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Timberman's \$7.5M gift to help build UA wood design center

By [Jaime Adame](#)

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PHOTO BY DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE FILE PHOTO/John Ed Anthony is shown in the first photo. Isabel Anthony is shown in the second photo.

FAYETTEVILLE -- The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville plans to build a wood design center with the help of \$7.5 million from the chairman of an Arkansas timber company and his wife.

The gift from John Ed and Isabel Anthony supports creation of the Anthony Timberlands Center for Design and Materials Innovation, UA announced Thursday, with the total project estimated to cost \$15 million.

The center would add to recent university efforts at boosting wood construction methods, such as a residence hall, estimated to cost \$79 million, scheduled to open in 2019 and considered the first U.S. student housing built using a type of large wooden panel known as cross-laminated timber.

John Ed Anthony is chairman of Anthony Timberlands Inc., of Bearden, about 50 miles southwest of Pine Bluff. He said the gift will help promote construction methods like those being used in UA's Stadium Drive residence halls, as the region previously has lacked such a wood design center.



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"The southern forest is one of the richest and most productive forests in the world," Anthony said.

But while efforts exist in the western U.S. to promote such new wood construction methods, the region "needs a center to develop the use of our products, as well," Anthony said.

The new wood design center would be a five-story, 50,000-square-foot structure with an expanded fabrication laboratory and space for studios, faculty offices, a small auditorium and housing for visiting faculty, UA announced.

It will be part of UA's Windgate Art and Design District in south Fayetteville, a few blocks from the main campus, and would serve as home base for a proposed graduate program in timber and wood within UA's Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design.

Forestry is listed as principal industry for the state by the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. Forests cover about 57 percent of the state, according to the Arkansas Forestry Commission.

The new center "will engage one of our state's key industries and strengthen the relationship the University of Arkansas has with the southern half of our state," Chancellor Joe Steinmetz said in a statement.

Anthony praised Peter MacKeith, dean of UA's architecture school, as recognizing timber as a key state industry.

MacKeith, who has worked as an architect in Finland, joined UA in 2014 from Washington University in St. Louis and has been a timber construction advocate since his arrival. He has called the dorm project "aspirational and inspirational," showing how Arkansas can "be a leader in the rapidly emerging technology."

Cross-laminated timber has not caught on widely in the United States, but MacKeith has said it is used in Europe and elsewhere, including Australia and Japan. UA selected a European supplier for cross-laminated timber panels in its student residence hall project after a bidding process.

Cross-laminated timber consists of large wooden panels up to 60 feet long made with layers of smaller wooden pieces glued together, according to APA-The Engineered Wood Association, a trade group. Advocates for the material like APA-The Engineered Wood Association say it has a lower environmental impact than other building methods.

Federally funded research into how the material performs is ongoing. Last year, the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory published findings showing the material withstanding a fire in a test building.

Approval for the wood design center must be granted by the University of Arkansas board of trustees for construction to move forward, said Mike Johnson, UA's associate vice chancellor for facilities.



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John Ed and Isabel Anthony, longtime Hot Springs residents now living in Little Rock, have structured their gift as a pledge over seven years, with the first installment to be paid by June 30, Jennifer Holland, UA's director of development communications, said in an email.

The remaining costs for the estimated \$15 million project would likely be paid for with university reserves, general obligation bonds supported by student facility fees and "other possible campus resources," Johnson said.

The final site has not been chosen, but a proposed location is at Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Government Avenue, Johnson said.

The proposed site is near not only planned art buildings, but also a library storage structure built using cross-laminated timber. The library storage building, which cost approximately \$11.4 million, began accepting books on Monday, Kelsey Lovewell Lippard, public relations coordinator for UA libraries, said in an email.

John Ed Anthony is a UA graduate and was appointed by then-Gov. Mike Huckabee to the UA trustees board, serving from 2003-11. He said the newer wood construction techniques like cross-laminated timber can benefit the construction industry.

"Some of those products are on the verge of blossoming, and I'd like for Arkansas to be a part of that revolution," Anthony said.

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