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U of L reaches deal for 500 student apartments

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University of Louisville officials announced a deal today with a private developer that recently started construction on the first of more than 500 apartments for students near the Belknap Campus.

"Despite state budget cuts, we must move forward to make sure our university offers the best possible accommodations and services for our students," said UofL President James Ramsey, referring to the housing plans of Edwards Communities of Columbus, Ohio.

Fewer than 10 percent of UofL's students lived on campus in 1998. But now about 3,300 out of 22,000 enrolled — 15 percent — live in student housing, and the numbers are expected to increase annually for the foreseeable future, UofL officials said.

Edwards Communities is developing the housing, called The Province, on 43 acres it owns at the old American Standard industrial site in the Park Hill neighborhood immediately northwest of the campus.

Edwards plans to build 366 apartments that can accommodate 800 students in phase one, which is to be completed by the fall 2009 semester, said Larry Owsley, UofL's vice president for business affairs.

A second, \$30 million phase calls for six buildings with about 150 apartments to house 500 students. Those units are expected to be ready for occupancy in the fall of 2010, Owsley said.

The Province will include a clubhouse with an outdoor pool, a lake, a spa/fitness center, sun deck, parking and a pedestrian bridge across the CSX railroad tracks to the campus.

Owsley said Edwards will own and manage the housing, while UofL commits to providing residents the same programs and services offered to students living on campus.

Provost Shirley Willihnganz said the project is important for several reasons:

Studies show that living in housing with other students improves graduation rates and makes students feel more connected to the school.

The development of public-private partnerships is critical at a time when there is a severe shortage of state funds.

It will improve the Park Hill neighborhood.

Two other developers have announced plans to build student housing near Belknap, but Owsley said that UofL has not signed deals with them yet and that those units probably won't be ready before the fall of 2010.

Phenix Investment Associates of Georgia plans to develop 192 apartments with more than 600 beds and to convert the old American Standard plant into a parking garage, with ground-level commercial space, Owsley said. Phenix controls 8.2 acres near Shipp Avenue and Seventh Street where the project, named The Bellamy, is planned.

A Louisville group, Icon-Cards Development LLC, has proposed student housing on 1.6 acres just northwest of Cardinal Boulevard and Floyd Street. The original plan was for an eight-story structure with 384 beds and 20,000 square feet of commercial space. But Owlsey said the group is considering scaling back the project.

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