

Colleges offer chance to live 'n learn

*Institutions
see expansion
of programs,
campus living*

By **CHRIS DETTRO**
STAFF WRITER

Higher education in Springfield increasingly is being conducted in more campus-like settings as both the University of Illinois at Springfield and Springfield College-Benedictine University become places for students to live as well as learn.

Lincoln Land Community College and Robert Morris College look to expand program offerings as their enrollment shows slight increases.

University of Illinois at Springfield

At UIS, which welcomed its first freshmen only six years ago, Chancellor Richard Ringeisen

says the strategic planning process, not a gaggle of new buildings, is the most significant thing that has happened in the 6½ years he's been there.

"We asked how best we could be what we wanted to be and came up with a vision statement to be one of the top five small public liberal arts universities in the country," he said. "We've kept our eyes on that target."

In 2001, the university began a small freshman program called Capital Scholars with about 100 honors students. A new curriculum for freshmen and sophomores was developed, and by 2006, the program had 250 freshmen. There are 280 freshmen enrolled at UIS this fall.

"Because we had all these freshmen, we had to have more housing," Ringeisen said. Of this year's freshmen, 42 percent are from the Chicago area and 30 percent from Springfield and surrounding towns, he said.

UIS officials expect enrollment to continue to go up with records being set this fall — 4,855 students — and last fall — 4,761 students.

A residence hall scheduled to open next fall will have a "green" roof with a grass surface designed to save on heating and cooling costs.

The residence hall, probably to be named Founders Hall, will in-

clude 22 single-occupancy units, 84 double-occupancy units, six accessible suites, five resident assistant suites and an apartment for the resident director. In addition, the structure will house the campus bookstore, a grill and classroom facilities.

The current Public Affairs Center bookstore will be converted to additional dining space.

When Founders Hall is completed, between 1,100 and 1,200 students will live on campus.

"We've gone from having 300 to 400 students on campus six years ago to more than 900 now," Ringeisen said. "It has changed the feel of the place."

UIS also broke ground for its research and educational field station at The Nature Conservancy's Emiquon Preserve in Fulton County earlier this summer. There, students will join professional scientists to study the restoration of the Illinois River flood plain near Havana.

Construction of the station building, which will include both laboratories and classrooms, began in July, and completion is expected by the end of the year.

UIS's newest on-campus building is The Recreation and Athletic Center, which opened in September.

"Next we badly need to reno-

vate the library," Ringeisen said. "That will be our next big request of the state."

He also sees a need for a bigger public safety building as well as a student union that likely will cost \$10 million to \$15 million. Those funds will have to come from a capital fundraising campaign.

He said the goal at UIS is to "go to 500 freshmen and then stop," and with that, grow to 6,000 students and stop.

Opportunities also have increased in the student activities area, he said.

"We have theater groups, music groups and athletic teams," Ringeisen said. "There are 75 student clubs compared with 20 six years ago."

"Being out here every day and seeing this maturing university ... people who haven't been out here in a year or two will be shocked," he said.