LaGrange College sets ambitious fund-raising goal

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When LaGrange College goes public with its record $65 million capital campaign today, it also will announce that it already has quietly raised $59 million toward that goal.

Now the oldest private college in Georgia, founded in 1831, will appeal to its alumni and the general public to help raise the remaining $6 million by next year.

The centerpiece of the campaign will be the building of a new 45,000-square-foot library, three times the size of the existing one, right in the heart of the campus.

The library, with construction beginning this week, will be special for a number of reasons. Thanks to a $6 million donation from the Callaway Foundation, the library will be named after the late Frank and Laura Lewis, who were both librarians. Frank Lewis, who worked at the college's library for 22 years, was the first African-American faculty member and the first African-American trustee of the college.

And thanks to the encouragement of environmentalist Ray Anderson, founder of Interface and a former trustee of the college, the library will be LEED-certified, meaning it will be built to the environmental standards of the U.S. Green Building Council.

LaGrange College President Stuart Gulley, who drives a Prius because of Anderson, said the plan is for the library to open by November 2008. At that time, 215 parking spaces will be converted to public plazas to help link the college campus together.

The campaign did receive two important estate gifts: $14.9 million from the estate of Lee Edwards Candler, and $3 million from the estate of Louise Hawks Turman. Other major donations included an additional $4 million from the Callaway Foundation for converting an historic gymnasium into a music venue; $2.5 million from the Lettie Pate Evans Foundation; and $6.5 million from the board of trustees.

Trustee Scott Hawkins, an Atlanta real estate executive who graduated from LaGrange in 1974 and is chairing the campaign, donated $1.5 million on his own.

"We want LaGrange to be the premier liberal arts and sciences college in Georgia," Hawkins said, adding that 100 percent of the faculty also contributed.

With this campaign, the college's endowment will total $68 million.