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santiago calatrava

USF Poly Architect Draws From the Surroundings

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LAKELAND | The living vitality of the land entranced Santiago Calatrava as he first walked the heavily wooded site where the University of South Florida Polytechnic will have its home.

Not just the bulls grazing there, although the architect-engineer has an affinity for bulls, but also the rich vegetation of trees, multiple plants and Spanish moss. Throughout Lakeland, he said, he saw the plethora of lakes that make the city's name richly deserved.

From those influences came inspiration for the campus master plan he unveiled last week in Lakeland and Tampa.

"We want to signify a new philosophy, living with the natural," said the Spanish-born Calatrava, 58, whose creations of light and space are known worldwide.

"We are moving toward a time when the relationship of nature and man will be different."

In visiting the North Lakeland site, Calatrava spent a great deal of time walking around, looking at the trees and how the light filtered through them, according to David Steele, USF Poly's director of university advancement.

"He spent a lot of time looking and smelling," Steele said. "He's very thoughtful, very contemplative."



SCOTT WHEELER | THE LEDGER
Architect Santiago Calatrava, shown on Lake Hollingsworth in Lakeland, is designing the University of South Florida Polytechnic campus.

Calatrava redid the USF Poly campus master plan and, in a couple of months, is to present his design for the first building.

That academic building, now planned as 80,000 square feet, will be the initial architectural statement by which the fledgling polytechnic will be known.

"Millions of people will be exposed to it," said Steve Scruggs, executive director of the Lakeland Economic Development Council, referring to drivers who will be able to see the building from Interstate 4.

The campus will be at the corner of I-4 and the Polk Parkway in Lakeland.

At the heart of the master plan is a narrow lake about three-fourths of a mile long, which Calatrava calls the heart of the design.

At one end will be the signature academic building, due to open in summer 2012. At the other, he envisions a large plaza capable of holding thousands of people, suitable for graduation or other key events.

He said the allure of helping start a polytechnic from the ground up made the USF Poly project appealing.

"I enjoy very much my profession," he said. "It is beautiful when you can get in front of a situation like this, the foundational movement of an institution."

Calatrava's fondness for bulls, the USF mascot, is an added bonus for him in designing the new campus. He uses bulls often on pottery he creates, said Gene Engle, chairman of the USF Poly Board.

"He does beautiful paintings and pottery," Engle said.

"You ought to see some of the tables he builds. They're beautiful."

Calatrava's son, Gabriel, an engineer, assisted his father at the presentations.

He prepared the video presentation showing the campus from the air and its proposed transformation into the setting depicted in the architectural model of the master plan, Engle said.

"He dedicates himself 100 percent to his projects," Gabriel Calatrava said of his father.

"It sounds cliché, but it's true. He's probably one of the few architects who can say 'I designed almost everything.'"

Calatrava is known worldwide for designs that include Pont de l'Europe (Bridge of Europe) over the Loire River in Orleans, France; Alamillo Bridge for the World's

Fair in Seville, Spain; a \$23.5 million glass and steel footbridge in Redding, Calif.; Tenerife Opera House in the Canary Islands and a revamp of the Olympic Sports Complex in Athens, Greece, for the 2004 Summer Olympics.

He tried unsuccessfully to get permission to plant 10,000 trees, one for each athlete, in redoing the sports complex, Calatrava said Wednesday during a tour of Hollis Garden. He was there for a breakfast meeting of the Lakeland Economic Development Council's high-skill, high-wage committee.

In the garden, as at the campus site, Calatrava stared at the trees, plants and sculpture, touching some of them, his face contemplative.

"He'll start almost like he's doodling," Engle said, describing Calatrava's approach to design.

"He'll start some sketches. He'll come back, look at it and do more sketches. Then he does water colors and something forms. He knows it when he sees it."

Whether anything he saw at Hollis Garden will find expression in the new USF Poly campus remains to be seen, but his comments throughout the visits to Tampa and Lakeland left little doubt of his desire for harmony between buildings and landscape.

"This will be a wonderful place to walk around for students," he said. "We want something alive and something wonderful."

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