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Hunt's not done with North Carolina

N.C. State University Chancellor Jim Woodard made a striking prediction last week: In coming years, the soon-to-be built futurist James B. Hunt Library will join the Bell Tower as one of the two signature structures on the West Raleigh campus.

On Friday, ground was broken on the \$115million Hunt library, which, among other things, will serve as headquarters for the Institute for Emerging Issues on State's Centennial Campus.

The library, the institute and the centennial campus all bear Hunt's imprint. They are among the visible parts of a remarkable legacy of the influence of one man's drive. Raised on a Wilson County dairy farm without wealth or connections, Hunt's career is a testament to the power of persistence, persuasion and an ability to make others see the virtue of his vision for the state.

For the last 37 years, Hunt has been a force in North Carolina's political, business, legal and education life, starting with his election as lieutenant governor in 1972.

Hunt, a Democrat, transformed the governor's office, serving 16 years (1977 to 1985, and 1993 to 2001). Before Hunt, governors could only serve one four-year term.

His only loss came in 1984, when he unsuccessfully challenged Republican Sen. Jesse Helms' re-election.

Although he left office nearly nine years ago, he remains one of the most influential individuals in the state. His counsel is sought not only by North Carolina governors, but by governors around the country. He helps set the state's agenda through his think tank. And he can still pull strings behind the scenes, as he did in helping recruit Kay Hagan to enter the U.S. Senate race last year.

There are precedents for Hunt's final act. Three other North Carolina governors maintained broad influence after leaving the Executive Mansion. O. Max Gardner

(1929-1933) continued to run the state during the 1930s and 1940s through his political organization, and while serving as a Washington lobbyist and adviser to Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. Gov. Luther Hodges (1954-1961) served as U.S. Commerce secretary and helped develop the Research Triangle Park. Terry Sanford (1961-1965) served as Duke University president and U.S. senator, and twice ran for president during his post-gubernatorial years.

On Friday, Hunt gathered many of the state's leaders for a luncheon at the Park Alumni Center to give one of his patented inspirational speeches, urging them to raise \$20million to complete the library. It will, Hunt said, be both a showcase and a petri dish for creative public policy thinking in the state.

At 72, Hunt said, he still has big plans for North Carolina.

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