

MAKING HISTORY



Jim West, dean of Mississippi State University's College of Architecture, Art and Design, gives a presentation on the college's statewide impact at the Starkville Rotary Club's Monday meeting at the Starkville Country Club. (Photo by Steven Nalley, SDN)

West touts MSU architecture college's statewide impact

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Mississippi State University's College of Architecture, Art and Design has a history of making history.

Jim West, dean of the college, said back in 1991, when it was called the MSU School of Architecture, it became the first architecture program in the country to require all of its students to have laptop computers. This fall, he said his college would roll out another national first.

"We will be the first program in the country that has (all the) architecture students, a whole year's worth, and all the construction students, a whole year's worth, in the same studio with faculty from both groups team-

teaching in that studio over two semesters," West said. "It is going to be a mess, but it is going to be fun."

West addressed members of the Starkville Rotary Club Monday, discussing the past and future of his college and the difference it had made in small town renovation and disaster intervention across the state.

West centered his discussion on two research centers within the MSU College of Architecture, Art and Design (CAAD): The Carl Small Town Center (CSTC) and the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio (GCCDS) in Biloxi. Between 2009 and 2012, he said, CAAD's research centers received 100 funded grants and contracts valued at \$4 million, reaching 45 communities and 119 organizations to help generate 730

jobs.

"We've worked in communities all over the state. In architecture in particular, we pay attention to the civic nature of our work," West said. "You plop a building down on the corner of Main Street and 13th Avenue, and it's there for 50 to 100 years. It has a real civic nature to it. We try to educate our students, in architecture in particular, about the importance of civic responsibility."

West said the CSTC had done significant work with the city of Greenwood, renovating 14 buildings. Students had played a significant role in these renovations, he said, and the state as a whole was rich with opportunities to bring a new shine to old

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buildings.

"What our centers do is help people recognize what they have and capitalize," West said.

West said Greenwood also indirectly helped CSTC help another town. When film crews went to Greenwood to adapt Kathryn Stockett's novel "The Help" for the screen, he said, the filmmakers left behind a \$100,000 fund to start a community center in nearby Baptist Town, later augmented by 23 Katrina Cottages brought up from the Gulf Coast to replace Baptist Town's dilapidated housing.

West said the CSTC had also been a partner in Smithville's recovery from an EF-5 tornado that struck in 2011. Similarly, he said, the GCCDS was launched to assist recovery from Hurricane Katrina.

"We started it in east Biloxi, (where) 95 percent of the residential houses were gone totally or underwater. We decided we would plant there and focus in there," West said. "(In) the first 4-5 years, in that little neighborhood of east Biloxi, (we had) 300 new houses."

Other GCCDS initiatives,

West said, included restoring local homesteads, restoring wetlands, and development planning research. He said GCCDS was also trying to launch a center for scholarly research on the art of Walter Anderson.

"He was an incredible observer of nature," West said. "There are people in the biology department (at MSU) that are just as excited about Walter Anderson ... as the art department."

Starkville Rotary Club President Debra Hicks said she found the program informative. West explained how the MSU School of Architecture pulled its current departments from other MSU colleges to become CAAD, and she said she had never heard that history before.

Hicks said she also enjoyed learning about CAAD's statewide initiatives, particularly in service. Rotary International had a strong focus on service, she said, and she was glad to see that focus imparted in MSU's classrooms.

"I think it's so important to see where what you learn in the classroom applies to the real world," Hicks said. "They do a great job, from what he's told us of tying what they learn in the classroom to people's everyday lives."

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