

AU's South Hall: new use for historic building

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A venerable building on Alfred University's campus will find a new use as a 90-bed residence hall beginning in the fall of 2006. Alfred University President Charles M. Edmondson today announced that South Hall, built in 1908 and expanded in 1929, will be renovated as a new residence hall. Construction will begin late this summer. "Our goal is to both preserve South Hall, which is part of the Village of Alfred's historic district, and to provide a renewed life for the building," said Edmondson. A gift from Arthur L. Powell, a 1943 alumnus of Alfred University who is a life trustee and former chairman of the Board of Trustees, and his wife, Lea Powell, also a former member of the Board of Trustees, will cover more than half of the cost of the renovation, said Edmondson. "This project will give us attractive new living space for our upperclassmen, yet maintain the historic shell of the existing building" said Edmondson. University officials speculate South Hall will soon become as popular a living unit as The Brick, which was built in the 1860s, and is now the most sought-after residence hall assignment. The front portion of the building, which is the original 1908 structure, will be remodeled into suites. From the outside, little will change in terms of the building's appearance, said Michael Neiderbach, director of capital operations and legal affairs for the University. The back portion, which includes the gymnasium added in 1929, will be converted into paired bedrooms with a shared bathroom between them. The bedrooms will overlook an atrium with a glass ceiling in the center of what was the old gym. "There will be minor changes in the appearance of the 1929 addition," said Neiderbach. He said additional windows will have to be installed as part of the conversion. South Hall, located on Park Street, has a red brick exterior with terra cotta roof tiles that distinguish many of the older buildings in the town and village of Alfred. The roof and exterior of the building will be preserved as much as possible in the renovation, Neiderbach said. When the Alfred-Almond Central School district was created in 1940, the University purchased the structure and renamed it South Hall. It contained offices, classrooms and the Women's Gym, with a total of 27,000 square feet. In addition to housing the Department of Physical Education for Women, South Hall contained the Department of Business and Secretarial Studies, which evolved into the College of Business. By the mid-1970s, when McLane Physical Education Center was built to provide physical education facilities for both men and women, South Hall was no longer needed by the University for academic programs. In 1976, it was leased to what is now Allegany County Arc as a sheltered workshop for developmentally disabled adults. That use continued for nearly 20 years, until 1993, when the University demolished the Rogers Campus Center and began construction of the Powell Campus Center. Until the Powell Center was ready for occupancy, the Division of Student Activities was housed in South Hall. The building has remained empty for much of the last decade. Originally, plans were to tear down South Hall - preserving the roof tiles - and construct the Museum of Ceramic Art on that site. However, size limitations of the site, coupled with the community's concerns about traffic and parking for the Museum, prompted the University to change its plans more than a year ago, Edmondson said. The new plans call for the Museum to be built where Davis Gym now stands. "With the change in our plans for the Museum, we wanted to find a use for South Hall, and a new residence hall seemed to be the best possible use," said Edmondson. The University has experienced several larger-than-usual freshman classes in recent years, and that has created space crunches in its residence halls, at least temporarily converting lounges and computer labs in the residence halls into bedrooms. More than 1,300 of the University's 2,000 undergraduate students live on campus, "and more would choose to do so, we think, if we had space for them," said Edmondson. The University has a two-year residency requirement, meaning most of the freshmen and sophomores live on campus. "With that kind of pressure on our residence halls, we also have a difficult time taking one 'off-line' to do major renovations," said Edmondson. "Adding 90 beds will give us a little bit of leeway with our residence halls so that we can do more than routine maintenance to them."