The University of Louisiana at Lafayette architecture graduate students have been building a pavilion on Camellia Boulevard as part of a grant from Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, and the structure will serve as a monument to the community.

While the project is part of coursework for graduate students, Gjertson said the structure will be dedicated as the "Lafayette Strong Pavilion" on Jan. 2 to commemorate The Grand 16 — Lafayette shooting and the community's response.

"We thought that (the design) was a really good way to symbolize that because we've got all these little, individual pieces that, on their own, are not strong but when you bring them together it creates this strong shape," Gjertson said.

Dalhousie received a grant from the Canadian government and has teamed up with three other universities: UL Lafayette, the University of Arizona and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The grant is to study innovative structural systems and see how they perform in different climates, Geoff Gjertson, professor of architecture at UL Lafayette, said.

The unique shape of the pavilion is a catenary shell, which is the curve a person would get if he or she hung a chain or rope. Gjertson said it is the purest form of structure because the natural curve brings down the weight more efficiently than other designs.

Gjertson said the students spent most of the summer gluing together small wooden pieces to create the long, curved beams needed to build the gridshell.

There are 11 graduate students working on the pavilion and receiving class credit. One student, Thomas Mouton, began working on the project when the construction documents were being drafted.

Mouton said this kind of project — a design/build project — is different from the usual assignments students complete. He said there are different phases of design, such as the schematic and construction documents, that are not often used in small-scale projects.

Mouton said the design/build is a crucial part of an architecture student's education.

"There's a hole at the center of our learning and you can never really learn until you just get out there and you run into all the problems that come," Mouton said.

Mouton said he learned sometimes an architect is at the will of the material. He said he also learned about the long process one must go through to build something, such as working with Lafayette Consolidated Government and going to city council meetings.

Gjertson said the structure is an unconventional form and is, in its own way, art.

"I hope it makes (people) question and look at architecture and what it can be in a different way," Gjertson said.

The pavilion will be the first installment of an art park planned to span along Camellia Boulevard. There will be a sidewalk through the grass and the pavilion.

Dalhousie University was the first to build its gridshell, Gjerston said. According to him, the University of Arizona will begin construction soon and UNC Charlotte will begin in the spring.