

Things look up at underground campus

Oakland Community College's underground campus in Southfield opened only two months behind schedule and within its \$6.4 million budget on Oct. 27.

About 2,000 students are currently attending classes at the campus and about 60 percent of them take classes at night, according to OOC Provost Walt Fightmaster. At night the building is already beyond capacity, forcing the college to rent space at nearby Leder Middle School for teaching of secretarial students.

Courses in public health, nursing, science, liberal arts and social science are currently offered.

One of the specialties being taught at the campus is medical sonography, a fairly new technique of using ultrasound scanning in diagnosis. Because the campus is located next to Providence Hospital, college officials hope to expand medical instruction.

The 80,000 square-foot building, located behind the Sheraton-Southfield Hotel, is surrounded by dirt on three sides. Viewed from the north, both levels are "underground." Viewed from the south, the building appears to be jutting out from the side of a manmade hill.

The building, called an "earth integrated structure" was designed by Straub, Van Dine and Dzurman of Troy. The architects hope the design will significantly reduce heating costs in the winter and cooling costs in the summer. Although the cost of building an unconventional structure was high, college officials hope to make up that cost in 15-20 years through lower utility expenses.

faces the sun in the morning to let sunlight illuminate and heat the building. This also protects the building from buffeting northwest winds in the winter.

Stairs in the building lead to a third level where there is some storage space but doors open to a grassy roof for students.

Even on a rainy day, the "underground campus" is bright. Walls are painted bright yellow and wooden benches are green. Finishing touches still need to be done on the building.

Alarm failure prompts probe into school's warning system

By KAREN SUE HERMES

Oakland University officials said Tuesday they will check every fire alarm system on the Rochester area campus during Christmas break.

The announcement followed the failure Monday of the fire alarm system in Hamlin Hall where a fire erupted on the sixth floor while students slept.

No one was injured in the dormitory fire, which was contained to the furnace room in which it started.

The dormitory's sprinkler system was activated and the fire was extinguished before it was even detected. George Catton, the university's director of physical plant services, said it isn't known yet why the system failed.

He said it is "possible, but there's no solid evidence yet," that cleaning crews turned off the system.

Another university official said Hamlin's alarm system was malfunctioning last week and intermittently sounded.

A night watchman, George Hammond, said he smelled smoke and heard water running down the dormitory's elevator shaft about 6 a.m.

About the same time, sixth-floor students also smelled smoke.

Immediately they called the Pontiac Township Fire Department, the university's Department of Public Safety and the dormitory's head resident, Alan Crandall.

HAMMOND, TOGETHER with Crandall and a handful of resident assistants, then banged on doors, evacuating 350 students from the half-full dormitory.

Dorene Bieryla, assistant director of residence halls, said the evacuation was quick, taking no more than five 10 minutes.

"We have fire drills all the time," she said.

Pontiac Township Fire Department cleared the dormitory of smoke when it arrived.

Chief Arthur Petersen of the Pontiac Township Fire Department said the fire's cause still is under investigation.

Met Gilroy of the university's Department of Public Safety said he and Det. Sgt. Vern Erickson of the Michigan State Police Fire Marshal Division agreed it "probably" was accidental.

University officials speculated it was caused by a smoldering cigarette tossed into a waste receptacle housed in the furnace room.

Damage to the dormitory is estimated at about \$5,000, said Nancy Anderson, business manager of residence halls.

"There was water damage to the carpeting on three floors and the inside of the furnace room door was charred, she said.

Ms. Bieryla said she and Crandall heard no complaints from students about the failure of the alarm system.

Freshman Lisa Tennant, 18, of Royal Oak, said students knew the alarm system was malfunctioning.

"The important thing to remember is we did get out," she said.

A resident on the sixth floor where the fire started, Miss Tennant is majoring in psychology.

She said she was awakened by the banging on her door and someone yelling, "Fire!"

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