



Montclair State University opens privately funded dorm building

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By **Kelly Heyboer/ The Star-Ledger**

MONTCLAIR — Montclair State University student Tim Meyer spent his freshman year squeezed into an aging cinder-block dorm room with two roommates and a community bathroom down the hall.

Last week, Meyer toted his belongings to his new room in the university's new \$211 million residence hall complex. Inside, the sophomore found a large double room with a private bathroom, new furniture, high ceilings and large windows with a panoramic view of a nearby mountain.

Even Meyer's mother was impressed.

"This is amazing," said Liz Meyer, of Paramus. "The space. The size of it."

Montclair State's new dormitory complex — called the Heights — is expected to house 2,000 students and nearly double the number of beds at one of the state's largest public universities. The project, which will be dedicated in a ceremony with state officials today, includes two high-rise buildings with eight residence hall wings and a new 24,000-square-foot gourmet dining hall.

Campus officials said the Heights includes the latest features in luxury dorm living, including private bathrooms, plush furniture, flat screen televisions in the lounge spaces and a restaurant-style dining hall.

But the complex is also notable because neither Montclair State nor the state put up a penny to build it.



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Patti Sapone/The Star-Ledger

Montclair State University opens The Heights, its new state-of-the-art 2,000-bed student housing complex. It's the first public-private partnership project on a college campus completed under the New Jersey Economic Stimulus Act of 2009. (Patti Sapone/The Star-Ledger)

Montclair State University opens privately-funded dorm building
gallery (9 photos)

The Heights is the first campus construction project built as a public-private partnership under the New Jersey Economic Stimulus Act of 2009. The process, approved by the Legislature, allows colleges that don't have the cash to build their own buildings to sidestep the public bidding process. Instead, the schools can bring in private companies to finance and run new campus facilities.

"This is just a great opportunity for the university," said Karen Pennington, Montclair State's vice president for student development and campus life. "We are very grateful to the Legislature."

Under Montclair State's deal, Provident Resources Group, a Georgia nonprofit corporation, financed the \$211 million project through tax-exempt bonds. Capstone Development Corporation, an Alabama company that specializes in building student housing, served as the developer. New Jersey-based Terminal Construction Corporation oversaw the 16 months of construction.

The title to the Heights will be given to the university either in 40 years or when the bonds are fully paid, which ever comes first, school officials said. Until then, Provident Resources Group will own, manage and maintain the revenue-generating buildings.

Montclair State officials said most students will not notice an outside company owns their residence hall. Students still get rooms through a campus lottery system and pay the standard annual room rate of \$10,140 for a single and \$9,280 each for a double.

Chelsey Ristaino, a senior serving as a community assistant on one of the floors in the Heights, said some of the female students living on her floor couldn't believe the size of their rooms.

"They come in and they are so excited," said Ristaino, 21, a musical theater major from Massachusetts.

Last year, due to overcrowding, many students were assigned triple rooms originally built to house two students, she said.

Senior Francisco Cordero, said he was surprised by the technology in the complex. Students swipe their student identification cards to get into their rooms. Hallway bulletin boards have been replaced by flat screen televisions posting announcements. Lounges have large projection screens where students can host movie nights.

"I'm really impressed," said Cordero, 21, of Long Branch, who will help oversee his floor as a community assistant.

The Heights' two buildings are named Dinallo Heights and Machuga Heights in honor of construction company founder Anthony Dinallo and Paterson building inspector John Victor Machuga, whose families and friends made donations to the university in their memory. The eight residence hall wings housed in the buildings are named after notable New Jerseyans: war hero John Basilone, physicist Albert Einstein, poet

Walt Whitman, school teacher Nellie K. Morrow Parker, tennis great Althea Gibson, astronomer William Gordon, Red Cross founder Clara Barton and football player Sam Mills.

The dining hall is named Sam's Place in memory of Mills, Montclair State's two-time All-American linebacker and longtime NFL player and coach.

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