

College Buys Apartment Buildings

\$8.75 Million Spent For Marye's Heights

By **RYAN HAMM**
Editor-In-Chief

The Mary Washington College Real Estate Foundation purchased the Marye's Heights apartment complex for \$8.75 million from the Silver Companies on Wednesday, Nov. 21. The complex, which is located behind the south end of campus on William St., will help ease the college's overcrowding problems with space for 350 students in August 2003, after the 18-month lease period provided to residents.

"We have been thinking about wanting to do something like this for a long time," said Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Bernard Chirico. "I really feel that this is a true watershed for MWC because it is very different than what we have done up to this point."

The Mary Washington College Real Estate Foundation, a separately incorporated private foundation formed exclusively for the purpose of acquiring real estate on behalf of the college, will handle the existing leases of the current residents.

Once the college acquires the property, residents will have the opportunity to extend their leases until May 15, 2003, with the guarantee of no rental increase from the amount

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"We hope that students who do want to live off campus will migrate to the facility..."

Rick Hurley

Courtesy College Relations



Juliette Gomez/Bullnet

Ruth Brady, a resident of Marye's Heights, looks out of her terrace. Brady, like all of the current tenants, is forced to find new housing.

Tenants Upset, Students Pleased

By **SARAH LUCAS**
Features Editor

Many of the residents of Marye's Heights Apartments, the majority of whom are elderly, are upset about having to move out because the college purchased the complex. However, reaction from students on the purchase has been overwhelmingly positive.

According to resident Mary Monroe, she and the other residents like being within walking distance of downtown Fredericksburg. Some residents do not have cars but are able to walk downtown. She also does not think there are enough apartments within the city limits to accommodate all of the tenants.

"This place has been, for many years, like a community in and of itself," Monroe said.

Monroe said that many of the residents expected to spend the remainder of their lives at Marye's Heights. She herself has only been living there for three years, and said that she does not think the move will be as hard on her as it will be on some of the other residents.

"The thought of having to move isn't thrilling me to death, but that's life," Monroe said. "We're very disappointed, but things move forward in life. Everything is growing, and the college is not immune to that growth."

She also added that she was glad the notice came in plenty of time for them to move, and that they were not told that they would have to move in 60 or 90 days.

According to a press release, when the leases expire, tenants will be given the option of extending their lease to May 2003, with the guarantee of no rent increase from current rates. Peggy Johnson, a longtime resident of the complex, will serve as a relocation counselor, helping tenants to find new places to live and answering their

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they are currently paying. In August of the same year, upper class students will be given priority to move into the complex.

"Our preference is to rent to nonstudents during this transition period in order to preserve the life of the people who are still living there," said Richard Hurley, executive vice president and chief financial officer and treasurer of the Foundation. "We hope that students who do want to live off campus will migrate to the facility so that they can get the experience of living off campus but still be close."

The apartment complex is currently home to mostly elderly people and has never been a major attraction for college students that move off campus. Instead most students choose to live in the Greenbrier or Snowden apartment complexes, both further away from campus.

"The location is so ideal right between the athletic fields, the campus and the president's house," said Ranny Corbin, executive assistant to the president. "This is going to attract back to campus the students living off campus."

Many of the current residents of the Marye's Heights Complex said that they are displeased with the purchase. Mary Washington College Alumna Peggy Johnson is a current resident of the complex and has agreed to serve as a relocation counselor for the tenants. Johnson, 53, said that overall she is

unhappy with the decision.

"I planned on retiring here and staying here but now I have to go somewhere else," she said.

Corbin said she feels sympathy for the people but feels that it will not be hard for them to acquire housing elsewhere.

"I know a lot of them personally and I am sympathetic for them because it is a tight knit group, but I have no doubt that they will find satisfactory places to live," Corbin said. "There are plenty of other places to live in the area and I think the college has been very sympathetic in helping them by giving them the 18 month period."

Nikki Booker, who has managed the complex for the past three and a half years, declined to comment on the issue.

According to the college officials, the acquisition of the new property will not cause an increase in enrollment, which has remained capped at 4,000 for the past 15 years. The college conducted an internet survey last spring and found that as many as 400 of the previous commuting students said they would like to live in apartment-style housing on campus or located nearby.

"When people move off campus they are looking for privacy and independence and that is the one thing that we will be able to offer through Marye's Heights," said Chris Porter, director of Residence Life and Housing.

Students who live in the complex will enjoy the proximity to campus, and they will receive special stickers that permit them to park in the complex's lot. The apartments will cost around \$300 more than living on campus, but the students will not have to worry about the responsibility of paying bills each month. According to Hurley, the complex will provide 100 single rooms and large doubles for 250 students. Each apartment consists of one single room and one double room. At this point Porter is unsure of how the residential life process will be set up in the complex.

"There will be staff over there but exactly what configuration will be over there we are not sure of yet," Porter said. "We will look at what other schools have done but we will figure out what will work best for MWC."

Other schools in the state that already offer apartment style housing are Christopher Newport University, the University of Virginia and Virginia Commonwealth University. Jane Firer, the complex manager of the VCU owned West Broad apartment complex, said that the apt. style housing works well with students.

"Ever since we opened these apartments on July 1, we have heard nothing but positive feedback from the students," Firer said. "The students like it a lot and in general we are at full occupancy so that we have to have a waiting list... that says something."

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questions.

According to Monroe, many of the residents have adult children in the area who can help them move.

"I'm not looking forward to moving again, but I'm not as unfortunate as some people because I have a lot of family [in the area]," said another resident who also asked that she not be named.

"It was a little unsettling. I think we all felt that way," she said. "At our age, we are just sort of settling in. I feel like we don't need change."

Hurley said that he could understand how the residents feel.

"My first response is that my heart goes out to them," Hurley said. "I certainly understand and appreciate how this disrupts their lives."

Hurley added that the college has been doing all they can to make the transition easier on the residents.

On Monday night, the college held a meeting with the tenants to give them information and answer any questions they had.

"[The meeting] went as well as could be expected," Hurley said. "There was a lot of anger vented, a lot of good questions asked."

Hurley said that he tried to give the residents the good news, such as the fact that there will be no penalties for breaking leases. Some residents, he said, were concerned about students moving in right away and being disruptive. Hurley said that while it is possible that they will start renting to students as early as Fall 2002 to help pay the bills, they would prefer to wait until all the residents have moved out so that their quality of life will not be disrupted.

Most students said that the purchase will provide a much-needed solution to a housing shortage.

"I think [living in the apartments] might help alleviate the housing process...especially because of the proximity to the college," senior Elizabeth Collins said. "Obviously, you could just walk to campus."

Junior Michael Lange had many friends who had to move into apartments this year because of the housing situation, and thinks that the purchase of

Marye's Heights will help alleviate the situation in the future.

"I think it was a wise expenditure of the college's money," Lange said.

Some students said they wondered why the college had not made such a purchase a long time ago.

"I think [the purchase] is great, but they should have done it years ago, because by the time they do it I'll be gone," said junior Tina Timpano, who also said that she would choose to live in the apartments if she had the chance.

Many younger students expressed interest in living at Marye's Heights in a few years so that they wouldn't have to deal with looking for an apartment elsewhere off-campus.

"The good thing about [Marye's Heights] is it's so close," sophomore April Gross said. "[My friends and I] talked about moving [off campus], but everything's taken."

Sophomore Ethan Ripperder would also consider moving into an apartment in Marye's Heights, and liked how he would have the advantages of both on- and off-campus housing.

"It's good because it's off-campus, and you have more privacy," Ripperder said. "Also, since it's owned by the school, you'd get more benefits, like internet access."

In the press release, Hurley, who is also treasurer of the Real Estate Foundation, said that students who live in Marye's Heights will have 24-hour access to campus-based computer networks, just like on-campus students. Many other colleges have already realized the advantages of school-owned apartment complexes.

"A lot of colleges purchase apartment complexes," sophomore Mark Shabman said. "I have friends who live in ones at UVa. I would prefer [living in a school-owned apartment complex] than living on campus."

Hurley said that the college hasn't worked out how students will be able to choose to live in the apartments, which will cost about \$300-350 more than a dorm room per semester. The college will probably give preference to upperclassmen.