

New privately owned Hawaii dorm filling up

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KAHULUI, Maui – A new \$30 million housing project is expected to attract more students from greater distances and improve Maui Community College's chances to develop into a four-year university.

Three dozen students were living at the privately owned 100-unit Kulanaa'o complex in Kahului during the fall semester, with the population eventually to grow to 400 after construction is completed by the end of the month.

Monthly rent is \$651, which includes utilities, basic cable TV, high-speed Internet and telephone. However, developer Agora Realty & Management Inc. and MCC are offering a reduced rate of \$335 per month during the spring semester for those who pay in advance for the entire semester.

Kulanaa'o is Agora's first venture into student housing. The company, based in Sherman Oaks, Calif., also built the 200-unit Pi'ilani Gardens affordable-housing complex in Kihei and is a partner with A&B Properties in a 143-unit residential complex at Port Allen, Kaula'i.

Agora CEO Cary Lefton said the company was put in contact with MCC Chancellor Clyde Sakamoto through a mutual acquaintance, Tamio Iwado of Prudential Iwado Realty Inc. The Maui realty firm is the local agent for the project.

"(Sakamoto) said there was a tremendous need to expand enrollment, and so we brainstormed," Lefton said.

MCC enrolled 3,000 students last semester, a 5.8 percent increase from fall 2006. The college has limited student housing, with its Hale Haumana providing 44 beds.

Getting a private developer involved, instead of relying on the state to build dormitories, meant the project could be done more quickly and offered to students that much sooner, according to Sakamoto.

"It gives us the capacity not only to attract easily from other parts of Maui and the state but from Mainland and international venues as well," he said.

The benefits also include more "highly educated and skilled students" available to join the local workforce, Sakamoto said, and an enhanced educational environment from students living and mixing together.

STUDENTS LIKE IT

Approximately half of Kulanaa'o's residents are expected to be from

elsewhere in Hawai'i, and about 5 percent from Maui, with Mainland and international students comprising the rest.

The chance to interact with students from other places was the main appeal for Joel Kellenberger, 20, of Zurich, Switzerland, who enrolled at MCC to study English. "It's cool for me because I don't know American culture," he said.

Haruhi Ebata, 20, of Kanagawa, Japan, was living with a host family on Maui before moving into her apartment at Kulanaa'o. She likes the convenience of being able to walk to campus.

"It is easily accessible to school. I have night classes, and I don't have a car," she said.

Business student Kasey Remer, 24, of Minneapolis, was living alone in Wailuku and appreciates the social interaction with other Kulanaa'o residents.

"I also like that it's new," she said.

Kulanaa'o is on Vevau Street, across from the Kahului Public Library. It's a 10-minute walk to MCC, shopping malls, movie theaters, supermarkets, restaurants and Kahului Harbor.

The 3.25-acre complex's four four-story buildings were built around an interior landscaped courtyard. The furnished apartments range from 735 to 739 square feet and accommodate four students. The units have two bedrooms, a bath, a living room and a fully equipped kitchen.

Amenities include a front desk with mail distribution, lounge and recreational areas, study halls, parking and bike racks, and a coin-operated laundry facility complete with a flat-screen TV.

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