

Chronicle, The (Willimantic, CT)

The Next Generation of housing UConn officially opens first new dorm in 13 years

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Published: August 25, 2016

Chronicle Staff Writer STORRS - A well-attended ribbon-cutting featuring Jonathan the Husky dog, state dignitaries and university officials on Wednesday morning celebrated the first residence hall to open at the University of Connecticut in 13 years. Such a celebration partly addresses concerns vocalized by the Mansfield Neighborhood Preservation Group regarding the need for more on-campus **housing**. The new Next Generation Connecticut Hall, "NextGen" for short, is a 212,000-square-foot residential facility, located on Alumni Drive, that will house 727 students on eight floors. The opening of NextGen comes after the demolition this summer of the 45-year-old Connecticut Commons to make way for a new 200,000-square-foot student recreation center. Connecticut Commons most recently housed 412 upperclassmen in the honors program and, while some town officials were opposed to its demolition, NextGen adds 312 beds to the overall campus **housing** inventory. While construction of NextGen began in November 2014 and cost \$79 million, the overall budget for the project, including site work, utilities and furnishings was \$105 million. It is the first building to be completed under the university's \$1.5 billion Next Generation initiative. Most students living at NextGen will be freshmen and sophomores who will reside in mostly two-person rooms although there are a few single-person rooms including some designed for students with disabilities. The facility has two sets of restroom and privacy shower facilities on each floor with spaces designated for men, women and "allgender," which are LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual) friendly. Students living in the new dorm will not have access to a kitchen but can eat at the nearby Putnam Refectory dining hall, which recently underwent a \$12.6 million renovation so it can accommodate extra students. (UConn, Page 4) (Continued from Page 1) There will also be six apartments in NextGen for hall directors and graduate students working with the eight learning and living communities in the building. A learning and living community is a group of students who elect to live in a themed group designed to bridge students' academic, co-curricular and residential experiences. NextGen communities include STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) honors, WiMSE (women in math, science and engineering), EcoHouse, engineering house, Eurotech house, innovation house, scholars house and public health house. Perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of the project is the scholars house. According to university spokesman Stephanie Reitz, the scholars house "is oriented toward the needs of black male students (freshmen and sophomores), but not limited to them. Males of all ethnic backgrounds can apply." The scholars house will take up part of the fourth floor and will only have 40 students. A New York-based group called the New York Civil Rights Coalition had claimed the learning community has a "racially segregated purpose," but university officials contend it's meant to help a segment of the population that traditionally has the lowest retention and graduation rates. Each floor will have one or two learning communities, with its own study space and a lounge with a plasma TV. The facility has an "Innovation Zone" with a 3-D printer, laser cutter, mobile whiteboard and other resources for shared study and projects, as well as a computer lab, community and event spaces, game room and a gallery walk to showcase students work. Additionally, it meets LEED Silver designation and has multiple eco-friendly features. During the ribbon-cutting, state Sen. Mae Flexer, D-Killingly, said "you're in my old neighborhood, 16 years ago, I was a freshman and lived in the Hilltop community in what was a new dorm on the first floor. I had a window that looked right where this building is." She

went on to earn a bachelor's degree in political science from **UConn**. Praising the facility as one that will drive the future and jumpstart the economy, she said "the collaboration that happens here, at this university, in this dormitory, will then spread to our cities and to our towns like Willimantic, Putnam and Danielson. This is a tremendous accomplishment and very exciting, and I congratulate the university." State Rep. Tim Ackert, R-Coventry, said "it's truly an honor to be here because of the vision of Governor (Dannel P.) Malloy had as well as Lieutenant Governor (Nancy) Wyman, and President (Susan) Herbst ... this is an investment from Connecticut taxpayers." State Sen. Kevin Wilkos, R-Canton, also a **UConn** graduate, said he remembers the finance committee discussing the bill on April 16, 2014, where several sidebar conversations were taking place. "People weren't paying attention. I said I rate this project an F," he said, which, he explained made the room so quiet you could hear a pin drop. He said someone remarked "this ought to be good," and he said, "it is good ... I rate it F for financing the foundation for the university." **UConn** "will continue to be a great university in the Northeast and in the country and it will only get better ... this is part of our long-term plan to rebuild Connecticut's economy," Malloy said, before embarking on a tour of the facility where he enjoyed the commanding view of the campus from the eighth-floor study lounge. NextGen is "one of the tallest buildings on campus," said university spokesman Stephanie Reitz, adding it's the tallest residence hall at the Storrs campus.

ABOVE: State Sen. Mae Flexer, D-Killingly, pets the University of Connecticut's mascot, Jonathan, after the ribboncutting at Next Generation Connecticut Hall at **UConn** on Wednesday as state Rep. Gregory Haddad, D-Mansfield, center, and state Rep. Tim Ackert, R-Coventry, look on. LEFT: Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman points out the view to Project Manager Robert Corbett during a tour of the building. Behind them is Gov. Dannel P. Malloy.
Roxanne Pandolfi photos

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