

# Texas A&M University in Costa Rica

College Station  
Jan. 5, 2009

The international teaching, research and outreach of Texas A&M University takes on an added dimension next month with the start of operations at the new Soltis Center for Research and Education (Costa Rica Center), thanks to the generosity and environmental commitment of an Aggie, Bill Soltis, and his family.

Soltis, a 1955 Texas A&M mechanical engineering graduate who resides in Houston and has had a long career in construction, with most of his business done in Costa Rica, approached university officials in 2005 about the possibility of creating the facility. His vision was to provide more international experiences to Aggies while protecting the unique ecological setting and creating awareness for preservation. He proposed building the center's classrooms, dormitories and related facilities at his expense on a 40-acre site and offering a long-term lease on 250 adjacent acres of rain forest. The site is near the town of San Isidro, which is located about a two-hour drive from San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica.

University officials and colleges enthusiastically embraced his proposal with the concurrence of The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents.

With all aspects of the proposal by Soltis now met—including construction of a large academic building and eight dormitories capable of accommodating up to 60 students and faculty—the regents in December formally authorized the university to enter into a contract with the entity jointly created for its operation, the Casa Verde Research Center Sociedad Anonima to support academic and research programs.

“We are most grateful to Mr. Soltis and his family for making this facility available to our students and faculty for a multitude of beneficial uses in both teaching and research initiatives,” stated Texas A&M President Elsa Murano, “and we share his commitment to maintaining and enhancing the environment in this place of special ecological importance.”

Said Soltis: “Wanda and I are just thrilled that we can provide a facility for future generations of Aggies to both learn another culture and also understand the importance of conserving the beautiful places in the world like the Monteverde Rainforest in Costa Rica.”

Murano said the first students are expected to go to the Costa Rica Center during the early part of the spring semester. Formal dedication of the center is planned in June 2009.

Initial student users of the Costa Rica Center will be from the College of Education and Human Development, the College of Geosciences and the Dwight Look College of Engineering; Murano noted and added other academic units of the university are expected subsequently to take advantage of its unique ecological setting and ideal location for a variety of educational endeavors including the Memorial Student Center FISH organization for freshmen, and the Engineers with Borders. Additionally, the center is envisioned as serving as base for programs benefitting residents of the area around the rain forest—teaching English to local school children and developing water management programs, for example. Texas A&M faculty also identified a number of potential research programs in conservation sustainable design, hydrology, mapping of rain forest and others.

Texas A&M's current international endeavors include operation of an engineering-oriented branch campus in Qatar—Texas A&M University at Qatar, which is fully funded by Qatar Foundation—along with a study center in Santa Chiara, Italy and a multi-purpose center in Mexico City. Additionally, the university has research agreements and faculty/student exchange programs with more than 120 institutions throughout the world.