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URI launches construction of a 4,300 s/f, \$2.1 million LGBTQ Center

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State officials and members of the University of Rhode Island community broke ground for a new LGBTQ Center on Upper College Rd. When the \$2.1 million, 4,300 s/f site is completed, URI's new center will be a safe and affirming place for all members of the community. URI is the first institution of higher education in the country to design and build a free standing LGBTQ Center.

Gov. Lincoln Chafee, other state officials, URI president David Dooley, chief diversity officer Naomi Thompson, LGBTQ Center director Annie Russell and students participated in the ceremonial launch of construction at 19 Upper College Rd., the site of the old Ruggles House, a vacant URI building that will be razed.

"It's a great moment for the University of Rhode Island to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity that's part of our community now and will be in the future. As we have said in our transformational goals, building a community in which every member is welcomed, supported and valued is essential to our identity and mission," said Dooley.

Designed to give URI's LGBTQ community a strong identity, the single-story, stone and clapboard building will have a veranda running along the front of the center and plans call for its roof to feature ornamental plants and flowers. The center will have a multipurpose room with a capacity of about 50, a conference room for about 20 people, a group counseling room, and a student lounge. There will be offices for the director, three staff members and student staff members. The center is part of URI's Office of Community, Equity and Diversity.

The contractor is Nadeau Corp. of South Attleboro, Mass., and the architect is LLB Architects of Pawtucket. Completion is projected for spring of 2015.

The current staff of the LGBTQ Center located in Adams Hall has developed and uses a strategic planning process to build and track the success of its programs and initiatives. The center started 27 new programs, services, groups or initiatives in 2011-2012 and added more than 50 more in fall 2012 resulting in more than 75 initiatives within just two years. This year alone, the center has hosted more than 100 programs and participation is growing. The URI programs and approaches have been adopted by more than 15 institutions nationwide and one internationally.

In addition, Russell and her staff have designed and led numerous Safe Zone workshops at several different levels for all members of the university community.

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