

Yorktown Hall

“Hotel rooms at Robert Morris University lauded--
Students living in Holiday Inn find a lot to like”

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Robert Morris University senior Andrew Ziegler says he gets mixed reactions from friends at other schools when he tells them where he lives. Mr. Ziegler and his roommate Justin Downs are among the more than 130 RMU students who live in the Holiday Inn Pittsburgh Airport on University Boulevard, less than a mile from their school's Moon campus. Jessica Duffy, one of the three student resident assistants assigned to the hotel, said some parents initially are skeptical at the prospect of their children living away from home in a hotel. Students and skeptics quickly learn hotel life has many advantages. Two students generally share a room, which is bigger than most traditional campus dorm rooms, has a private bathroom with tub and shower, and, in most instances, has two double beds. Once a week, the rooms are professionally cleaned -- a service certainly not offered in campus dorms. RMU students who live in the Holiday Inn have full use of an indoor swimming pool, a 24-hour workout room, restaurant, gift shop and the motel bar -- for those 21 and older. Shuttle buses run to and from the campus every 15 minutes. Robert Morris University officials began housing students in the Holiday Inn in fall 2010 when requests for campus housing exceeded the supply of dorm rooms and suites.

Last month, officials announced the university is buying the hotel “to accommodate substantial growth in undergraduate enrollment, residential enrollment and student retention,” -- all at “historic levels” for the 2011-12 school year. The purchase price is \$10.15 million. The title transfer has not been completed yet but is expected to happen soon. “As of now, our plan is to continue to operate it as a Holiday Inn, so in the short term, signage is not likely to change,” said Jonathan Potts, senior director of public relations, at Robert Morris University. RMU plans to operate the Holiday Inn as a hotel, at least through 2012, according to a news release. The university has “engaged Pittsburgh-based Prospera Hospitality to assist with the hotel management and to ensure a smooth transition.” The hotel has 250 rooms, which eventually could house 500 students. “The hotel will provide opportunities for student employment” and will offer “real-world experience” for RMU's students in the hospitality and tourism management program, the news release stated. The indoor swimming pool at the hotel “has been a big hit with the students who live there,” Mr. Potts said. When RMU owns the 17-acre property, all students will be able to use the pool, which is an amenity the Moon campus does not have. The hotel workout room will augment the Jefferson Center fitness facility on campus. The Holiday Inn has 12,000 square feet of conference space -- more than twice the room at RMU's Sewall Center, which hosts 110 outside events each year.

Mr. Downs and Mr. Ziegler, both from Greensburg, lived in the hotel last year and liked it so much they elected to live there for their senior year. Another benefit, said Mr. Ziegler, a business major, is the hotel is “quieter than the dorms and you can actually do homework in your room.” Mr. Downs, a communications major, said “it's actually a bit cheaper to live here. We like the double beds and enjoy using the fitness room.” Ms. Duffy, a sophomore economics major from Evans City, also asked to be assigned to the Holiday Inn. Resident assistants typically get single rooms. Her's has two twin beds and she converted one into a daybed couch. RMU student rooms are separated from hotel guests, who do not have access to the student rooms. “It's really very safe and secure,” she said. “One drawback is a hotel might not be good for freshmen” who have not yet made friends on campus. Another slight drawback is “we don't have a lounge, but I made sure that everyone met the students on their floor and we get together in the hallway.” Only a handful of freshmen are living in the hotel, Mr. Potts said, and they generally are students who sent in their acceptance after the dorms were full. RMU had 1,679 students living in campus housing this fall, including the hotel. That's an 86 percent increase since 2000. In August, the university opened Peter Salem Hall, the 13th residence hall, which houses 190 students. Total undergraduate enrollment is 3,910. “We have increasingly become a university of choice for students who seek an engaged and holistic collegiate experience, which includes a 24-hour living and learning environment,” RMU President Gregory G. Dell'Omo said. John Michalenko, Vice President for Student Life at RMU, said, “National research and our own experience demonstrate a strong relationship between living on campus and improved academic performance.” Ms. Duffy and her fellow resident assistants at the hotel discovered another unanticipated benefit. They have not experienced the bane of resident assistants at every college -- the middle-of-the-night knocks on the door from students who are locked out of their rooms. “They can get their keys at the hotel front desk,” she said.

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