

Student housing project an experiment in living

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Buzz Price, left, owner and Chris Hall, project manager, are constructing high-end student housing near the Gonzaga campus. The building will be called the Gee.



Also today

- Friendly Computers franchise comes to town
- Gallatin, attorney move into renovated building

each 14-by-10 feet.

The zoning allows him to provide a shared bathroom for every two bedrooms.

It took Buzz Price three years before he found the piece of property he needed to test his big idea.

Originally from Spokane, Price left and took a job with a Bay Area tech firm. He and his wife moved back several years ago, and Price decided he would take a stab at development.

His goal: a unique, energy-efficient, shared-living space for students in a college neighborhood.

It took him those three years to find a foreclosed home at 817 E. Nora, near Gonzaga University. He tore down the eyesore apartment building on the lot and hired Active West Builders, of Coeur d'Alene, to build a three-story student housing experiment.

The key was finding a parcel, near a college, zoned for residential group living.

“One house over on either side, if I tried to build this (project), I would have needed a separate bathroom and separate kitchen for each unit,” said Price, who’s 51 and lives in Cusick.

The dimensions are a tight but substantial 50 feet tall, 40 feet wide and 75 feet deep. The zoning allows him to construct co-op style units; the building has 14 bedrooms,

Price figures he's spending above \$1 million for the project, which he calls "The Gee," as in "G" for Gonzaga.

The front of the building features two impressive shared spaces: a tall open-ceiling kitchen with huge windows looking out on Nora, and a furnished, tall-ceiling entertainment lounge.

Price, who graduated from Stanford, said the digital lounge will have three large HD screens on the wall, with earphone options so people can watch one show while others watch another without distractions.

The second and third floors have balcony railings that allow residents there to look down or talk with people in the open kitchen. "That's my ode to New Orleans," Price said, creating a feeling inspired by the intimacy of the French Quarter.

The construction will be as energy-efficient as possible. Chris Hall, a construction superintendant with Active West, said the goal is to earn LEED Platinum status for the project.

Price said the furnished units will be available sometime this spring.

He'll price them "competitively," just below what GU students pay for units at the Kennedy Apartments.

Each unit will have wireless and wired Internet access and cable TV, plus a laundry on each floor.

But Price insists this is more than a modified dorm.

"This is not like an apartment building, where people occupy a space and don't care about other people. ... This will be a community experience," he said.

Students will have full responsibility to maintain the property and follow social rules. "They'll have to be responsible to each other," he added.

In fact, Price will interview the first group of occupants and hand-select the initial group.

Here's where Price gets excited. He thinks the GU student population is the perfect group to start what he hopes is a nationwide business model.

If the Gee project succeeds, Price plans to launch a company to build close to 100 more near private colleges across the country.

“This would offer students high-quality living arrangements at a cost no different than other housing options they have on campus,” he said.

Carry-in, at-home computer repair

Spokane resident Jim Dixon will launch Spokane’s first Friendly Computers franchise. Like Geek Squad, Friendly Computers offers repairs in a shop – his is at 328 N. Sullivan, Suite 3 – or at one’s home or workplace. He expects to have three to five employees to start.

Dixon said he should be open by the end of February. He’ll do work on both Mac and PC computers, as well as tablets.

Dixon is a 30-year Air Force veteran with a background in computers. He said the plan is to open two more locations, including one in Coeur d’Alene.

He’s leasing space in an office building owned by Romax Associates behind the Shari’s Restaurant near Sullivan and Valleyway. Colin Conway, of NAI Black, was the broker representing Romax Associates.

Gallatin, Swindler relocating

Spokane’s Gallatin Public Affairs consulting group and Spokane attorney Geoffrey Swindler have moved into new offices inside a renovated commercial building at 103 E. Indiana.

Gallatin and Swindler both had offices in the Rock Pointe Tower.

Gallatin will take roughly half of the building’s one floor. Gallatin and Swindler said the move makes sense in providing more office space for future growth. Swindler is also leasing office space in his half of the office building to other Spokane law firms.

The 5,200-square-foot building was sold for \$395,000 to an LLC comprised of Swindler and three Gallatin partners, Jeffrey Bell, Dan Lavey and Marc Johnson.

Bell said the renovation was significant. “We basically started from scratch,” he said. He declined to say how much was spent on the remodel.

Copeland Architecture & Construction in Spokane was the architect, and Solid Rock

Contracting in Post Falls was the contractor.

Kevin Edwards and NAI Black broker Mark McLees represented the LLC, while Earl Engle, from the same firm, represented the former owner, the Charles P. Haskins Family Trust.

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