

Views of the riverfront and splashes of its fall-colored treetops are featured through windows that line many of the new classrooms and offices, and from an upstairs conference room surrounded by glass walls, as well.

"All the colors inside are very natural, too," said Bill Brewer, university architect and facilities director for Western Illinois University-Quad-Cities, said during a tour of the campus.

But among the soothing greens and browns, a couple of walls are painted bright purple, which is one of Western Illinois' team colors.

"Those are our signature walls," Brewer said, "to remind us who we are."

After more than a year of construction, and a price tag of \$18 million, the first phase of work on the 20-acre riverfront site nearly is complete.

Incorporating parts of the former Deere & Co. Technology Center that was donated to Western Illinois - along with the land - many years ago, the state-of-the-art facility will house undergraduate classes, student services, engineering laboratories, faculty offices, a writing center and other amenities.

Even as workers climbed ladders and moved materials all around him, Brewer said the first building will open in time for spring semester.

"We've got a few things to do, so everybody's kind of hustling around," he said.

In addition to instructional space and offices, the building will include a small convenience store, vending area and student and faculty lounge space.

The building is considered environmentally "green," featuring a rooftop garden and the use of sustainable materials in its furnishings. That includes bamboo ceiling tiles, cork flooring, and seats and countertops made out of recycled aluminum shavings, to name a few.

The facility has geothermal heating and cooling, and energy-saving motion sensors that turn on the lights when someone enters a room.

Another popular feature: An 80-seat, tiered-seating, auditorium-style classroom, which soon will be outfitted with tables and electrical outlets to plug in electronics, he said.

Meanwhile, the remaining Western Illinois location on 60th Street, near John Deere Road in Moline, will house graduate classes, undergraduate elementary education classes, the WQPT Public TV station and Quad-Cities Graduate Center, along with other services and courses, according to a letter sent to students by Joseph Rives, vice president for planning and technology.

And the university doesn't plan to stop there. More construction is expected on the riverfront site, where the second phase is in design stages, Brewer said. That phase is slated to cost \$42 million, and could start sometime next year, he said.

A third phase, priced at \$35 million, is "further out" on the schedule, he said.

In the end, the university expects to have a total of five buildings, connected with skywalks, on the new campus.

But don't expect to see university-owned housing, bookstores or a recreational center.

"The idea here is to serve the core academic mission," he said, adding that officials expect private developments to eventually go up

nearby. "This could be an economic driver for development. I think it's really going to start popping down here."

That's definitely the intent, said Janet Mathis, executive director of Renew Moline. With the capacity to serve up to 3,000 students through the first phase of campus development, the area is ripe for private entrepreneurs and investors, she said.

This is especially true because the city has done major cleanup, removing the rubble and old buildings on property nearby, she said.

However, the city hasn't secured a development agreement with anyone yet, she said.

"What a jewel that is, and what an opportunity for the community as a whole," Mathis said. "It's not often you get to start a campus from the ground up."