

## 'The George' expected to boost downtown

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Published: Thursday, May 13, 2010 at 3:15 a.m.

Soon, downtown Spartanburg will be bustling from morning to night with college students whose future aspirations could lead to a significant and lasting impact on the economic and cultural landscape of the city and the region.

That's the vision Darrell Parker, the University of South Carolina Upstate and city and county leaders have for the new George Dean Johnson Jr. College of Business and Economics -- or, simply, "The George" -- that will be unveiled today on St. John Street.

"This is going to transform Spartanburg," said Parker, dean of USC Upstate's new state-of-the-art business school. "I don't think we know all the doors that we've opened yet. I think we're just beginning to discover the potential."

For starters, USC Upstate now has a facility and program that Parker believes rivals any in the country and will attract top-notch students. From its stock ticker on the building's brick facade -- the only one of its kind on the exterior of any business school in America -- to the Stock Trading Room that will double as a computer lab, with dual monitors, and a classroom for investment classes whose students can monitor live activity on Wall Street, "The George" has it all.

"If I was a high school senior and I walked in that building, I would be speechless," said Matt Bertino, a business administration major from Jupiter, Fla. "I'd be like, 'Where do I sign up?' It's just so breathtaking when you see it."

Unfortunately for Bertino, he graduated last week and will not be able to experience the top-notch facility as returning business majors will.

"I think some of the biggest advantages are going to be the introduction of the new technology that's in the building," Bertino said. "And I think being in downtown, there's going to be a lot more small-business opportunities to get hands-on learning experience with the local Spartanburg community. That's one big thing that I'm jealous about."

Fortunately for Spartanburg, however, Bertino -- who just accepted a job as a financial analyst for American Credit Acceptance -- is staying here.

"The real job growth is going to come from stuff we generate," said George Dean Johnson Jr., the school's namesake and entrepreneur whose array of businesses includes American Credit Acceptance. "To me, if we can create more (entrepreneurs), it makes us a real college town. And by being a college town, chances are, you're going to live where you went to college."

Johnson and Parker said the daily shuttle buses that will bring students from USC Upstate's main campus to "The George" downtown will also contribute to a college-town feel. And there will be plenty of students.

The original plan was for "The George" to accommodate just juniors and seniors, but



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George Dean Johnson Jr., left, and Dr. Darrell Parker, the dean of the business school, tour the George Dean Johnson Jr. College of Business and Economics on Tuesday.

-- beginning this fall -- all 900 USC Upstate business majors will be taking classes downtown. The first classes in the building will begin July 6 for the university's Summer II session.

The opportunities for both students and local businesses are boundless, Parker said -- from large conference rooms that can host business leaders from around the state to small "breakout" rooms for more intimate meetings and instruction. There are also plans to eventually implement cutting-edge technology for distance learning, in which some of "The George's" top professors would conduct lectures to be broadcast live to other colleges and universities statewide.

"I think the thing that is most exciting is the influence ('The George') will have on the expectations of our students," USC Upstate Chancellor John Stockwell said. "They come from all different backgrounds, but they walk in here, and this is a sense of what their future can be. It will add to their capacity to aspire for important things, because this is an important building.

"Students don't get a chance to work in an environment like this on a day-to-day basis at very many campuses in the country."

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