The new Micron Business and Economics Building, opening fall 2012, will offer masterfully designed learning spaces that embrace new technology and beckon the community to campus.

At the corner of University Drive and Capitol Boulevard, it is perfectly aligned with the heart of government and the business community.

But the college already has laid a solid foundation for its future. Dean Patrick Shannon, who began teaching at Boise State more than 30 years ago, says the business school has blossomed and is more connected with the surrounding community than ever before. New initiatives have built a strategic network of academics and business professionals, bringing great business minds together to tackle tough issues and help keep Idaho companies on stable footing.

"When we were out fundraising for the new building, I emphasized that if all we were doing was changing location, I wouldn't invest in this building," Shannon says. "The community called for a business college that was more involved, so from research to teaching, everything we do these days is done through the lens of the community."

Today's College of Business and Economics is teeming with examples of partnerships that are paving the way for a more interconnected future.

They include last fall’s Design Thinking, modeled after a program at Stanford. The effort matched leaders from four participating companies with business faculty and students. Teams learned the principles of Design Thinking — a process to address ill-defined but strategically important problems — and tackled a looming problem for each company.

It answered the call of business leaders like Matt Bell, vice president of strategic planning for St. Luke’s Health Systems, who says he was looking for a way to encourage his organization to think out of the box, bring forth original ideas and do so in a disciplined and recurring manner.

“It makes sense for that kind of process to come from and be facilitated by the university,” Bell says. “We gained an outside perspective from Boise State students and professors. There really is value in a divergence of thinking and a convergence of ideas for a solution.”

By Sherry Squires
The Micron Business and Economics Building

$37 million 
118,000 square feet 
Four stories 
Corner of Capitol Boulevard and University Drive 
Opens fall 2012 
Micron Technology Foundation provided a $12.5 million lead gift for the building, followed by support from about 1,000 other contributors.

College of Business and Economics Dean Patrick Shannon will guide the college through the transition to a new building.

Patrick Shannon
The Executive MBA program is another great success story. Launched in 2006, it was Idaho's first Executive MBA program and unlike any other in that it was created in partnership with a consortium of local businesses. In 2011, it is exceeding expectations. In an independent survey of its graduates by the international Executive MBA Council, Boise State's program beat the average rating for all programs worldwide by a notable margin. Participants set it apart for its creativity in the evaluation of business problems, the immediate link between class projects and work tasks, an integrated curriculum that takes into account a wide range of business units and a trade mission-style international experience.

“The support of numerous local business experts, combined with participants who already have several years of managerial experience, has created an exceptional learning experience,” says Kirk Smith, associate dean for executive education. “We’re trying to grow everything around us, and programs like the Executive MBA pull together bright minds to forge new ideas.”

Critical to their success as new programs, both Design Thinking and the Executive MBA program are self-sustaining and do not rely on public funding or student tuition or fees.

“I see a future that is ever more connected to the community,” Shannon says, “both in meeting the needs of local business and in leveraging partnerships that will put us more in control of our own budget destiny.”

Another of the college’s efforts reaches outside the boardroom to places like the football field and theater stage. The Gang, as it is known, is a group of eight leaders and their diverse organizations brought together by Nancy Napier, executive director of Boise State's Centre for Creativity and Innovation. They meet to discuss messy problems that transcend their immediate lines of work and to collectively seek solutions.

“The group’s unique attributes and the involvement of Boise State football coach Chris Petersen grabbed a headline in USA Today last fall, and led Napier and Gang member Ada County Sheriff Gary Raney to share their thoughts on incorporating creativity with a division of NASA.

“I’m not aware of a group like this anywhere else in the world,” Napier says. “The Gang’s strength is in its willingness to see and use the value of drawing on other disciplines and sectors for similarities and lessons.”

Building on the success of the original group, Napier is helping to launch “mini gangs” with the ultimate goal of capturing the best ideas, attracting creative thinkers and organizations, inspiring new business growth and building a stronger economy for Boise. So far, a “Posse” and a “Pack” have started, with Napier and others tracking the process to develop a template for use with other groups.

“The university gives us a point of connection through which we can become a greater good for the community,” says Mark Hofflund, managing director for the Idaho Shakespeare Festival.
COBE’s list of community engagement projects involves nearly every faculty member and hundreds of students in the college. Many formed new partnerships with community businesses and agencies when COBE launched its first Spring Turnaround Initiative in 2009. The college invited area businesses struggling with a declining economy to call the college for help and subsequently assisted nearly 600 of them.

Increased community engagement has given students vast opportunities. A partnership last fall between TechHelp, the Idaho District Export Council and the U.S. Commercial Service allowed international business students to help create export plans for companies looking to do business outside the country. This semester, students are helping five Idaho firms enter new international markets through The Heidelberg Project, partnering Boise State students with a German university to collectively provide the research the firms need to evaluate the possibilities.

“Having our students work on projects for companies gives them a chance to apply what they learn in the classroom, contribute and be accountable to an organization,” says Meredith A. Taylor, director of COBE’s International Business program. “At the same time, they gain a sense of accomplishment and prove their competence to firms — and themselves — before graduation.”

The college has grown programs like Lessons from Alumni, where COBE graduates share their advice with current students. It also just unveiled an MBA Honors Track that matches top MBA students with professional mentors, began an accounting mentoring program this spring that assigns students to companies based on the students’ interests and has plans for several new speakers’ series. All are aimed at creating a conduit for ideas and expertise to flow to and from the business community.

“This is truly the best time to be at Boise State,” Shannon says. “The probability of running into someone these days with a deep appreciation for the college is high.

“We’ve built tremendous momentum leading up to the opening of the new building, and that’s going to allow us to partner in ways we have yet to imagine.”

The College of Business and Economics

- Since the construction of the existing business building 40 years ago, enrollment in the college’s programs has grown to more than 3,300 students. Undergraduate enrollment during the next 10 years is expected to grow 26 percent, and graduate enrollment is expected to double.
- Boise State’s business college holds the gold standard of accreditation and is the only AACSB-accredited business school in the Treasure Valley. Only about 4 percent of all business programs in the world and one quarter of those in the United States have AACSB accreditation. The college was recognized by U.S. News & World Report as one of the country’s Best Undergraduate Business Programs in 2011.
- The college aspires to build graduate and undergraduate programs with a national reputation for their quality and innovation and to create internationally renowned centers of excellence.