

Topping Off Event Marks Progress on Residential College

Contributed by Tobie Baker
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Tristan Denley, senior fellow of the University of Mississippi residential college, and his wife, mathematics instructor Kimberly Denley, sign the last truss to go in the structure during a topping out ceremony Thursday afternoon. UM photo by Kevin Bain.

OXFORD, Miss. - Dust and mud. Screws and bolts. Concrete and bricks. Two-by-fours, and of course, trusses.

The construction site for the University of Mississippi's new residential college bustled earlier today as welders, plumbers and electricians all worked in unison to complete their tasks. But at 3:30 p.m., construction ceased in order to observe a topping out ceremony as the last truss was raised.

"This has been a dream of mine for the past six years," said Carolyn Staton, special assistant to the chancellor and former provost.

As provost, Staton researched residential colleges at other universities, beginning in 2002. She led efforts to establish a task force, which unanimously approved the idea of placing a residential college on the UM campus. From there, she helped secure funding for the initiative.

"Having a residential college on campus offers a new way for students to embrace college," Staton said. "It helps make for a more meaningful experience."

In construction, topping out, or topping off, is a ceremony held when the last beam is placed at the top of a building. For today's ceremony, university officials, students, faculty, staff and construction workers gathered at the construction site to autograph the final truss. Painted red and blue, the steel truss was hoisted into position after an estimated 50 people had signed their names.

"This is a great day," Staton said, smiling. "It's exciting."

University of Mississippi Chancellor Robert Khayat signs the final truss before it is hoisted atop the university's new residential college, under construction along Sorority Row. The topping out ceremony Thursday afternoon marked an important landmark in the construction. UM photo by Tobie Baker.

Residential College Senior Fellow Tristan Denley, whose family will live with the more than 450 students selected to reside at the college, said the college should offer students a truer sense of community.

"The residential college shows just how much Ole Miss cares about its students," Denley said. "The university wants the students to really feel a part of the Ole Miss family."

Denley lived in a residential college while a graduate student at Trinity College-Cambridge University. He has been a UM mathematics professor for the past 12 years, and he served as chair of the department from 2002 until he was tapped recently for his new post.

Modeled after those at British universities in Oxford and Cambridge, the residential college is to include a microcosm of students. According to Staton, both blacks and whites, musicians and athletes, residents and nonresidents, as well as students pursuing various academic studies, all will reside, study and socialize in harmony.

"Living with people who are different than you helps you grow," Staton said. "The residential college will feature 24-hour interaction with a diverse community."

The four-story structure, located directly behind the School of Law, offers living space for faculty, staff and students, as well as shared kitchen and dining areas, laundry services, classrooms, lecture halls, conference rooms, a fitness and game room, a library, computer labs and even a produce market.

UM's residential college is slated to open next fall, and Staton has hopes that a second residential college will open in 2010. For more on the UM residential college, [click here](#).