Union to offer new view of campus

A view from a second-floor window at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's new Student Union shows new construction Tuesday and walkways as well as the original archways that lead into the former building from Cypress Lake.

Expanded facility set to open in November will house cafeteria, student groups

LAFAYETTE — Construction workers buzzed around the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's student union Tuesday morning as the structure edges closer to completion.

Scheduled for a November opening, the UL-Lafayette Student Union will become a hot spot for students to meet, eat and study.

“The Student Union will again be the heartbeat of campus, an area that students and employees will gravitate to,” Joey Pons, UL-Lafayette's director of public safety and risk management, said in written statement.

The 178,000-square-foot compound dwarfs the former student union, which was about 55,000 square feet smaller.

“Once you walk it, you’ll know how big it is. It’s big,” said Bill Crist, the university’s physical plant director.

Construction of the new building and renovations of some older facilities started in November 2012, with the union scheduled to be complete by the end of 2014.

The union will provide both meeting spaces and offices for student groups.

The university’s Student Government Association will call home a large space on the first floor, where windows spill natural light onto the burgundy carpets.

Above the offices and meeting spaces will be the union’s cafeteria, which Crist said will be able to hold about 600 people at a time.

Along with the smaller dining area downstairs, all food service—See UNION, page 4A

BY SETH DICKERSON
Special to The Advocate

From left, Cliff Myers, Patrick Pappillion, Bob Callier and Daniel Page set up a temporary cafeteria inside Guillory Hall on Tuesday.
Construction of a food court area in the student union at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette is underway Tuesday. Members of the media were given a tour of the progress by the contractor.

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es will be provided by Sodexo, which offers the majority of eating options on campus.

The dining hall, which encompasses most of the union’s second floor, will overlook the university on three sides, giving diners a view of Cypress Lake, the residence hall’s Rose Garden and Hebrard Boulevard.

Once students move into their new offices in the Student Union, the three halls between the union and Hebrard Boulevards — Guillory, Lafayette and Vermilion halls — will be knocked down. Guillory houses the cafeteria. Lafayette and Vermilion house SGA, the University Program Council and other organizations as well as the cashier’s office.

All three buildings have fallen out of repair.

Crist said the cafeteria will be the last to move, but once the offices are done, construction crews can begin tearing down Lafayette and Vermilion halls. “It’s going to be a beautiful view once we tear these three buildings down,” he said.

Behind the dining hall and across from the kitchen will be the “1898 Room,” a private dining room named for the year the university was founded. The dining room overlooks the rose garden and commons between Bonin and Coronna halls. Farther down will be Café de Lafayette, another dining room that could be used to privately feed athletic teams or other groups. An elevator will be installed to provide direct access from the first floor.

There also will be a post office, a renovated student theater, a coffee shop and a grassy courtyard overlooking the campus’ iconic swamp. The courtyard takes the place of the former union’s foyer and Canebrake Café.

The only remaining pieces of the former student union are its left and right wings, which housed the university bookstore and theater, known as Bayou Bijou. Both wings are in the process of being stripped bare and renovated.

The $39 million project, which includes the renovations and construction of the new student union, was funded by student fees — the first, a $55 per semester fee approved by students in 2002, and the second, a $20 fee approved in 2005.