

Program at NDSU spurred by hotel

By Mike Nowatzki

The Forum - 10/07/2005

A hotel being built in North Dakota State University's research park is causing more students to check out NDSU's hospitality and tourism management program, a campus dean says.

Fargo hotel developer Russ Maring entered into an agreement with the NDSU Development Foundation in August 2004 to build an extended-stay hotel in the northeast corner of the NDSU Research and Technology Park.

The Candlewood Suites hotel is slated for completion in March.

Workers for Olaf Anderson & Sons Construction Co. are currently putting up rafters and roof decking to enclose the three-story structure before winter, project manager Lynn Narum said.

Meanwhile, fall enrollment in NDSU's hospitality and tourism management program has grown to about 85 students from about 50 students five years ago, said Virginia Clark Johnson, dean of the college of human development and education.

"The hotel has generated a lot of excitement, and students are noticing the program more because of it," she said.

The ground floor of the hotel will feature a large lecture classroom and a research lab for students, she said.

Faculty and graduate assistants also will have an office in the hotel.

"What we are hoping to be able to do is offer that entire curriculum in there," with the exception of food preparation, she said.

Initially, students won't be involved in the hotel's day-to-day operations. However, they will have the opportunity to observe how the hotel operates and become familiar with its software management programs, Clark Johnson said.

"I think being connected with the hotel, the students will see more clearly how things work, and we hope the management team will bring their expertise into the classroom," said assistant professor Kara Wolfe, the program's coordinator.

The hospitality program currently lacks space in E. Morrow Lebedeff Hall, Clark Johnson said.

"I think it'll be nice because really right now we don't have our own building on campus," said Julia Falck, a senior from Green Bay, Wis.

Jenny Fowler, a senior from Moorhead who will graduate from the program in May, also said it can be difficult to find hotel jobs that fit around students' class schedules.

"It's just easier if it's already incorporated into your schedule," she said.

Maring, an NDSU alumnus, has said that he will own and operate the \$4 million hotel for seven years

and then donate it to the foundation.

Universities with hotels typically contract with outside firms to manage the hotels or have a faculty member split duties between teaching and managing, Clark Johnson said. The latter approach is a long-term goal for the NDSU hotel, she said.

After the hotel is handed over to NDSU, the university will have to determine whether it should remain an extended-stay hotel, she said.

“We are projecting that it’s going to be a real boost for people that are working at the research park and the Northern Crops Institute that brings people in for workshops for a week or two at a time,” she said.