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Design students work on charity art Tempe Marketplace project will take donations for area nonprofits

Jonathan J. Cooper
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A new piece of public art promises to entertain shoppers, encourage recycling and give ASU design students a real-life project to work on, all while raising money for Tempe charities.

The art will be built at the new Tempe Marketplace development, an expansive shopping, dining and entertainment project going up on the northeast corner of Rural Road and Rio Salado Parkway.

Target, Best Buy, Barnes and Noble, JCPenney and Harkins Theatres are among the nearly 90 stores that will begin opening in June.

The ASU students, part of the Department of Visual Communication in the College of Design, will create an art piece to accept donations for the Tempe Community Foundation, an umbrella organization that supports area nonprofits, said Mookesh Patel, the professor working with the students.

“It’s hard to find clients who are willing to throw their projects into the classroom, so this is a great opportunity both for the program and for the students,” Patel said.

Students have researched and analyzed the backgrounds, motivations and interests of the Tempe Marketplace clientele who will be their audience, Patel said.

They developed a strategic plan to guide their efforts and are beginning to formalize their design ideas, which should be done in the next three weeks, Patel said.

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Working in teams to create a real project is an experience Patel's students can't get in the "theoretical environment in the classroom," he added.

"The project is real. The deadline is real. The budget is real," Patel said. The interaction with people is real."

The 20 members of this year's Tempe Leadership class conceived the idea as part of a service project the group plans annually.

Tempe Leadership is a nine-month program that brings together Tempe professionals and educates them on current and future city issues, said Nikki Ripley, a member of this year's group.

Ripley's Tempe Leadership class will host a fundraising party March 17 to pay for the art project.

The party starts at 6:22 p.m. at the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix. Tax deductible tickets are \$50 each and include two drinks and all-you-can-eat food.

Vestar Development Company, the Phoenix-based group building Tempe Marketplace, is also working with the students on the project.

"We want to be a great community partner," said Emily Bond, Vestar's marketing director. "This is definitely one of our core values."

One of the requirements was to "think green," Patel said. The final project will encourage recycling in a fun and educational way that attracts children.

Students also hope the project will serve as a symbol to the Tempe Marketplace retailers, pushing them to recycle their cardboard boxes and other materials, Patel said.

Another project goal is to integrate the art into Tempe Marketplace's primary pedestrian areas to "improve the consumer experience with visual art displays," Patel said.

Grant Walker, a visual communication design junior, said the project was both stressful and fun.

"It's very exciting," Walker said. "It's a great opportunity for us, working with such a huge client. It's a really big deal."