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Greener Vegas gift benefits UNLV students



COURTESY PHOTO

A model shows a UNLV architecture project that is targeting the redevelopment of the downtown Las Vegas area on Fremont Street between Las Vegas Boulevard and Eastern Avenue. Greener Vegas donated materials for the model.

By [Stephanie Tavares \(contact\)](#), In Business reporter

Fri, May 8, 2009 (2 a.m.)

There is nothing college students love more than free stuff.

But when a truckload of building materials was donated to UNLV's senior architecture students, the feeling was more like euphoria.

The students received hundreds of dollars worth of lightly used and new foam core, medium density fiberboard (MDF), Plexiglas and lighting from Las Vegas nonprofit sustainability promoter Greener Vegas. The materials were used to build a large 3D model of the students' senior project: a complete redesign and revitalization plan for Fremont Street.

"The model project itself wasn't anything too different, they used similar materials last year. But (this year's seniors) had a lot more materials, and when you buy it new it can be quite expensive for students," said visiting professor Harry Ray, who taught the course. "They were really excited to be connected with Greener Vegas and have access to a lot of material they couldn't otherwise afford."

With the free materials, the class was able to make a mock-up of their revitalization plan along Fremont Street from Las Vegas Boulevard to Eastern Avenue, plus a block on either side of Fremont Street.

"Our vision of the new Fremont Street could only be completed with the help of greenervegas.org," students wrote in a letter thanking Greener Vegas. "Its support throughout the 2009 spring semester has given us the tools and resources to make our dream of a new Fremont Street go from pencil and paper to physical 3-D form."

It's part of a larger movement by Greener Vegas to promote recycling and sustainable business practices in Las Vegas, and to take the business community's excess materials and turn them over to the valley's underfunded schools.

Businesses are encouraged to donate any kind of office supplies they don't use. In exchange, the companies get credit for their good deeds and free promotion on greenervegas.org.

Generally, though, those efforts have focused on elementary schools. The donation to UNLV was the organization's first higher education project.

Hands-on class projects and group work such as the model project are unique but vital projects for students planning to work in architecture, said Ray, whose day job is as a partner of zimmerray studios.

And the more materials the students have, the more realistic their experience will be.

"If the students go to grad school, this gives them an understanding of how to work in an urban environment and what it means to design in an urban environment," Ray said. "But they are also working as a group and developing a group vision, which is more akin to what you have when you work in an architectural firm. That's one of the missing links in the way these courses are often taught. It's usually an individual effort. This is a vision for an entire area done as a group."

But Greener Vegas founder Tim Stimple and Ray said the model Fremont Street is just the beginning.

The duo met recently at a First Friday arts event in downtown Las Vegas, where the seniors displayed their model. The duo brainstormed other ways to team up and help others.

Ray is looking into the feasibility of having students use discarded materials from conventions to create usable communal spaces such as shade structures in low-income neighborhood parks or at homeless shelters.

"They have a lot of material they recycle from convention work from solar shades to MDF to paper," Ray said. "It would be great to do a design and build where they supply the material and we could design and build. That would be great."

He is also hoping the free materials will keep rolling in. With the university's budget expected to be cut and tuition expected to rise dramatically, future UNLV students will be more strapped for cash than ever.

Ray said donations of printer cartridges, rolls of paper and other office materials are always appreciated by students.

"If you think about the way an architectural office works, they would benefit from any materials that an architectural office has," Ray said. "They're always in need of audio visual materials and software to run on their computers like

Sketch Up software.”

The UNLV architectural seniors’ model Fremont Street renovation is displayed this summer in the department’s library at UNLV.

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