

Private dorm will open first

United Campus Housing to open its residence hall in 2006

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News Staff Reporter

In the race to build a better residence hall, the University of Michigan faces intense competition not only among its Big Ten rivals, but also from a private developer in Ann Arbor.

U-M has announced plans to build a combination dorm and classroom building for 500 students in a new campus gateway building at the corner of Huron and State streets. U-M, which hasn't built a new dorm since 1967, is opting for a merger of dorm and classroom space similar to plans already implemented at other universities around the country.

A Texas company, however, will beat U-M to the punch on a new dorm-like apartment complex. United Campus Housing plans to spend \$50 million to build 900 units; preliminary plans called for three, four-story buildings on land next to U-M's North Campus. It will open in 2006, two years before U-M's new residence hall at the site of the Frieze Building.

Both projects will have suite-style apartments. Each bedroom at United Campus Housing's project will have a private bathroom, as well.

Neither the developers nor U-M officials believe they will have empty beds because of the sudden influx of student housing. There are enough students currently living off campus, in city neighborhoods, to fill those beds, they agree.

"We don't consider them a competitor," said Mark Harries, CEO of United Campus Housing. "We're all filling a need."

United Campus Housing's units also will come furnished, and are expected to rent at \$595 to \$905 a month, which includes some amenities like cable TV and high-speed Internet service.

Harries said his company wants to become the "Hilton of student housing," and chose Ann Arbor because U-M had not built a new residence hall since 1967, and few private developers have added large apartment buildings to the market.

The company's last project, a nine-story tower near the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Harries said, has been a "runaway success."

To appeal to students, the company runs a roommate matching service to let students find like-minded friends to share two-, three- and four-bedroom suites. It encourages students with similar majors to live together. And it offers leases on a bed-by-bed basis, so students living in a three-bedroom apartment, for example, would each sign their own lease and have greater flexibility if they needed to move.

Two adults would run the building, an executive director and a director of residence life, who, ideally, will have had experience working at U-M. Still others work as the company's version of residence hall advisers, under the title of "community ambassadors." The tower is basically a private dorm, although the company would never call it that.

"We try to put in place a package of services and support mechanisms related to residence life that really help (students) get through school," said Wayne Senecal, another of the company's

CEOs.

The tower will be built on a 5-acre slice of property surrounded on three sides by U-M land, on North Campus, between the North Campus Recreation Building and a parking lot.

In an unusual arrangement, the City Council approved the tower's site plan contingent on U-M approving the site plan as well. U-M is reviewing the plans, and was asked by the city to negotiate an easement with the company, so it can build an access road from Murfin Road. Those discussions are continuing, said James Kosteva, U-M's director of community relations.

U-M's new residence hall, expected to open in 2008, is intended to improve students' academic lives by incorporating a significant amount of academic space, as well as their living conditions. It also follows significant projects among its Big Ten peers.

At Northwestern University, a new hall opened in 1999 with apartment-style suites to attract upperclassmen. In the past six years, Indiana University renovated two dorms, turning traditional rooms into suites in one of them. A new hall is also planned.

"That's the way kids grow up now," said Bob Weitch, director of Indiana's residential operations, explaining that the school's students expect more privacy.

"Housing is really important," he added. "In the event that it's not suitable, responsible housing, (students) will find somewhere else to go, or live off campus."

Michigan State University plans to spend \$15 million to \$18 million to open a 300-bed hall in 2007.

"They want space," said Angela Brown, director of MSU's University Housing. "They have a lot more to put in their residence hall rooms today than they ever did."

U-M President Mary Sue Coleman has said the school has to build a new residence hall, as well as renovate its older halls, to continue to attract the best students, whose expectations of dorm life have changed over the years.

"We have a market here at Michigan," said Carole Henry, U-M's director of university housing. "Our students and parents expect a certain quality of life when they enter the undergraduate experience."

Reporter Dave Gershman can be reached at (734) 994-6818 or dgershman@annarbornews.com.

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