

Welcome Center is new SCSU 'front door'



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“The Intersection” is an apt name for the exhibit room at St. Cloud State University’s Welcome Center.

It sits near where Fifth Avenue South intersects with Ramsey Place, and it’s in a building that has been billed as the place where university and community meet. The gallery will showcase local projects, with an emphasis on the connections between St. Cloud State and its surroundings.

And on the day St. Cloud State officially opened the Welcome Center, graduate student Alex Ames beamed as visitors shuffled through “The Intersection” and past his work, which recounts the history of Fifth Avenue and the university’s past and present connections to St. Cloud.

“The Welcome Center is a place where town and gown will work together in partnership,” St. Cloud State President Earl H. Potter III said.

It’s part of the \$30 million Fifth Avenue Live! project and includes 12,000 square feet of meeting rooms, small-business development offices, a university-themed gift shop and commons space for small gatherings.

It also includes an office for university staff from continuing studies and admissions.

The Welcome Center was designed to be the new front door to St. Cloud State. It sits among student housing in Coborn Plaza Apartments and retail space at the former site of a Coborn’s store.

On the day university officials and members of the Coborn family gathered for a ribbon-cutting

ceremony, project officials announced two more tenants for retail space at the development.

Dunn Bros Coffee and iBeach, a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week tanning franchise, will occupy retail spaces alongside Fantastic Sams and Campus Bookstore. That means that slightly more than half of the retail space has been filled in the first phase of the Fifth Avenue Live! project.

"Interest has picked up a little now that more students have moved in," said Bruce Maus, listing agent for the company that is marketing the retail space. "It's not moving as quickly as some would like, but it's a premium location and we're asking top dollar."

The vision for the Welcome Center is that students and their family members can access an array of St. Cloud State services, and that community members also can use the amenities there. If community members are doing business with St. Cloud State, there is no charge to use the facility. Eventually a fee schedule will be established for community members who want to rent the space for their own meetings.

The high-tech, interactive nature of the center is apparent just a few feet inside the front door, where a Wayfinder kiosk greets visitors. It's kind of a Google search for St. Cloud State. The kiosk allows visitors to search by building, by people and by events. They then can print directions to a building, get e-mail and phone information for faculty and staff and see all campus events.

Eventually tickets for all campus events will be available for purchase at the Welcome Center, said Loren Boone, assistant vice president for marketing and communications.

"We're trying to be as high-tech and interactive as we can," he said.

The Center for Continuing Studies and its Corporate

Education and Outreach program already have used the two classrooms in the center for several professional development and training sessions, said Tammy Anhalt-Warner, manager of the Welcome Center. Training topics run the gamut, and inquiries for use of the space are coming in steadily.

"There has been a lot of interest," Anhalt-Warner said.

The Small Business Development Center also is housed in the Welcome Center, and within that is an office for the St. Cloud State microloan program. The SBDC also provides space for the Better Business Bureau and a satellite of the state's International Trade Office, said Barry Kirchoff, director.

"We help people start a business or grow an existing business," Kirchoff said.

<http://www.sctimes.com/article/20100924/NEWS01/109240018/Welcome-Center-is-new-SCSU-front-door>