

“A huge impact on the science and math programs.” “A showcase for Western.” Those are phrases people have been using to describe the Evan R. Agenstein Hall expansion and renovation project that is currently underway. Plans have been approved and groundbreaking is scheduled for late spring or early summer.

“It’s been an exciting process,” said Dr. Jerry Zweerink, professor of chemistry who serves as faculty shepherd on the project committee. “It’s very exciting to be able to spend more than \$30 million on a building. We’ll have a facility that will take us well into the 21st century.”

Construction plans include building an addition east of the current building that would approximately double its size, and then renovating the original building. The project, barring delays, is scheduled for completion in the fall of 2009.

Jerry said the current building, built in 1969, does not meet the needs of the growing chemistry, biology, and computer science/mathematics/physics departments.

“Things were designed for the ’70s,” he said, “and the ways we communicate and learn today are drastically different.”

Laboratory space is not adequate in the current building, and new laboratories will be built in the addition to ensure state-of-the-art ventilation systems and equipment. When completed, both faculty and students will have more space to conduct research.

Additionally, students will gain pleasant gathering spaces throughout, and renovations will include updating classrooms and utilities; and expanding office space. In 1969, the departments had 23 faculty members. Today there are 39, along with three graduate assistants.

The Agenstein Hall project has been in the works since 2002, when U.S. Sen. Christopher “Kit” Bond secured \$250,000 in federal funds for Western to work with Project Kaleidoscope/National Science Foundation to draw up plans for the renovation and expansion. The project remained on the state’s capital improvement list since then. Finally last year, the state released \$30.1 million for the expansion and renovation, and the project received a boost in October when Wes and Patsy Remington donated \$5 million for the project (see page 14).

“It’s been a very positive experience,” Jerry said of the planning. “People are really excited about it.”