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Grand Canyon University improving campus

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Grand Canyon University is planning a nearly $125 million campus makeover over the next three years that will significantly boost the number of buildings and amenities at the central Phoenix college.

The additions, which university officials announced Friday afternoon at a student convocation, will alter the face of the campus by beefing up the school's athletic space and providing students in certain majors with more high-tech classrooms.

"We're trying to raise the image and build it into a world-class university," said university CEO Brent Richardson, who acquired Grand Canyon with a group of investors three years ago.

The projects, which will be completed primarily in two phases, include a 120,000-square-foot building for the university's College of Nursing and Health Sciences, a recreational pool, and an aquatic center.

The recreational pool, scheduled to be completed later this year, will open first. The aquatic center and the new nursing building are set to open in 2008-09.

Renderings of the aquatic center show two swimming pools, one for laps and one for diving, and a multilevel diving platform. The center would accommodate the school's new water-sports programs and be open to local school districts and organizations to use, according to plans.

Making digital-media technology more readily available to students is another cornerstone of the makeover plan.

In conjunction with Phoenix-based rocker Alice Cooper, the school is building a 29,000-square-foot center called The Rock for teenagers that will be focused on teaching leadership skills through music and sports.

Groundbreaking is expected to happen this month. Next year, the school also plans to complete Digital Media Studios, an approximately 40,000-square-foot facility aimed toward students in media arts, public relations, graphic design and other disciplines.

Richardson said a third phase could also include an additional athletic facility with an ice hockey rink.

New landscaping and other renovations are part of the project plans as well.

The additions are expected to have an impact on the community surrounding Grand Canyon's campus because many of the amenities will be open to the public.

The university is located on about 90 acres near 35th Avenue and Camelback Road.

"It provides another opportunity for especially the young people in the community to enjoy state-of-the-art facilities and to have constructive alternatives to just hanging out on the street," said City Councilman Claude Mattox, whose district includes the campus.

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