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Wood cut from State Fair Park trees crafted into table

Chris Dunker
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Jay Ryan, of Jay's Woods in Bennet, wipes down the conference table he built and installed in the boardroom of the Innovation Commons building on Innovation Campus. Ryan built the table using green ash from trees cut down at the former State Fair Park.

Photo courtesy Matt Steinhausen

Chris Dunker



In line with the renovation of the former 4-H Building and Industrial Arts Building, Nebraska Innovation Campus is continuing to make the old new.

Few remnants of the former State Fair Park remain, but trees removed from the old fairgrounds during construction have been repurposed into furniture for the 250-acre campus.

Innovation Campus, which is nearing opening its second building, installed a new boardroom table last week crafted from green ash trees that once lined the western edge of State Fair Park, said Josh Berger, director of operations at Tetrad Property Group, the site's developer.

“Between here and Devaney, we had to take all of the trees off of the old State Fair campus,” Berger said. “We did that to move dirt to the east side of Innovation Commons to make the land buildable, but we felt bad about cutting down the trees and decided we needed to do something.”

Berger had the idea of converting the trees into lumber and looking for opportunities to integrate the wood back into Innovation Campus.

Three dump truck loads of elm, oak, hackberry and ash were milled at Big Red Sawmill in Palmyra and delivered to Jay Ryan of Jay's Woods in Bennet.

Over the course of 300 man-hours, Ryan used Berger's design to create a template and glue strips of green ash together. Then, he glued a quarter-inch veneer to the table using a vacuum bag to help manage the expansion and contraction of the wood and finished it with a catalyzed urethane.

TMCO of Lincoln built the table's base and the 22-foot-long finished product was installed in the Innovation Commons last week to be used by the Nebraska Innovation Campus Development Board, the Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Institute, NUtech Vent



“I was glad to get it delivered,” said Ryan, who added Nebraska wood species are fun to work with.

The Bennet carpenter will build a second table from wood cut at the old fairgrounds this spring to be installed in the Food Innovation Center under construction in the former Industrial Arts Building.

The Food Innovation Center is set to open later this year and will be home to UNL’s Food Science and Technology Department, as well as private partner ConAgra Foods.

Dan Duncan, executive director of Innovation Campus, said Tetrad’s gift is “another piece of the puzzle” in getting the research park up and running.



“We try to do everything we can to be sustainable and cognizant of the environment and this was a way we could recycle something from the former State Fair days and make it very functional,” Duncan said.



Jay Ryan

Courtesy photo

Reach the writer at 402-473-7120 or cdunker@journalstar.com. On Twitter [@ChrisDunkerLJS](https://twitter.com/ChrisDunkerLJS).

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