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February 11, 2006

## Gehry unveils design for Las Vegas medical center

By **KATHLEEN HENNESSEY**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAS VEGAS (AP) - Architect Frank Gehry presented his design for a new Alzheimer's research center in Las Vegas on Saturday, unveiling an uneven stack of blocks anchoring a swooping trellis made of Gehry's signature contorted steel.

The latest work from arguably the most famous American architect will house the Lou Ruvo Alzheimer's Institute, a proposed center for the research and treatment of neurological disorders funded by Las Vegas liquor distributor Larry Ruvo.

Backers are hoping the building also will become the city's first architectural icon that doesn't house slot machines.

"This is something that will separate us from any other place on the face of the earth," said Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman. "I know (tourists) are going to come down to downtown Las Vegas to take a look at this phenomenon."

The 55,000-square-foot facility will sit in a corner of a 61-acre site in downtown Las Vegas, the epicenter of the mayor's efforts to create a cultural hub in a city struggling to establish its highbrow credentials.

As he unveiled his model, Gehry called the design a "mouse that roars," in part because the 5-story building will likely be dwarfed by planned high-rise developments on the site and a boxy nearby furniture market - not to mention the 200-pound elephant five miles south, the Las Vegas Strip.

Gehry said he didn't consider the glitz of the Strip when creating the design and he didn't intend the building to be a riff on the complexity of the human brain that will be studied within its walls. Some have suggested the more ordered geometric medical office and research building that anchors the design represents the right side of the brain, while the chaotic steel and glass canopy enclosing a banquet hall is the left.



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Instead, Gehry, 76, said he envisioned Italian Renaissance painters' renderings of a mother's arms cradling a child.

"It's always about the fold," he said. "That is the metaphor, it's a comforting image."

Gehry said the canopy will be made of steel, not the titanium used in one of his best known creations, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. Gehry also designed the Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles.

Ruvo, senior managing director for Miami-based Southern Wine and Spirits, named the project after his father, who died of Alzheimer's disease.

He's compiled a well-funded group of supporters and honorary board members, including first lady Laura Bush, former first ladies Barbara Bush and Nancy Reagan and California's first lady Maria Shriver.

Shriver and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger were scheduled to attend a fundraiser for the center Saturday evening at the MGM Grand hotel-casino.

The price tag for the construction is currently \$60 million, said Lynette Boggs McDonald, president of the Keep Memory Alive, the foundation raising money for the institute. Boggs McDonald said about \$30 million had already been raised and the foundation hopes to finance a portion of the project with tax-free economic development revenue bonds.

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