

**For Immediate Release**  
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**Contact Bill Taylor, Asst. Director, News Services**  
taylorb@ferris.edu, (231) 591-2065 or 591-5604

### **Alumnus Wheeler leads renovation of Ferris studio**

BIG RAPIDS – A Ferris State University alumnus has gone the extra mile to provide learning opportunities for students.

John Wheeler, chief executive officer of Rockford Construction Company and the Rockford Development Group of Belmont, recently led a campaign to renovate an architecture technology studio in the College of Technology's Swan Building. Ribbon cutting ceremonies for the new learning environment for the instruction and study of architectural technology will be held Dec. 8 at 1:30 p.m. in Swan-205.

Diane Nagelkirk, chair and associate professor of the Ferris Architectural Technology and Facility Management Department, and Mel Kantor, former chair and veteran professor, sought to create a real-world architecture studio that would simulate an office environment and provide the optimal learning experience for students. Their goal was a unified application of 22 workstations with privacy screens, small group areas and a cohesive lecture and presentation area. This was to be encompassed by a fluid, functional and architectural space.

During the 2003-04 academic year, Nagelkirk and Kantor, a long-time friend and former instructor of Wheeler's, took their \$35,000 development proposal to the construction executive to discuss fundraising opportunities. It proved to be a project near and dear to the heart of Wheeler, who graduated from the program in 1976 and serves on Ferris' Architectural Technology Advisory Board.

Wheeler volunteered to spearhead the renovation, working with seven other companies to complete the project. Five of the firms donated all or part of their services. Wheeler covered 100 percent of all the costs not donated.

Those firms assisting were Columbo's Carpets Inc., Custer Office Environments, Detail Painting, Feyen-Zylstra, Handorn Inc., United Commercial Services and Via Design Inc. Rockford Construction served as project manager for the renovation and, in fact, put \$10,000 more into the remodeling than Ferris' original plans.

The result has been a striking transformation of Swan 205 from a space that did not match program goals for a learning environment into a dynamic studio serving second year Architectural Technology and third and fourth year Facility Management students. The space primarily accommodates studio courses with a mixed lecture and studio configuration. The studio includes workstations, a designated presentation area with a state-of-the-art projection system and cabinet space for storage, resource library materials and miscellaneous office equipment.

Wheeler, who has hired several Ferris graduates for his firms, also sponsors a scholarship for architecture students continuing into FSU's Construction Management program. He and his wife, Chris, were the major donors for the Wheeler Pavilion built in 2001 at Top Taggart Field. The three-story building houses a presidential suite and various facilities for football and track and field game day operations.