In May 2013, The Guerrieri Family Foundation, one of the Eastern Shore’s leading philanthropies, announced an $8 million gift for the construction of a new Academic Commons. The new complex will include a state-of-the-art library.

The gift, one of the largest private donations for a capital project in the University’s history, is made in memory of Patricia R. Guerrieri, an SU alumna for whom the new complex will be named.

“We are grateful for the opportunity to honor our mother at the very place where she first met our father, on this campus, in a way that expresses our love for her and shares with those who did not know her what a truly amazing and gracious person she was,” said Michael Guerrieri.

“The Guerrieri family has been a longtime friend of Salisbury University,” said President Janet Dudley-Eshbach. “I was fortunate to have met Patti and to have shared my dreams for the University with her. I think she would approve of the impact this new center of learning will have on our students, on the University and on the greater community.”

“Patti Lou” met her future husband, M. Alan Guerrieri, while an elementary education major at SU (then the Maryland State Teachers College, or STC). After their marriage, they continued to live in Salisbury and Ocean City. Three of their children attended the Salisbury State Campus Elementary School, a laboratory for classroom teaching and innovation. The site of that former building will be the location of the new Academic Commons.

The Guerrieri matriarch, who died in May 2010, had a wide variety of interests, ranging from the natural world – plants (she loved gardening), animals including sea life, and astronomy – to history and antiques, sports (football) and cooking.

“Patti Guerrieri often helped others, quietly and privately,” said Dudley-Eshbach. “In many ways this new center for learning will do the same: Silent reading, browsing the stacks, conversations centered on classroom collaborations, a refreshing cup of coffee, stimulating exhibits and thought-provoking lectures – all these activities and more will happen within the new complex.”

“None of us ever totally knows how such engagement changes lives, but it does. The Patricia R. Guerrieri Academic Commons will, in many thoughtful ways, help others to learn and grow.”

The Patricia R. Guerrieri Academic Commons is scheduled to open in 2016. At 234,000 square feet, the $115.8 million facility is the largest construction project ever undertaken at SU. Echoing the classical athenaeums of Ancient Rome and Athens as a gathering place for intellectual, social and cultural pursuits, it is expected to become the hub of campus life. The facility will house the library, as well as the Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture, academic centers serving students, a flexible assembly hall accommodating up to 400, an art display space and a Wi-Fi café.

According to preliminary economic and employment impact estimates calculated by SU’s Business, Economic and Community Outreach Network (BEACON), the construction phase of the new Academic Commons will have a regional economic impact of some $238 million, including the addition of about 350 jobs in Salisbury.