Building independence

Jody Terhaar, project shepherd for the new Centennial Commons senior student townhomes at the College of St. Benedict, talks June 27 about the community feel that the school was looking to achieve in the design. Nearing their completion, the four eight-unit townhomes will house more than 120 students. TIMES PHOTOS BY KIMM ANDERSON. KANDERSON@STCLOUDTIMES.COM

Apartments on CSB campus aim to offer community and a sense of responsibility

Quick Facts about Centennial Commons
- 124 students housed.
- 144 parking spaces.
- Fully furnished.
- Full size washer and dryer.
- Two bathrooms in each unit.
- Four single-occupancy bedrooms in each unit.
- Cost: $5,363 per year, without meal plan.
- Bus stops will be added to the area.

Transitioning to the future

To accommodate the increase of students who will be living on-campus, St. Ben's has expanded its housing to include four eight-unit townhouses and a commons building. The additional housing

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brings the total beds on-campus up to 1,685.

The 2013 seniors will be the final class of the off-campus living option. For the 2011-12 school year, 79 percent of the students lived on-campus and in school-provided housing for the study abroad programs.

“The majority of my friends who live off campus will continue to live off campus,” Gideon, 21, said. “I think the transition could have gone over more smoothly than it has, but I think it’s an interesting move. I enjoy living on campus.”

After this school year, about 90 percent of the students will be living on-campus, including students who are studying abroad. The other 10 percent must apply to live off-campus for approved circumstances.

Even though St. Ben’s has moved forward with this transition, the city of St. Joseph is “trying to keep up,” Mayor Rick Schulz said.

“This move is definitely changing our rental properties and the downtown area,” Schulz said. “We have rentals, with the help of our (economic development) authority, that are converting back to single-family homes in order to appeal to a new renter. It’s a continual saga here. The rental landscape is changing.”

The new apartments will house only upperclassmen. By August, 124 seniors will begin occupying the new development. Including the four townhouses and the commons building, the site — which also will house a future welcome center and the school’s sports fields — cost $9 million.

“Before moving forward with the new housing, we consulted the students,” Terhaar said. “They wanted something unique, and they didn’t want it to look like college housing.”

The townhouses in Centennial Commons will not be identical in size, but each has a distinctive, color scheme inside and out. The 1,422-square-foot apartments include a full-size kitchen, in-unit washer and dryer, and two bathrooms for the two occupants.

“We really wanted to make the student feel independent,” Terhaar said. “We also wanted to prepare them for when they move into their first apartments. Because the students really wanted the new houses to feel like a community, front porches, a fire pit and two ponds were added to the townhouse designs.”

“I’m really looking forward to living there next year,” said Sarah Beddow, a senior at St. Ben’s. “I’m excited about having a front porch.”

Sustaining the present

The students who live in Centennial Commons will pay $5,363 per year and it will be included in their tuition payment. However, to help prepare the students for their first apartments, Terhaar said, the college will be handing out monthly bills similar to electric bills to show them how much electricity they are using and give suggestions for saving energy.

The students will not be paying separate bills for their cable, Internet or electric, she said.

“I think that’s a good idea,” Beddow said. “It’ll help prepare us for the future and growing up.”

Making the students aware of their energy use is only a small part of St. Ben’s effort to become more energy efficient.

In 2008, the college adopted a policy for sustainable buildings that requires St. Ben’s to stay within Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, said Jody Purman, director of sustainability for the college.

“This is the first construction since we adopted that policy,” she said. “Later this year, we will be applying for LEED certification for all five of the buildings.”

The community commons building has been awarded 32 credits for design so far. St. Ben’s also will apply for construction credits to achieve silver status, which requires 50 credits.

The townhouses are under a separate category and cannot be awarded credits until after being occupied for a period of time.

“Getting a LEED certification is an extensive process,” Purman said. “Everything from the building site to the design of the building to how much water you’re using has to be taken into account. This is something the school views as important for the future. We want to build sustainable housing for our students.”

Construction on Centennial Commons began in November 2011.

Dedicated to the past

In line with Centennial Commons’ theme being tied to the college’s 100-year history that it will mark in 2013, each of the new buildings will be named after a sister who served in the St. Ben’s community.

A dedication ceremony in September will recognize the individuals — Cecilia Kapaner, Mary David Olheiser, Mary Anthony Wagner and Lois Weyl — Two of the sisters, Weyl and Olheiser, are still around and had been invited to attend the blessing ceremony, Terhaar said.

The elements of St. Ben’s history can be seen clearly in many aspects of the new construction.

“We are incorporating a lot of design elements from parts of the main campus into the community building including the Benedictine crosses,” she said. “It’s interesting seeing those past elements coming together with the modern elements we’re including in the new buildings. It’s a mingling of the past and the present.”