Controversial Alumni Plaza breaks ground with cactus garden intact

By Alexandria Blue
Contributing Writer

Nearly two years after controversy over surrounding, the proposed removal of the cactus garden, ground will be broken today on the Alumni Plaza, a $30 million plaza project.

More than 200 students, faculty and alumni are expected to gather today to commemorate the beginning of the $4.85 million plaza project.

UA President Peter Likins and ASUA President J.F. Benedict are expected to speak. UA men's basketball coach Lute Olson will also be in attendance.

The ceremony will begin at 4:30 p.m. outside the Administration Building. At the beginning of the program, the U.S. Army color guard will ring seven times in honor of UA alumnus Bill Bowers, who was killed overseas during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The new plaza will be a home to a host of native Sonoran Desert plants, an elliptical grassy hill, four new fountains, 50 alpines benches and a bronze Wildcat family statue.

Amphitheater-style steps will be built in front of the Administration building to complement the existing entrance.

The amphitheater will give students a place to lounge in between classes as well as another venue for music performances and other formal events, said Mike McDonald, chief financial officer for the Alumni Association.

Some UA students who walk and ride their bicycles to class in the potential construction area are concerned about being diverted from their normal routes.

Cynthia Pearson, a freshman majoring in pre-physiological sciences, rides her bike to a class in the Modern Languages building.

Pearson said that the construction will force her to use another bike route and could potentially make her late to class.

“My class is always in 10 minutes after (my class in the Modern Languages building), so I always have to be on the run,” Pearson said.

“It's not going to be good,” she said.

Steven Alex, a music freshman who has a class near the future plaza, said that he will find a new way to get to class once construction begins. “It'll be a hassle on the days that I wake up 10 minutes before class,” he said. “But typically, it shouldn't be a problem.”

The plaza, which will be situated in front of the Administration building between the Student Union Memorial

New Buildings
At a Glance

- Institute for Biomedical Science and Biotechnology $65.7 million
- Medical Research Building $54.3 million
- Roy P. Drachman Hall $30 million

The groundbreaking for three medical research facilities will mark the start of the U.A.'s quest to become a leader in research.

The Institute for Biomedical Science and Biotechnology building and the Medical Research building will soon be constructed on a 103,000-square-foot lot. A neighboring building, Roy P. Drachman Hall, will also break ground today on its 103,000 square-foot space. A street-side style ceremony in honor of the groundbreaking will include refreshments, a performance by the UA Steel Band and a speech from President Peter Likins.

The new buildings, located on the corner of East Helen Street and North Warren Avenue, is expected to bring together 30 faculty scientists and 300 researchers, including neuroscientists, respiratory scientists, medicinal chemists