

The New Haven Register (nhregister.com), Serving New Haven, CT

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School has red-letter day

Saturday, September 26, 2009

By Abbe Smith, Register Staff

WEST HAVEN — It was a big day at the University of New Haven Friday with the dedication of the new \$43 million “green” dormitory and the groundbreaking for the much-anticipated Henry C. Lee Institute of Forensic Science.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held first for the five-story, 402-bed residence hall with views of Long Island Sound and downtown New Haven. But it was the groundbreaking ceremony for the forensic institute that drew more than 400 people including local and state dignitaries, police and fire officials, UNH leaders and scores of students.

“This is a great day,” Lee told the crowd.

The \$9.4 million facility, expected to be completed in fall 2010, will house a forensic crisis management command center, an interactive forensics museum, a crime scene learning center, laboratories and classrooms. The institute will have on hand state-of-the-art forensic equipment including ground-penetrating radar for locating buried bodies, a high-intensity laser for bullet-trajectory reconstruction and portable instruments for chemical and biological analysis.

The building is not only meant to function as a learning center for forensic science students, but also a working laboratory for law enforcement officers investigating real crimes. The crisis management command center will allow police departments nationwide to connect via satellite and get assistance from top criminal investigators and forensic scientists in real time.

“Let’s say the Orange Police Department needs to look for a body,” Lee said. “Where to go? We can lend you the ground-penetrating radar.”

Speakers at the ceremony stressed that the institute’s greatest asset is Lee, himself, an internationally renowned forensic scientist who has assisted in the investigation of thousands of crimes, including the O.J. Simpson case, the John F. Kennedy assassination, the murder of JonBenet Ramsey in Boulder, Colo., and the Chandra Levy murder investigation.

UNH President Steven H. Kaplan called Lee an “inspiration.”

“I want to thank you most sincerely for all you have done for this university,” he said directly to Lee.

State Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, who attended the groundbreaking, called Lee a teacher of justice and praised the university for making the new forensic institute a reality. This is “another step marking the University of New Haven’s leading the nation in meeting a real need in real time for forensic education,” he said.

The day also celebrated the dedication of the new, completely occupied residence hall for upper-class students. Soundview Hall, named for the water view residents on the fifth floor are lucky enough to have, is expected to receive a gold certification for Leadership in Energy Efficient Design, a national benchmark for green building practices. Special grass around the building

requires little water and no fertilizer. Inside the building, energy-efficient lights and heating systems work toward the “green” goal.

Students who went through the lottery system and were awarded the chance to live in the new hall were treated to some unusual new amenities. For one, students can get text messages on their cell phones when their laundry is done. They also have access to private bathrooms and kitchens.

“It’s pretty amazing,” said senior Sara Brookes-Bertolatus. “It’s actually set up like a real apartment with a kitchen. We cook all the time.”

Mayor John M. Picard, who was present for both ceremonies, said the expansion of facilities at UNH will be a good draw for the city and will bring in additional money from the state’s “payment in lieu of taxes” program. He estimated that the new residence hall alone could bring in additional \$500,000 in PILOT funding.

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