

New Phila U. dorm welcomed as a win-win

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Philadelphia University has a new dorm in a familiar building, amid hopes that the new housing will perk up the campus while alleviating town-gown tensions in East Falls.

After nearly two years of negotiations and construction, the university is ready to move students into the new apartment-style abodes inside the Falls Center campus.

On Saturday, undergraduate and graduate students will start lugging suitcases through the doors of the new dorm. By the start of the school year, 318 non-first year students will be sleeping and studying inside the former Medical College of Pennsylvania building.

The Henry Avenue dormitory, officially dubbed the Residences at Falls Center, is not your old-style, cramped student quarters. Like so many new dorms in this age of hot competition for good students, these rooms are high-end.

The open-concept apartments – for one to five roommates – are fully furnished and each includes a living room, kitchen, private bathroom and wi-fi internet access.

Residents spread across five floors will also have access to free laundry facilities, on-site parking and two floors of study and recreation space, among other things. A university shuttle will ferry students to campus, located less than a mile away, twice an hour from 7:30 a.m. to midnight, seven days a week.

Rooms range in price from \$6,800 to \$7,600 per student, per academic year.

Seeking campus vibrancy

Dean of Students Mark Govoni said the private university leapt at the opportunity to lease the building from Iron Stone Strategic Capital Partners. School officials had been searching for a way to better accommodate its student housing population without breaking the bank on new construction.

"We were always a little bit under where we needed to be," said Govoni of the University's housing stock. Govoni said some students have been living in study lounges that were transformed into supplemental housing. Others seeking housing were simply turned away.

The Residences will help the university meet a goal of having 60-percent of its students living in university housing. That percentage had previously hovered in the low 50s.

Govoni explained that the 60-percent mark was set to create a "strong residential critical mass of undergraduates."

"When [students] moved off they took some of the pulse of the campus and dispersed it off-campus," he said. "We wanted to get more energy and, more practically speaking, more beds under our students."

Offering living options, such as the Residences, where all aspects of community life combine, helps promote that end, said Govoni.

"We like the concept of having everything in one place where students can stay up late and do their work and have really outstanding facilities in the room," he said.

Easing town-gown chafing

Gina Snyder, executive director of the East Falls Development Corporation, said that philosophy should help to alleviate potential problems when college students live near or in residential neighborhoods such as East Falls.

"A lot of students tend to rent houses on homeowner streets and that can end up with some town and gown issues where there's challenges in terms of lifestyle differences," said Snyder.

"So now they're able to do their college student thing and it pulls them from being right next to local homeowners," she said.

Snyder said she hasn't heard much neighborhood opposition to the new dorm. Many residents, she said, are pleased to see a new tenant at the Falls Center.

"Everyone is winning all around in that regard," said Snyder.

The first day of classes for Philadelphia University undergraduates is Aug. 22.

The school is home to 2,500 undergraduate students and 500 graduate students.



The former Medical College of Pennsylvania has transformed into a dorm for more than 300 Philadelphia University students. (Megan Pinto)