Mark Twain grand opening showcases renovated residence hall

BY Harrison McLean

COLUMBIA — Sunlight streamed through a wall of windows in Mark Twain Residence Hall on Wednesday, showing off a bright new lobby with fresh paint and modern furniture.

Mark Twain Hall, which opened in 1964, is one of MU's older residence halls, but it doesn't look old now.

The 49-year-old building has been renovated inside and out, a job that took almost two years and cost $21.7 million.

The project is part of the fourth phase of a five-phase master plan to renovate or replace all of the residence halls at MU. Mark Twain was the eighth residence hall to be renovated as part of the plan.

The hall was closed in December 2011 and will be officially reopened Monday when students begin moving into their new home.

During an open house on Wednesday, Frankie Minor, the director of residential life, and Julaine Kiehn, who heads Campus Dining Services, spoke with excitement about the project.

They talked about of the physical improvements to the building, as well as creating a place to foster learning for the students.

"The students are the heart of this facility and important to making this res hall a true community," Minor said.

"When they get here, this building will turn from a hall into a home."

The lobby and entryway

The exterior of the building has been redone to update and fix any structural problems, including water damage and the lack of protective barriers around the roof.
Restructuring the exterior was so complete, Minor said, that you could see through the building when it was stripped down.

The entryway has been streamlined from a maze of corridors to a central foyer. The Fifth Street entrance now presents just two choices: one door leads to the residential tower on the right and the second to the dining hall, now known as The MARK on 5th Street.

Minor said the reconfigured flow of the entryway will allow more flexibility for the dining hall and the residential portion. Because of the distinct separation, the two entities will be able to set their own hours.

Sustainability was also emphasized as the project used recycled materials for the carpet and floor tiles. Dual flush toilets will cut down on water usage, and students will have more control over the air-conditioning units in their rooms.

"Anyone who used to live here would tell you that our AC worked really, really well, to the point where it was so cold people were walking around in blankets," Minor said.

**The residential tower**

The first floor of the residential tower has an open feeling, with floor-to-ceiling windows on two sides. The lobby features a lounge with couches, tables, chairs and booths, as well as an information desk in one corner.

Minor said the new design emphasized natural light throughout the building, both in the lobby and in the long hallways connecting student rooms. Study spaces have been placed along the halls rather than at the ends to bring more light into the area.

Additional security between the lobby and student rooms is provided by a pair of double doors to the right of the information desk. The doors lead directly to the residential wing of the building, which has a capacity for 380 students over six floors.

This figure dropped from the pre-renovation capacity of 395 when more space was devoted to lounges and study rooms. Each floor now has two study rooms available around the clock.

Chase Rother, residence hall coordinator for Mark Twain, said the configuration of student rooms does not represent a dramatic change.

"It's more updating the facility to make it more modern," Rother said. "We like to think that all of our halls are already high quality. It just got some modernization."

All student rooms remain suite-style, with four students in two adjoining rooms who share a bathroom. The layout is similar to the way Mark Twain was set up before the renovation, except sinks have been moved into the bathrooms, instead of in the bedrooms.
Doors to the rooms now have both a keycard swipe lock and a number pad combination, adding another level of security. Each bedroom features two beds that can be lofted, two desks and two rolling wardrobes rather than built-in closets.

The rooms also have sockets for USB ports in the wall, in addition to traditional outlets — one of the improvements to the building's electrical system.

"In the past you could count the number of appliances students would bring to college on one hand," Minor said. "Now people are bringing five times that, so our electric system would get overloaded."

The MARK on 5th Street

The reconstruction added 50 places to the dining area, brought in new furniture and revamped the serving area.

The expansion was built over what used to be the only residence-hall pool on campus. It closed in 2011 to reduce building maintenance and keep the dorms consistent.

The new dining section features floor-to-ceiling windows, which continues the theme of natural light. The carpeting is blue — purely a coincidence, Kiehn said, given that it was built over what used to be a pool.

The serving area remains to the right of the entrance, but the remodeling added "the most expanded deli on campus," as well as a pizza bar and other options, Kiehn said.

"We want to enhance the Mizzou student experience and bring people together over food," she said. "We see it as a space where people can build community, as well as enjoy good food."

Like the old dining hall, The MARK on 5th Street is still a small, comfortable space.

"It's still a convenient space that isn't as big as other dining halls, so it feels more comfy-cozy than other places," Kiehn said.

The students and staff

Mark Twain will now be home to four learning communities in journalism/communication and education. The building will have a total of 11 student staff members: four peer advisers, six community advisers and one leadership adviser.

For most of the new staff, Mark Twain has been closed since they came to MU. Alex Peltier, a junior community adviser for the education community in Mark Twain, said during Wednesday's open house that he is excited to start working in the new building but can only base his expectations on word of mouth.
"I'm happy to see another res hall back on the map," he said. "I think this community bonds in a unique way because it's kind of separate from everyone else.

"I'm excited to get the community built up and make it a fun inviting place for residents to live."

Peltier, who was one of the tour guides for guests at the opening, said he was impressed with the new look of the building.

"From what I heard it wasn't the most eye-appealing place," he said. "But now it looks marvelous. They've done a lot of cool things to make it a warm, inviting environment."

Former residents of the building also seemed pleased with the renovations.

Kelsey Allen, a 2010 MU graduate, spent her freshmen and sophomore years living in Mark Twain. She said she remembered visiting as a prospective student, seeing the pool and suite-style bedrooms and knowing immediately that she wanted to live there.

Once she arrived, she said her two years were "a great experience," highlighted by the close-knit community with fellow residents. Other than cosmetic changes to the building, she said it looks the same in a lot of ways.

"It had a nostalgic feeling. Everything looks the same, just prettier," Allen said. "It still feels like the same Mark Twain."
Students leaving home for college reminded to consider health needs

By Mike Lear

A University of Missouri student health expert says often overlooked when students prepare to leave for college are their health needs.

Director of the MU Student Health Center Susan Even says a student at college could for the first time be having to take care of his or her own health issues.

“Many students when they get sick, their first reaction is to pick up their cell phone and call or text their mom and say, ‘What should I do?’”

Even doesn’t expect she can stop that from happening, but she says it’s a good idea to prepare a student as much as possible before they leave home. That can be done at the same time a student is doing other things, like packing clothes and meeting roommates.

She says students need to know things like, “What they’re allergic to, what kind of surgeries they’ve had and how to get a refill … how much they’re going to have of their medication if they’re taking it ongoing, how long what they’re bringing with them to school is going to last and how are they going to get a refill.”

Even also recommends a student have his or her immunization records and know what the requirements are of the college and the state its in, and check to see what restrictions might be placed on students who have traveled abroad or lived in other countries.

She adds, prevention can stave off a great deal of problems.

“Even just by appropriate respiratory hygiene: coughing in their sleeves, using hand sanitizers, staying home from classes when they have fevers over 101 and can’t control their coughing, that sort of thing. We’re going to be continuing to try to encourage students to do the things that might help prevent spread of their respiratory infection to others but also then to get their flu shot, for example.”

Even says new students could also fare better if they make some friends.
“Everybody needs help and everybody benefits by asking for help sooner rather than later and making a connection with somebody that you can have as a link to making more friends is useful.”

She says students should also be ready to make decisions about alcohol, substance abuse and sex, know what insurance will and won’t cover and know what the health centers on their college’s campus offer.
Student population inflates Columbia’s poverty rate, study finds

Rate falls when group excluded.

By Jacob Barker

Wednesday, August 7, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Boone County's poverty rate has been overstated by about 6 percentage points in recent years, according to a new paper released by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Number crunchers have long known that college students tend to inflate poverty rates because of their low incomes, but the census has not quantified the phenomenon. In places such as Columbia, the overstated poverty rates result in larger allocations of federal funds that use poverty rates in their formulas.

The effect of students on national or state poverty rates is "pretty trivial," said John Blodgett, a data analyst with the Office of Social & Economic Data Analysis at the University of Missouri. But for Columbia and other cities with high concentrations of students, "it does make a significant difference," he said.

In Boone County, 19.9 percent of residents were considered below the poverty line using standard measures.

But when college students are excluded, the rate drops to 13.2 percent, according to the census paper, which uses American Community Survey data from 2009 through 2011.

The national poverty rate is around 15 percent.

"We all know it's kind of bogus, but" cities "may get federal money from it, so they live with it," Blodgett said.
Students’ effect on Boone County's poverty rate is one of the largest in the country. Among counties with more than 100,000 people, Boone County had the 12th-largest drop in poverty when adjusted for students.

Since 1997, MU enrollment has grown by about 10,000 and become a larger share of the county's overall population. MU students in 2011, at 31,745, made up about 19 percent of the county's population, compared to about 17 percent in 1997.

Students living in dorms are not counted as poor, Blodgett said. But once they move off campus, they often do fall into the poverty threshold. Nationwide, more than half of students living off campus are considered poor, according to the report. The poverty threshold for a single-person household is $11,490.

Poverty rates figure into formulas for federal programs that dole out money, such as Community Development Block Grants and HOME Funds, said Randy Cole, Columbia's community development coordinator. In 2013, the city got about $417,000 in HOME funds, which is used to create affordable housing, and $886,000 in CDBG funds, which can be used for anything from street repairs to microloans.

If the Census Bureau excluded students from poverty calculations, "that would definitely decrease our CDBG funding," Cole said.

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Research universities to U.S. leaders: Watch out, China is gaining

The heads of research universities in Kansas and Missouri have joined a slew of others in a passionate plea for this nation’s leaders to put more money behind scientific study and innovation on their campuses.

The federal budget sequestration — more than a trillion dollars in cuts over eight years — promises to trim billions off federal research spending.

Bad idea, the university leaders say in a letter to President Barack Obama and Congress.

“More than half of U.S. economic growth since World War II is a consequence of technological innovation, overwhelmingly resulting from federally funded scientific research,” says the letter from the leaders of more than 100 research universities.

Research, the letter says, has led to life-saving vaccines, lasers, magnetic resonance imaging, the Internet and many other advances that have improved lives and generated new sectors of the economy.

“Many of the university researchers making those discoveries would not have the opportunity to be in their labs were it not for federal support of research and higher education,” the letter says.

Among the letter’s signers: Kirk Schulz, president of Kansas State University; Bernadette Gray-Little, chancellor of the University of Kansas; Brady J. Deaton, chancellor of the University of Missouri; Tim M. Wolfe, president of the University of Missouri system; Leo E. Morton, chancellor of the University of Missouri-Kansas City; and Thomas F. George, chancellor of the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Federal agencies are the largest source of research funding at these universities.

Consider KU. More than $275.2 million in external money was spent on research in 2012. Of that total, federal dollars accounted for $223 million, more than 80 percent.

While Gray-Little has said the impact of federal cuts to KU isn’t known yet, she expects funding will be down across the country. She and other university leaders who signed the letter expressed worry over the economic future of the country and warned that continued cuts to research could leave the United States behind other nations.
The National Science Board said in a recent report that while the U.S. still has the most research and development spending at $402 billion — one-third of total world investment — Asia has narrowed the gap substantially in recent years.

According to the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, over the last 10 years, U.S. research and development expenditures as a share of economic output have remained nearly constant. But in China, R&D spending has increased by nearly 90 percent.

The bottom line, the universities argue: Cutting back investment in research hobbles this country’s stride in the race to be the champion of innovation and development.
A former University of Missouri football player turned himself in to Boone County sheriff’s deputies Wednesday on charges of first-degree child endangerment and second-degree domestic assault, Detective Tom O’Sullivan said.

Zack Abron, 33, also is accused of violating two ex-parte orders, he said.

Police were called to a home in the 4500 block of Belleview Court shortly after 4 p.m. Sunday for a report of a domestic disturbance, O’Sullivan said. A woman reported that Abron had assaulted her but left before they arrived, he said. Officers had been looking for the former Missouri running back since then.

Abron played at MU during the 2000 to 2003 seasons, compiling a total of 40 touchdowns and 3,198 rushing yards. He is an assistant coach at Battle High School.