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### TRIBUNE VIDEO

## High five Mesa's 5th new college, Benedictine U., blesses, opens downtown campus

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[Tim Hacker/ Tribune]

### Benedictine University at Mesa

The Benedictine University at Mesa will start classes next week, as the school held its ribbon cutting ceremony, Tuesday, Aug. 27, 2013 in Mesa. [Tim Hacker/ Tribune]

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Posted: Wednesday, August 28, 2013 7:05 am

By Katie Mayer, Special to Tribune | 1 comment

A crowd of more than 250 gathered in downtown Mesa Tuesday for a blessing and ribbon-cutting in the building that was once Mesa's Southside Hospital and is now home to Arizona's first Catholic university.

The 44,000 square-foot contemporary renovated space, located at 225 E. Main Street, is the primary academic building for Benedictine University at Mesa and includes nine classrooms, a nutrition lab, computer lab, a chapel and faculty and administrative offices, along with empty space to grow.

On Sept. 3, students will step foot on campus and be the first to experience a learning style that university officials call "lecture-free classes." University officials would not release the number of students starting classes, but said the number is changing, as enrollment is ongoing.

"When I came out here to Mesa, I had a big dream, but I didn't dream big enough," said Charles Gregory, executive vice president of Benedictine University. "It's more than I could ever have comprehended."



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The ribbon-cutting event kicked off at 10 a.m. with a program that included a blessing from Diocese of Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted. The bishop and priests then walked around the campus to bless the new building.

Many City of Mesa officials and university officials repeatedly mentioned the lengthy process of what started as a vision for a higher education institution in downtown Mesa and ended with a \$10 million joint venture renovation that is now the new Benedictine University at Mesa campus.

Benedictine University President William Carroll said the journey was not "sweet talk" and involved "heavy duty negotiations."

Mesa Mayor Scott Smith said that officials were not simply looking for a college to offer classes downtown, but that they wanted a university that would actually change the community.

"They saw that in many ways Benedictine University and Mesa were like twin sisters," Smith said.

Smith said both the city and university are innovative and community-focused and that both are focused on investing in the future of generations to come.

"We are writing the next chapter in Mesa's history," said Mesa Councilman Chris Glover, whose grandfather had been a physician at Southside Hospital.

Glover delivered an emotional speech that began with a story about Jesus and ended with his calling the work with the university "one of the most intrinsically rewarding experiences of my life."

A number of students, wearing the school's red-colored shirts, attended the event and shared their excitement about starting college classes.

"This school has everything I was looking for," said incoming freshman Dulce Perez, 18, of Mesa. "It's small and I liked that it would be hands on."

Steffen Spreng, who is 20 years old and transferring to the university from Mesa Community College, said he's excited to "see the Christian Community growing in Mesa," even though he is not Catholic.

"I like how it's going to be small and another thing that really intrigued me is the lecture-free environment because I'm a hands-on learner," Spreng said.

Benedictine University at Mesa Branch Campus President Michael Carroll said rather than passively sit and listen to lectures, students at the university will problem-solve, debate, assess and self-regulate.

Students will work on tablets, download lectures and attend all classes in a learning lab environment. Officials call the classroom style "flipped" because instead of reading a textbook and then looking at a problem, students will learn about a problem or issue first, and then conduct research to find a solution.

"By the time they graduate, they are going to have an electronic portfolio to show employers what they've accomplished," Carroll said.

Benedictine University at Mesa is part of a larger effort city officials launched to attract colleges and universities to Mesa. The first institution, Albright College, opened earlier this year in Mesa's Bank of America building and throughout August, three more institutions opened – Upper Iowa University, Wilkes and Westminster.

Grand Canyon University also announced in late July that it would begin building a campus in Eastmark in 2014.

The main Benedictine University campus is located in Lisle, Ill., which is 25 miles west of Chicago. Tuition for students attending Benedictine University at Mesa is \$20,000 per year. For more information, go to [www.ben.edu/mesa](http://www.ben.edu/mesa).

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