

University will move Mesa campus

By Gary Nelson
Arizona Business Gazette | azcentral.com

Upper Iowa University will move its Mesa campus to the Fiesta District next spring.

The university, based in Fayetteville, Iowa, is one of five degree-granting institutions that agreed this year to establish campuses in Mesa, the result of a nationwide recruiting effort by city officials.

Four of the colleges will set up in city-owned downtown buildings, with full operations to begin for the fall 2013 semester. The eventual goal is a downtown residential-campus district clustered with the city's cultural facilities and light rail.

When Upper Iowa first approached Mesa, it was rumored the school would rent the former Borders store in a defunct center at Alma School Road and U.S. 60 for its largely adult clientele.

While negotiations for the Borders building played out, Upper Iowa rented space from Mesa Public Schools at 1025 N. Country Club Drive.

Now the university has a deal for 13,000 square feet in the Borders building under a 15-year lease, with an option for another

17,000 square feet in three years.

It projects 750 students by the fifth year and believes Mesa will become one of the largest of its satellite learning centers, which currently number 19.

The Fiesta District's first four-year college adds to a growing array of amenities in the southwest Mesa neighborhood, although it remains scarred by large tracts of vacant retail space.

Just north of the future Upper Iowa campus, Mesa is building a large police substation. Across Alma School Road, a LongHorn Steakhouse drew wall-to-wall crowds when it opened.

And a half-mile to the west, Mesa Community College is moving forward on several large construction projects, although some of those have been delayed.

Most visible to the public will be a \$14.9 million performing arts center in the former Harkins theater at Longmore and U.S. 60. A ceremonial groundbreaking was held in August, but construction is not planned to begin until March.

Upper Iowa has established a partnership with MCC to assist

MCC transfer students. A university vice president, William Duffy, said the new campus is perfectly situated for its mission.

"This new location is ideal for the UIU-Mesa Center," said Duffy, senior vice president of UIU Academic Extension. "The Fiesta District location is within close proximity to several key partners: Mesa Community College, ... the new Mesa law-enforcement facility under construction, and several medical facilities."

Duffy said the university plans to work closely with Mesa as the city presses redevelopment of the neighborhood.

The most visible and expensive of those efforts is scheduled to begin next year when the city rebuilds Southern Avenue to the tune of more than \$10 million.

Dennis Kavanaugh, who represents the neighborhood on City Council, called Upper Iowa's decision "a significant new private investment in the Fiesta District which advances both our educational and economic-development objectives."

He said the campus will enhance the Mesa Counts on Col-

lege initiative, which was launched in mid-2010 with a \$3 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to put more Mesa students on the path to a college degree. MCC is a key partner in that program.

Upper Iowa's facilities in the former Borders store will include classrooms, a computer lab, curriculum lab, nursing classroom, offices and a student commons.

The school offers classes in six eight-week terms year-round with rolling admissions. Its majors in Mesa include elementary education, nursing, several business fields, criminal justice with a focus on law enforcement and fire services, human services, psychology, public administration and social sciences.

Its next term begins Monday. Upper Iowa began offering classes in 1857 as an affiliate of the Methodist Church. The church affiliation ended in 1928.

The other colleges coming to Mesa are Benedictine University of Lisle, Ill.; Wilkes University of Wilkes-Barre, Pa.; Westminster College of Fulton, Mo.; and Albright College of Reading, Pa.