Business school at ISU has new high-tech home

By David Elbert
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Ames, Ia. — A mahogany and cherry table that is a whopping 31 feet long and 7 feet wide dominates the board room on the second floor of the new Gerdin Business Building on the southeast edge of Iowa State University's central lawn. The table has built-in electronics and seats 30 in leather chairs.

The table is one of the many new teaching tools that students in ISU's College of Business will experience for the first time when classes resume Jan. 6.

Faculty members began moving into the $25 million building a couple of weeks ago. By the time students arrive in two more weeks, the classrooms will be the first on campus to offer wireless Internet connections.

"We are the college of choice for Iowans who want a business education," business school Dean Labh Hira said during a recent tour. ISU's nearly 4,000 business students include more native Iowans than any other business college, he said.

The 111,000-square-foot, four-story, limestone building has high-tech labs with computers capable of replicating real-world situations for classes on securities trading, management information systems, market research and transportation logistics.

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Changed: Above, Labh Hira, dean of ISU's College of Business, says the college's new home has state-of-the-art technology. At right, Kim Schroeder, the college's director of marketing, talks about classrooms. The building is named for Russell Gerdin, founder of Iowa trucking firm Heartland Express, and his wife, Ann.
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It also has such amenities as a coffee shop, comfortable small rooms where students can learn to work as teams on projects, and the board room where classes on business etiquette, dressing for success and Robert’s Rules of Order will be taught.

The board room, which is outside Hira’s office, is a match for any executive suite in Des Moines.

The long tabletop is made of Anegre, a type of mahogany grown in South Africa. It is edged with cherry and was custom-made in seven sections by Heartwood Inc. of Seattle.

At the west end of the table, windows frame ISU’s Campanile. The landmark belltower is only 100 yards away, but is largely hidden by thick foliage that surrounds the building.

A handful of walnut trees was cleared from the site before construction began, Hira said. Wood from those trees was milled and used to produce much of the bench seating that lines the limestone halls, he said.

The new home of ISU’s business college is named in honor of Iowa trucking entrepreneur Russell Gerardin and his wife, Ann. Gerardin is the founder of Heartland Express Inc., a Corvalville-based trucking company, whose shares are traded on Nasdaq.

The Gerdins committed $10 million to the building project in 1988. The goal was to raise $26.5 million. ISU put in $11 million and pledges for another $14 million were raised from other private contributors.

The building cost $25.3 million to build and equip. The other $10.2 million will be spent “for faculty development program enhancements,” said Kim Schroeder, director of marketing for the business college. The building is expected to be the last major structure built on the central lawn of the Ames campus.

The building is located at the corner of Knoll Road and Union Drive, where generations of students and their families have sat atop a limestone wall to watch the annual Voshea parade.

New landscaping has lowered the wall and created a new entrance to the central campus through the building’s wide center staircase. Designers used a one-story elevation change between the east and west sides of the building to create a new gateway for students.

Modern: The classrooms in the Gerdin Business Building at ISU will be the first on campus to offer wireless Internet connections. The $25 million building is the new home of the College of Business.