

At SUNY-Stony Brook, Trying to Shed the 'Neo-Penal' Label

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home will seat 7,500.

Not everything is being done this summer. Recently completed additions include an ambulatory surgery center fronting Nicolls Road that opened in March as a new addition to the University Hospital. A child care center for university workers was opened last fall along Stony Brook Road.

Off campus, private donations are funding the restoration of Sunwood, the home of Ward Melville, the philanthropist whose 478-acre land donation brought SUNY to Stony Brook village. A new Sunwood, replacing the original home that burned in 1987, is to serve as a residence for the university president as well as a reception and meeting center for some university events.

Stony Brook University's expansion even extends into New York City. This year the college opened a Manhattan branch on Park Avenue South as a way to give students a taste of the city. School officials expect 800 students there in the fall.

The campus construction plans that are not big and ambitious have value beyond their size. The destruction of a footbridge over the school's main road that connects the library to a dead end on the second floor of the student union is eagerly awaited. Plagued by surface ruptures and stress cracks, the so-called "bridge to nowhere" is considered unsafe and is often closed in inclement weather.

"That bridge was symbol of the fame Stony Brook garnered in its early days as ugly and dysfunctional," said Aaron Godfrey, a lecturer in classics and European languages at the university for a quarter century. "It represented the disconnect between the students and administration, and the administration and the state construction fund in Albany."

Dr. Godfrey said the school's architectural style was often described as "neo-penal."

Robert Reuter, an architect and industrial engineer and Stony Brook

native, says he remembers the school's early construction.

"I think that originally the community was quite excited about having the university here, but almost immediately it was universally derided for its architecture," he said. "The quality of building and planning was seen as an unfortunate joke. It didn't adhere in any way to the wishes of Ward Melville."

Mr. Melville, owner of the Thom McAn shoe stores, envisioned Stony Brook as a small liberal arts college with a colonial architecture in keeping with the Three Village area, which he did much to preserve through the Ward Melville Heritage Organization, which owns several historic buildings. But the only campus structure with a colonial architecture is the new day care center.

Dr. Kenny said that when she arrived in Stony Brook in 1995, "there just wasn't money for major renovations, but something had to be done. We started with ornamental plantings on the mall area, which had never been anything but blacktop. We added grass and trees and benches to make the area more inviting."

Today the mall features a large fountain and a mammoth brick dormitories had been another longstanding problem.

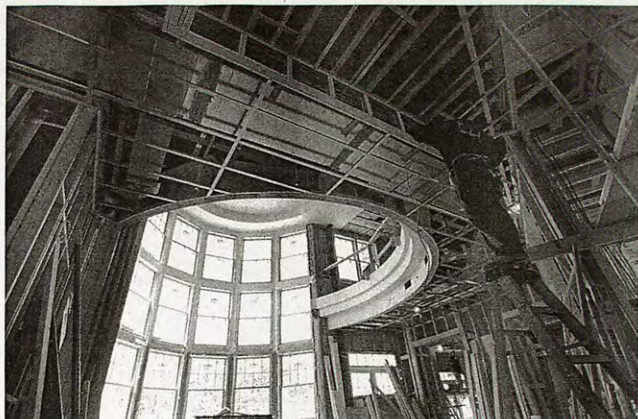
"The dorms were depressing and dark without any welcoming common areas," said Dallas Bauman, assistant vice president for campus residences. Mr. Bauman said residence halls had exposed piping in the ceilings, mismatched linoleum floor tiles and no security system.

An \$81 million infusion of state money some five years ago allowed the school to renovate all existing dorms and build new ones. Today there are 8,000 resident beds, up nearly 2,000 from the 1980's.

"The new dorms are much bigger and nicer," said Veronique Antunez, a junior who transferred from Adelphi University in Garden City.

"There are a lot of living options here and the halls are stylish, not cramped and small."

Millie Aponte is a junior who remembers visiting her older brother



Maxine Hicks for The New York Times

At Stony Brook, a house is under construction that will be the president's home and be used for receptions.

at Stony Brook years ago, before she also transferred to the school from the College of New Rochelle.

"It's much better here now," she said. "There's less asphalt and a lot more grass. Now that they are fixing a lot of the buildings, it's a campus you can be proud of."

But many of the neighbors are unimpressed. Valerie Vignona used to live in the Long Hill neighborhood adjacent to the school's new undergraduate apartments. Three years ago, the Vignona family moved to another part of Stony Brook in part because of problems they experienced living next to the university.

"When we moved into that community there was a nice stand of trees separating us from the school's residence halls, but when they started building new dorms they tore all

the trees out," Ms. Vignona said. "With the dorms so close we got rats and mice and noise."

Ms. Vignona said that school-related congestion along Stony Brook Road, which borders the campus to the west and is the only access to the Long Hill area, makes traffic unbearable.

Dr. Kenny acknowledged that town-gown relations have not always been smooth.

"The university hasn't always been warmly received, whether because of architecture or scope or size," she said. "Truthfully, I don't think anyone could have welcomed such large and massive construction in their backyard. We have made serious efforts to ameliorate that antipathy."

President Kenny said she believed

beautification efforts at the university pleased the surrounding community and encouraged interaction. Other plans with that goal in mind include cutting a straight thoroughfare from the university's main entrance on Nicolls Road to the central area of campus.

The road would feature ornamental plantings and culminate at the circular drive around administration buildings, the Staller Center and the Asian American Center, all of which would become visible from the main roadway. Currently trees block the view of the university center from the road.

Although money hasn't yet been allocated for this plan, Dr. Kenny said she hoped it would be started in the next few years.

"The new entrance will relieve

current traffic congestion at the school's main entrance without widening Nicolls Road, which has been a matter of community concern," she said. "I don't think people will object because there won't be more road way, just better roadway."

In fact, community resistance to the plan has already risen.

"When Ward Melville laid out this area, Nicolls Road was supposed to be a pristine corridor," said Ken Sunberg, president of the civic association in Setauket, which with Stony Brook and Poquott comprise the Three Villages. "With ongoing university developments, Nicolls Road is in danger of becoming deforested into a large commercial strip, which is not in keeping with the feel of this area."

Another longstanding sore point between SUNY and the community has been how the college disposes of its sewage. Currently, the school's waste is treated and dumped into Port Jefferson Harbor via a huge pipe running under 25A.

"Now that there are more buildings with more usage, there will be more sewage being dumped into the Sound," Mr. Sunberg said. "They are maximizing use of that pipe already and they are not generally adding new pipes or facilities to treat the waste."

Iva Kocijan, the university's spokeswoman, said the school was looking for different answers to sewage treatment. "We don't plan to send any more to Port Jefferson," she said. "We're exploring various solutions, one of which is containment and treatment on campus."

Mr. Sunberg said university officials had informed his group of the school's intention to put a seven-floor hotel near the main entrance on Nicolls Road.

"We did talk about building a conference center-hotel complex, but at this point we have no plans to do so," Ms. Kocijan said.

Such mixed messages tend to set some neighbors' teeth on edge. "We have no sense of stability since the school is not always forthright about their plans," Mr. Sunberg said.