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University of Rhode Island breaks ground on \$125 million engineering school

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Kingston, RI Governor Gina Raimondo, University of Rhode Island (URI) president David Dooley and URI College of Engineering Dean Raymond Wright joined other state, university and business leaders in a ceremonial groundbreaking to launch construction of URI's new \$125 million engineering complex.

Funded by a bond issue approved by Rhode Island voters in 2014 and supported by Rhode Island's business and labor leaders, the project will result in a 190,000 s/f facility designed to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation, and which can evolve to meet the technology-driven changes in all segments of engineering. This first phase of the transformation of the engineering facilities is the largest construction project in the university's history, and it is set for completion in summer 2019.

Shown (from left) are: Calvin Cho, a URI College of Engineering student; Michael Brandmeier, president and chief executive officer of Toray Plastics (America) Inc.; David Dooley, president of URI; Gina Raimondo, governor of Rhode Island; and Raymond Wright, dean of the College of Engineering

In the fall of 2016, Rhode Island voters approved an additional \$25.5 million for the second phase of the project to upgrade and expand Bliss Hall.

Demolition began on existing structures to make way for the new building. Nearly all of the five buildings, Crawford Hall, Gilbreth Hall, Kelly Hall, Kelly Hall Annex and Wales Hall, all of which opened in the late 1950s and early 1960s, have been razed.

The building will have two 72-seat "active classrooms" and a 60-seat "active learning classroom," as well as vibration proof laboratories, a clean room, computer labs, offices, a café and more.

The key feature of the building is the truss support system, which is often used in bridge and design construction. The new engineering facility will have three trusses, which eliminate the need for interior support columns or posts and allow for large, open spaces.

“Increasingly, our engineering students and faculty are not only working in interdisciplinary teams within the college, but with students and faculty from across the university in oceanography, health, pharmacy, chemistry, computer science, and business, to name but a few, as well as companies and corporations around the state, region and the world. This new facility will stimulate collaborative, multidisciplinary learning and research. It will lead to discoveries that we cannot even imagine today. Our engineering alumni, students, and faculty have always been essential drivers of innovation and economic development in Rhode Island, and with these new facilities, we know that URI’s role in moving the state forward will be strongly enhanced,” said Dooley.

Even before a single spade of earth was turned or a single excavator showed up at the site, the project attracted \$7 million in private gift pledges. Among the top pledges are: Toray Plastics (America) \$2 million; FM Global, \$1 million; Taco Inc., \$400,000; Barry Gertz, URI class of 1976, \$1 million; Jerry Deroy, URI class of 1971, \$500,000; and an anonymous gift of \$2.5 million from a URI alumnus and corporate leader. The college has set a \$20 million private fundraising goal to invest in additional equipment and faculty recruitment.

Ballinger of Philadelphia, is the prime architect, mechanical engineer, electrical engineer, and structural engineer on the project, and the associate architectural firm is DBVW of Providence. The associate structural engineering firm is Odeh Engineers of North Providence. The owner’s representative is Hill International, an international firm with an office in Providence. The construction management firm is Dimeo Construction Co. of Providence.

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