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New dorm rooms greet ASU West students

Casa de Oro helps change 'commuter' tag

by Lesley Wright - Aug. 24, 2012 04:02 PM The Republic | azcentral.com

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freshmen and sophomores woke up in their new dorm rooms on Arizona State University's West campus Thursday, ready for the first day of classes.

But it was anything but a typical first day of school for the West Valley university.

Developer American Campus Communities invested nearly \$24 million of private funds in high-end residence and dining halls that will help the campus shake its reputation as a commuter campus.

ASU move in day 2012

"It was finished on time and on budget," said Mistalene Calleroz White, dean of students for the West campus. "There was no state funding involved."

While state taxpayers may like the sound of that, university officials are thrilled that, for the first time, most incoming freshmen and sophomores will make the campus their full-time home during the school year.

The school does not require metro Phoenix freshmen who live within commuting distance to live on campus. But this year, ASU officials are advising



Cheryl Evans/The Republic

Arizona State University student Brandon Evans, 18, of Chandler, moves into the new Casa de Oro dorm on the West campus in Phoenix with the help of his mother, Lynette (left), and sister ,Kayla, 11.

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ASU West

ASU's West campus, at 4701 W. Thunderbird Road, debuted new residence and dining halls this week. ASU President Michael Crow and civic leaders will join the public at 10:30 a.m. Sept. 7 for a grand opening and free tours.

Casa de Oro

Features 365 beds in 109 one- and two-bedroom suites. Residence hall is 93,000 square feet over three stories.

Public spaces include a social lounge, gaming area, study rooms, community kitchen, computer room, laundry and landscaped courtyard.

Verde Dining Pavilion

All-you-can eat menus, with vegetarian and vegan options.

Large and small dining rooms.

Open to the public.

Source: Arizona State University.

them to do so, even if they live nearby. The campus now assumes all freshmen will move into the residence hall or go through an administrative "exception" process.

This week, many students were happy to move into dorms so that they can get the full college experience.

Ross Raymond, an 18-year-old mathematics major, said he wanted to live in the new residence hall, called Casa de Oro, even though his home is only 6 miles away in Phoenix.

"It's much better to live on campus," said Raymond, who was shooting pool with a friend in the hall's lounge. "You've got that community. And I can still get supplies at my parents' house."

An academic village

Living within what ASU President Michael Crow calls an "academic village" of students and professors can help students finish their studies in four years. It could also boost graduation rates, studies show.

ASU West has had Las Casas, a housing complex with apartment-like suites, since 2003, but it housed mostly out-of-state students and upperclassmen. That all changed about two weeks ago, when the first round of freshmen moved in to Casa de Oro.

The dining hall, which features healthy meals, is open to everyone on campus and to the public.

"It's just unbelievably different," said Elizabeth Langland, vice provost for the West campus. "I've been here five years and I cannot believe the transformation. The life on the plaza is just electric with students."

Freshman traditions

Langland, who also is dean of the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, the largest college on the West campus, has worked to create a small liberal-arts atmosphere on the [compact](#) campus.

Last weekend, freshmen attended Camp Solera, an orientation that immerses new students in a university setting. Students lived on campus for several nights and had a traditional candlelight ceremony. Also, they hear from professors and administrators about what they can expect from school and what the school expects from them. This year, the camp included a tour of the residence hall.

After that tour, Calleroz White said she was thrilled to learn that five local students who toured Casa de Oro changed their minds about living at home and moved in to the dorm. It shows that the residence and dining halls are inviting to students, she said.

The dean stays in touch even with students who live off-campus, to make sure they are making friends, joining activities and living the college life.

Students who live in isolation, she said, often drop out or take extra years to graduate.

"You can live across the street and it will be a world away," Calleroz White said. "We want to create the expectation that students will live here. Our goal is to get every student in and out in four years."

That's an argument she uses with local parents who may balk at the idea of paying \$5,720 each year for dorm housing. The savings could easily be eaten up by an extra year or two of tuition, Calleroz White said.

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Luxurious living

Student surveys influenced how Casa de Oro was designed.

The two-bed suites have a partial wall separating roommates' sleeping areas. Each room has a refrigerator and microwave and two large closets. The bathrooms, while shared by two suites, each have private toilets and showers.

Elsewhere in the three-story building, students will find kitchens, laundry rooms, study and tutoring areas, game rooms and lounges. Most of the public rooms have large, flat-screen televisions.

The dining facility has communal dining and smaller rooms where students can share meals with faculty. Students who are worried about food allergies, or who have special dietary needs can consult with dietitians.

Sophomore Eric Davis, 20, lived in his Peoria home his freshman year and then moved into Las Casas. The difference was eye-opening, he said.

"The majority of friends I have now I developed after living on campus," said Davis, now a junior who lives in Casa de Oro and serves as a peer counselor. "I really like it."

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