The RSPH is getting a new front door, thanks to the generosity of the Rollins family. A $50 million commitment from the O. Wayne Rollins Foundation and Grace Crum Rollins will enable the school to expand its physical space with construction of a second building for teaching and research.

The new building will be named for John and O. Wayne Rollins’ mother, Claudia Nance Rollins, thus extending the family’s ties with the RSPH to five generations. Naming the building in her honor recognizes Claudia Rollins’ belief that education was key to a better life for her family and the community.

Specifically, the family’s gift will help create a public health complex designed to enhance collaboration within the RSPH and with the school’s many partners in and outside of Emory. The new building will serve as the “front door” to the complex—“a welcoming home for students and alumni and a landmark space for partnership and community,” says RSPH Dean James Curran.

The Rollins gift will also strengthen the school’s ability to attract the high caliber of faculty and students who have become the hallmark of the school’s commitment to improving health and preventing disease. The school has tripled the number of students and faculty and the amount of research since the doors opened to its first facility, the Grace Crum Rollins Building, in 1995.

“This new gift from the Rollins family reflects their vision and their desire to go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that we have the capacity to make our leadership for public health a reality, both locally and globally,” says Emory President James Wagner.

Planning for the new building has been a partnership from the beginning, with input from faculty, staff, students, and alumni in the RSPH, members of Emory’s health sciences and university communities, and the Rollins family. The building architect, SLAM Collaborative, is designing the structure based on the ideas generated by the RSPH and others involved in the planning process. Construction is scheduled to begin next summer.

When the building opens in 2010, the RSPH will more than double in size. The multi-story building will rise on what is now a small parking lot behind the Grace Crum Rollins Building. A pedestrian bridge will link the two public health structures.

With the addition of the new building, the RSPH complex will grow in stature as a destination point for public health students and professionals in Atlanta, home to the school’s many partners—the CDC, CARE, The Carter Center, the American Cancer Society, the Arthritis Foundation, the Task Force for Child Survival and Development, and an array of colleges and universities.

Just as important, the building will be a tribute to the Rollins family and their generosity to Emory. Early major gifts to Emory’s Candler School of Theology, the O. Wayne Rollins Research Center, and the RSPH exemplify the family’s commitment to serving humanity. As members of Emory’s Board of Trustees, O. Wayne Rollins, and later his sons Randall and Gary, recognized the importance an outstanding school of public health could have for all of humanity.

A self-made business entrepreneur and innovator, O. Wayne Rollins orchestrated the 1964 purchase of Orkin Inc.,
often recognized as the first leveraged buyout. Together, he and his brother John participated in numerous successful business ventures, including radio and television stations, pest control, oil field services, truck leasing, boat manufacturing, and real estate. Randall and Gary have continued to build the Rollins companies since their father passed away in 1991, a year after the RSPH was established.

Following his death, the family’s commitment to the school deepened. Their contributions include major funding toward construction of the Grace Crum Rollins Building, named for Wayne’s wife. Generous gifts have helped build a significant endowment for the school and have accelerated the recruitment of faculty leaders, including Rollins professors and department chairs Jack Mandel in epidemiology, Michael Kutner in biostatistics, and Michael Windle in behavioral sciences and health education. Following 9/11, the family’s concern for protecting public health led to the creation of the Center for Public Health Preparedness and Research, directed by Ruth Berkelman, Rollins Professor of epidemiology. The Rollins family’s commitments to public health and Emory were recognized with the naming of the school in 1994.

“It goes without saying that we would not have reached the high level of productivity and success we enjoy today without the vision of the Rollins family,” says Curran. “Our goals to improve health and prevent disease resonated with O. Wayne Rollins’ ideas about social justice. When he expressed interest in helping build a permanent home for our school, he began a tradition that continues today through his sons Randall and Gary and their children and grandchildren.”

Now their commitment will provide the RSPH with additional space to accelerate teaching and collaborative research in key areas, including global health, predictive health, infectious disease, cancer, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. Plans call for a multi-use facility with technologically sophisticated “smart” classrooms, wet and dry laboratories for research, offices, conference space, and an auditorium. Conference capabilities will enhance the development of specialized training, individualized distance-learning modules, and professional exchange programs. The building will be designed to achieve silver status for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

All of these amenities will help attract students and recruit and retain faculty, all of whom form the heart and soul of the RSPH. “We are indeed fortunate to have resources that enable our school to dream of making the world healthier for all mankind,” says Curran. “Because of the generosity of the Rollins family, we will continue to be an international leader at the forefront of public health successes.”

This schematic design shows the proposed building (left) and the Grace Crum Rollins Building as pedestrians would see them walking from campus.