

Architecture students pitch museum plans

Date: May 2, 2013

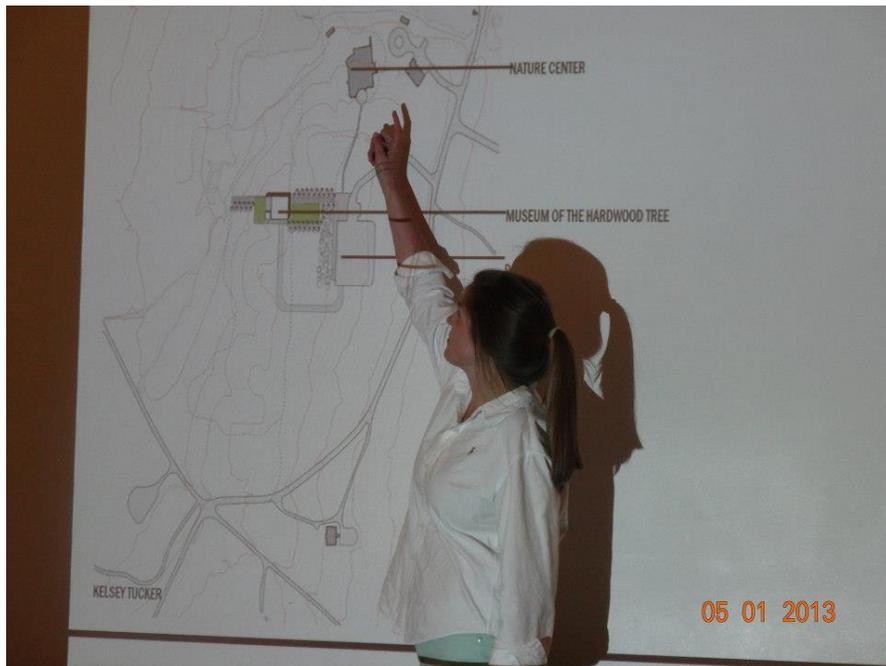
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ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Publication: Arkansas Democrat-Gazette: Northwest Edition (AR)

Page: 7

Section: Northwest Arkansas



Caption: Kelsey Tucker explains a preferred location that her building would occupy on the museum's grounds at Chaffee Crossing. Photo: from Hardwood Tree Museum.

FORT SMITH -The idea of a hardwood museum gave fifth-year architecture students at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville a focal point for their design visions.

The eight students traveled to Fort Smith on Wednesday to present their designs in an event room at River Park before members of the **Hardwood Tree Museum** board of directors.

The presentations completed a project they worked on all semester.

"I think we had some great ideas," museum board President Bob Worley said. "I'm sure some aspects of each of these will be incorporated in the final design."

Board member and Fort Smith architect James Reddick said designing a hardwood museum not only was a fun project for the students but it had some basis in reality, requiring students to fit the design into space and exhibit size constraints.

Reddick said the board was a long way from choosing a design for the museum. It hasn't begun fundraising for the project and will have to make decisions on the type and number of exhibits - which will go indoors and what can be used as outdoor displays - and how much floor space they will require.

The museum will be built on 20 acres at Chaffee Crossing near the Janet Huckabee River Valley Nature Center. Worley said it will take six or seven years to raise the money, plan, design and build the museum.

But the board hasn't been idle since announcing plans in 2011 for the museum. Worley said members have been conducting interviews, acquiring artifacts and capturing histories of the state's early woodworking industry.

The museum will display not only include artifacts from the hardwood industry, but also pictures and images the board is assembling into a database, Worley said. Later, an exhibit professional will be brought in to help balance exhibitions of artifacts with pictures and images for the museum.

Fort Smith was a center for the woodworking industry with more than 100 businesses devoted to woodworking at one time. The businesses in Fort Smith built furniture, caskets, wagons and even riverboats, Worley said.

The furniture industry also flourished in places such as Little Rock, Benton, Owasso and Fayetteville, he said. The world-famous Ben Pearson Archery manufacturing business was based in Pine Bluff and wooden baseball bats were made in Harrison, Worley said.

"The hardwood tree put food on the table all over this state," he said. "It made millionaires out of a lot of people."

There also will be opportunities for outdoor exhibits at the museum. Reddick said one of the students incorporated in her design a peckerwood mill, a small sawmill that is set up in the woods to rough cut felled trees before they are hauled out of the woods.

The museum also has received donation of an 1836 barn from Johnson County that was built of rough cut oak, Reddick said. It will be set up as an outdoor exhibit.