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New student apartments open at YSU **\$22 million complex will boost recruitment, spark Smoky Hollow rebirth**

The drive from Champion Township in Trumbull County to the Youngstown State University campus takes about 40 minutes.

Lashyka Clark knows it well – State Route 82 east to State Route 11 south to Interstate 80 east to Belmont Avenue to campus.

"It's kind of long, especially getting to those early-morning classes," said Clark, 21, a full-time YSU student who lives with her parents in Champion.

Clark's daily trek to campus won't be as grueling this year.

As one of the first residents of the new University Courtyard Apartments on the east side of YSU, Clark will be no more than a five-minute walk to just about anywhere on campus.

"They're very close," she said about the apartments on Wick Oval. "I like the idea of not spending as much time in my car or money on gas. I can get to class on time."

In a festive ribbon-cutting ceremony this morning, YSU officially opened the \$22 million, 408-student apartment complex, hailing it as a critical step in increasing the university's student recruitment efforts and revitalizing the deteriorated Smoky Hollow neighborhood of Youngstown.



Youngstown Mayor George McKelvey, YSU President David C. Sweet, Mahoning County Commissioner Ed Reese and YSU Student Government President Emily Eckman are joined by leaders from YSU, YSU Foundation, Ambling Corp., Bank One and O'Hora Construction Co. for the ribbon-cutting of the new University Courtyard Apartments in Smoky Hollow.

"Someday we will look back at this day as the beginning of the rebirth of this neighborhood," said YSU President David C. Sweet, who joined Mayor George McKelvey, Mahoning County Commissioner Ed Reese, leaders of the YSU Foundation, Ambling Companies Inc., University Housing Corp., Bank One and dozens of others for the celebratory opening.

"Our hope is that these apartments, which are at full capacity with 408 students, will spawn all kinds of activity in and around this neighborhood."

The apartments are the first of their kind for the YSU campus and the largest single residential development in all of Youngstown in nearly a decade, city officials report.

The complex, which consists of two buildings with 130 apartments for 408 students, is for the exclusive use of YSU students and has been sold out since mid-July. Students will begin moving into the apartments on Sunday, Aug. 17. Fall semester classes begin Monday, Aug. 25.

"This is really an opportunity for YSU to reach out to the community," said Emily Eckman, president of YSU Student Government who will live in the new apartments. "I think this is really going to open up the university to more students."

Plans for the apartments date back six years, when YSU officials decided the campus needed more housing

to boost student recruitment efforts, especially in areas outside the Mahoning Valley. YSU's residence halls, with a capacity of about 1,000 students, have been at capacity for four years.

YSU is leasing the land for the new apartments to University Housing Corp., a nonprofit entity made up of local business people and university officials. UHC, with the financial backing of the YSU Foundation, contracted with Ambling to build and manage the apartments. Ambling, with headquarters in Valdosta, Ga., has built dozens of apartment complexes on university campuses nationwide.

The complex, which has one-, two- and four-bedroom units, is the cornerstone of a larger plan to redevelop the historic Smoky Hollow neighborhood, which sits adjacent to the east side of the YSU campus.

The \$250 million plan, spearheaded by YSU and the Wick Neighbors Inc., calls for developing a residential-commercial district that will include hundreds of houses, condominiums and apartments for students, singles, families and senior citizens.

Margaret Murphy, executive director of Wick Neighbors, said the apartments provide tangible proof that development in Smoky Hollow can work.

"These apartments are a tremendous jumping-off point for this neighborhood, but they are not the end of this story," said Murphy, whose group includes churches, cultural institutions, schools, businesses, social service agencies and residents in the Wick Avenue and Smoky Hollow corridors.

"Today, we have great reason to celebrate. We have much more work to do, and many more celebrations to come."

-30-

[Back](#)

[Top](#)



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