

News Article
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Alabama 4-H to Open New Environmental Center

Alabama 4-H is set to open the first planned gold-certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) environmental education building in the eastern United States. The facility will set a new standard in teaching Alabama's children about being environmentally responsible and energy efficient. U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby will join in the dedication ceremony Monday, Nov. 26, at 10 a.m. for the \$5 million Alabama 4-H Environmental Science Education Center.

This facility, located at the Alabama 4-H Center on Lay Lake near Columbiana, is also the first planned gold-certified LEED building in Alabama. The 17,500-square-foot facility will offer Alabama's school children, 4-H youth, business leaders and others the opportunity to learn about the environment in a way not currently offered in Alabama.

"This is a special day in the life of Alabama 4-H," said Jack Odle, chairman of the Alabama 4-H Club Foundation, the fund-raising arm of Alabama 4-H. "4-H'ers and all school children will be able to come to the 4-H Center and use this facility to better understand why it is more important than ever that we protect the environment. "Through our educational programs and with this new facility, 4-H is making a significant commitment to the youth of our state," Odle said. "We would not be able to achieve this without the support of the donors – corporations, foundations and individuals who have joined with us to build this learning center and to endow 4-H programs. We thank them."

Auburn University Pres. Jay Gogue, Alabama A&M Pres. Robert Jennings, Sharon Anderson with National 4-H and Alabama 4-H State Council member Ethan Parker of St. Clair County will also speak at the dedication. A highlight of the day will be the release of several red-tailed hawks by the Southeastern Raptor Center, part of Auburn University's College of Veterinary Medicine. The release is a symbol of 4-H's commitment to the environment.

The LEED Green Building rating system is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings established by the U.S. Green Building Council. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality. To attain gold LEED certification, buildings are required to achieve a total of 39 points – the Alabama 4-H Environmental Science Education Center will apply for 45 points.

The building was designed by Davis Architects of Birmingham and constructed by B.L. Harbert International, also of Birmingham. Nearly every aspect of the construction and furnishings include some degree of sustainable materials. When 4-H'ers and visitors walk into the center, they might not see green, but the building and its furnishings will feature the highest environmental standards possible.

"Designing this building has been an exciting challenge because it needed to tell the story of why it was a green building and why that is important," said Neil Davis, president of Davis Architects. "There will be many obvious things when you look at the building where you will immediately see that it is energy efficient, but other things in the building are not easily recognizable as being energy efficient. "For us, how to properly tell the story of this building was an interesting challenge," he said. "We've always appreciated the natural, historical aspects of architecture, but in a building like this, we've come full circle and rediscovered it."

The heritage of Alabama 4-H has also been captured in the building's commitment to sustainability. Alabama 4-H was founded nearly 100 years ago as a way to teach parents modern methods of farming.

While parents were resistant to change, county agents learned that their children were eager to learn newfound technology, so agents taught children, who, in turn, took the new information to parents. With this new facility, Alabama 4-H's Natural Resources and Environmental Education program will be equipped to teach Alabama youth and educators about protecting and enhancing the environment in a facility unlike anything currently in the state.

The facility has been built with funds raised by the Campaign for Alabama 4-H through the Alabama 4-H Club Foundation, Inc. More than 700 corporations, foundations, organizations and individuals have supported the Campaign for Alabama 4-H giving \$5.7 million to date. Funds from the campaign also support a \$2 million, 20-room addition to the hotel lodge space at the 4-H Center, and the endowment of 4-H programs statewide.