**Construction begins on Gage towers replacement**

Groundbreaking ceremony for new residence hall Thursday

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**Published:**Tuesday, September 21, 2010

**Updated:**Tuesday, September 21, 2010 09:09

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Submitted Photo

The artist’s rendering of the new residence hall, located next to McElroy, that will be completed in 2012.

Minnesota State will have a huge change on campus by 2012 as it builds a new residence hall and demolishes Gage towers.

The groundbreaking for the $23.8-million, 118,000-square-foot residence hall is scheduled for Thursday. It will accommodate 300 students when it's completed in 2012

The ceremony will be at 10 a.m. in the parking lot next to Carkoski Commons. Legislators, MSU President Richard Davenport and other administrators will participate. Students, faculty, staff and the public are invited.

Residential Life's preparation to build a new residence hall started in 2003 when it estimated the costs for renovating the Gage towers. The 12-story towers were built in 1965 and 1966 each, and maintenance for the windows, plumbing and elevators has since become too much to keep them.

"We have been maintaining them very responsibly,' said Director of Residential Life Cynthia Janney, "but to reinvest for the next 15 years would be really expensive."

One example of Gage's long history is its elevator. Gage resident Samantha Besemer, who lives on the tenth floor, said elevator malfunction is something that most Gage residents have witnessed. Besemer said it's slow and makes noise and that she once had to use the stairs for a week when the elevator was out of order.

The building's height is another thing that bothers some residents. Gage dorm rooms have eight-foot ceilings, which is two feet less than Julia Sears. As students call for more space to put their belongings, the need for renovation arose, but Janney said the structure of the towers makes it hard to renovate.

"The walls in the buildings can't be rearranged because they are part of structural support of the buildings," she said.

Janney said Stadium Road's heavy traffic made the residents uncomfortable as well because they have to cross it to go to class. The only crosswalk is right behind the end of an upward slope, which makes pedestrians and drivers uneasy because they can't see each other until they get close.

The last reason to demolish the two towers is its size, which makes it more difficult for residents to create a community, said Janney.

"In a four story building, you can get to know people and feel the sense of belonging," said Janney. "It's much harder in a 12 story building to have the same feeling of belonging."

Despite Janney's reasonings, many Gage residents screamed in lament when they learned their residence hall will be demolished in two years. Current Gage B tower resident Joseph Vanderwiel said he loves his place and never wants to leave.

"If you want to meet people, Gage is the place to live," Vanderwiel said.

Despite the number of floors the towers have, Vanderwiel said he thinks his residential community is livelier than any other.

Gage towers have two more years to stay. When the new residence hall opens, the towers will turn into a parking lot as a part of the university's master plan to reorganize its campus. Parking has become a major campus concern, with less than 40 percent of students being able to park on campus.

The new residence hall will be a four-story, semi-suite-style facility. Less than 10 percent of the rooms would be single rooms. The rest of the rooms will be double rooms.

In keeping with the university's strategic priority for a sustainable, pedestrian-friendly campus, the new building will be built next to the McElroy Residence Community, specifically next to I Hall, connected by classrooms andĘthe First Year Experience office.

It will be the second new residence hall on the MSU campus in the last two years.

As in Julia Sears, the new residence hall will have bedrooms with individually controlled air conditioning and heating, tile floors and sound-resistant walls, loftable beds, dressers and desks with lockable drawers, upholstered office chairs, closets, plentiful electrical outlets and dual Internet, telephone and cable TV jacks. It also will have a number of environment-friendly features, including water-saving toilets in bathrooms.

Janney said the new residence hall would have the same room rates as Julia Sears. The new residence hall's double room will likely be $1000 more per academic year than a basic double room in the older dorms.

The new building will be financed with revenue fund bonds, paid for by residence hall room fees. Residence halls are self-supporting; funds to build them come from fees paid by the students who live in them.

Residential Life will also renovate McElroy E and F halls in limited scale to improve ventilation by summer 2011.