FIU's gala last week brought the dream of a new business school complex closer to reality.

BY GREGG FIELDS

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It was a starry, starry night last Thursday at Florida International University, as the business school celebrated the unveiling of plans for its new four-building complex.

The event drew 500 donors, students and faculty, all of them considered "stars" who got a sneak preview at the business complex that will soon begin to rise on the university's Tamiami campus.

Those stars include R. Kirk Landon, the local philanthropist for whom the undergraduate business school is named, and Alvah Chapman, the former Knight Ridder chairman for whom the graduate school is named.

"I've been here eight years, and I've been planning for this day since I took the job," said Joyce Elam, dean of the College of Business Administration.

Elam said the four new structures are vital for the school, which grants diplomas to 1,500 undergraduates each year. They'll help the school cope with its burgeoning student body.

"Right now, students take classes all over the campus," Elam said. "The administration is all over the campus. We have no common space, where students can get together, share ideas and work on projects."

WORK IN PROGRESS

The business complex has been years in the making and all the financing isn't in place yet. But enough has been raised to get started.

Elam said school officials began by designing what they felt they needed. "That's when we realized the price tag was $45 million," she said.

FIU President Modesto A. "Mitch" Maidique found funding for the first $15 million, but that left a $30 million shortfall. Fortunately, the state matching fund program means Elam only needs to raise $15 million more. So far, she's raised $9 million.

To allow more time for fund-raising, the project has been divided into phases, with an initial groundbreaking scheduled for this summer.

PHASE ONE

The first phase, which focuses on student areas, will include meeting rooms and a 300-seat auditorium — named for benefactor Ocean Bank — as well as smaller suites for presentations.

The business school will have its own career placement center, named for Bank of America.

"Really, the key for us was our alumni who worked at these corporations and were willing to be our advocates," Elam said.