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Firsts for UniverCity marked by Café opening

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The first residents are in and the first businesses are open as the initial phase of UniverCity, the new community at SFU, is rapidly taking shape.

To mark the progress SFU President Michael Stevenson and UniverCity President Michael Geller will have coffee on Tuesday, Nov. 30 -- after they officially cut the ribbon (at 8:45 a.m.) at the Renaissance Coffee Café, one of the first businesses to open in the recently completed Cornerstone building.

The Cornerstone building is a five-storey, 115-unit mixed-use development, which will include a food market, pharmacy, restaurants, and even a butcher shop. A vision centre also recently opened. Already 100 of the apartment units have been leased to SFU students and other residents. A few retail and office spaces are still available, including the opportunity for a neighborhood pub.

Renaissance Coffee is an SFU community-owned business which operates two quick-serve cafes in the academic quadrangle (AQ). Its newest location offers a lounge setting complete with fireplace. The building, located just east of the AQ, is within easy walking distance of campus.

Renaissance Coffee owner Parmindar Singh Parhar expects patrons will be drawn by its location and atmosphere. "I believe this can be a connecting point between the intellectual community and the residential community," he says.

Earlier this fall, the first residents moved into Harmony, the first of 470 condominiums now nearing completion. Harmony is being developed by Polygon Homes.

Geller says nearly all of the first homes have sold at prices never before achieved in Burnaby. Millennium University Homes Ltd. and Intergulf Development Group are also participating in the first phase of UniverCity. Another 350 townhouses and apartments slated to open in 2005 and early 2006 are now getting underway.

By the summer of 2005, Geller expects more than 1,000 residents will have moved into the first neighborhood. "Just as the first SFU graduates were known as 'charter students' we like to think of these first residents as 'charter residents'," says Geller, adding they too will enjoy "a great sense of adventure." Discussions are underway with the city and the provincial government to accelerate the timing of the first elementary school and community centre for the neighborhood. A community transit pass is also being considered for residents, along with a co-operative car-sharing program.

This fall's activities follow nine years of planning and construction. UniverCity is expected to take two decades to complete and will eventually be comprised of 4,500 homes, 10,000 residents and an array of commercial and community facilities.