



Haute To Death dance party at Temple Bar | Marvin Shaouni

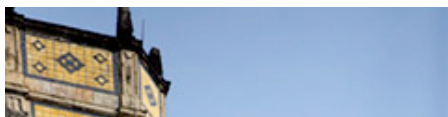
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Remember the Titans: UDM Reaches Out to Its Neighbors

By: Kelli B. Kavanaugh

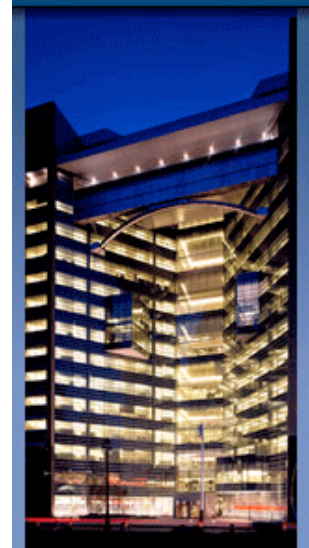


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Think of universities that define a city. In Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, right? In New York City, it's Columbia, and in Boston, BU. Here in Detroit, it's Wayne

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Not many would argue that point but, for just few minutes, let's forget the big dog and hear the tale of the Temple, the New School, the Tufts of Motown: It's the [University of Detroit Mercy](#).

The private Catholic university has 5,700 students on three campuses, 800 of whom live on the main one, which sits on a quarter-square-mile plot at the southeast corner of Livernois and McNichols Roads, just south of the [University District](#) neighborhood.

UDM is particularly well regarded in engineering and architecture, and these programs draw people from across the US and from 40 countries. It is a Jesuit school like Xavier, Loyola and Georgetown and, like them, emphasizes a well-rounded liberal arts education.

So what's going on up there worth noticing? As it turns out, quite a bit. UDM is shaping the fabric of its neighborhood, introducing new talent and brains to Detroit with every incoming class, and keeping its family close to home.

The president's vision

Decades before the Rev. Gerald Stockhausen became university president in 2004, a fence was erected around the campus.

While not the most warm and fuzzy of construction projects, it had become a necessary one to the university as the neighborhoods around it -- particularly those to the south and west -- began to decline.

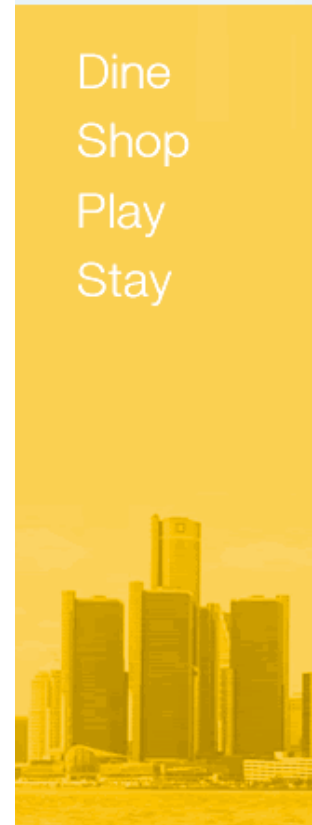
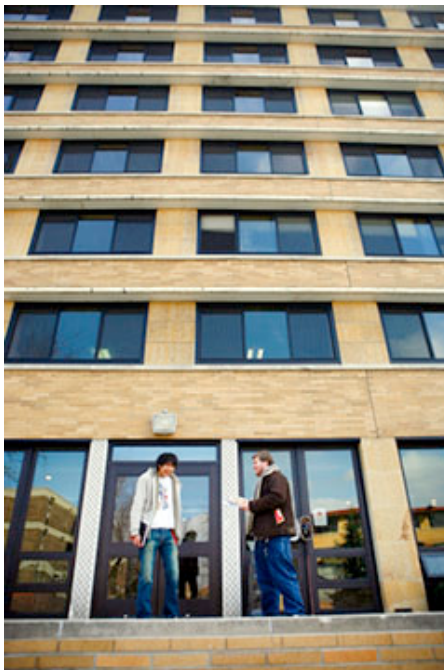
In order to attract students, especially out of state and suburban ones, UDM sent a message that the campus would be safe.

Now, however, the university is looking outside its fenced border to better integrate itself with its community. Its leadership role in the University Commons organization is a prime example of that mission.

Stockhausen's predecessor, Sr. Maureen Fay, started the group and now is its chair. She partnered with Wayne County, Marygrove College -- which is less than a mile west of UDM's main campus -- and other area organizations like Northstar Community Development Corp. The primary focus is improving Livernois -- from the Lodge Freeway to the city limits -- through action like storefront façade improvement. They've acquired funding from the Mayor's Office of Commercial Revitalization and completed about a dozen facade face lifts so far.

"New facades make the place look more attractive, which brings more business to the area," says Stockhausen. As customer traffic increases, conventional wisdom says that more businesses will want to open along the corridor, and Stockhausen is hoping that includes more shopping, services, and restaurants and bars -- things that make the university's neighborhood more livable and attractive.

"It's a work in progress," he says. "It hasn't quite happened yet, but we're looking for a



build-up over time."

UDM also is attempting to offer more opportunities for the community to come to campus.

The university recently hosted a mayoral candidate forum and invites the public to hear speakers booked on campus. The well-stocked library is open to the public, and let's not forget Titan athletics, which offer locals an affordable opportunity to see Division I basketball and soccer and, more recently, lacrosse and tennis, which are brand new programs this year.



As for the flow into the neighborhoods, fraternity houses line Fairfield Street just east of campus, and more and more students are finding flats to rent in the University District, especially on streets like Quincy and Warrington. "There are more and more students living on campus and in the neighborhood around here," says Stockhausen. "I know that students are comfortable going to parties off-campus, and there is a greater flow on and off campus."

From farmland to city

Annie Hill is a UDM sophomore studying communications and business administration. She hails from Memphis, Mich., a small town with one stop light and a population of just over a thousand. She lives on campus and is involved in sorority life, holds down a job at Grounds, the campus coffee house, and interns for [After 5](#), a web site that promotes Detroit nightlife.

Hill initially considered attending Western Michigan University, but ultimately chose UDM, saying she was "drawn to the unique and irreplaceable experience at UDM." She liked the campus atmosphere and small class sizes. She says she has formed bonds with all of her professors, and "that cannot happen at a bigger school."

And she's had the chance to get to know Detroit. "I get the opportunity to experience many restaurants, clubs, shops, theaters and other venues," says Hill. "I grew up in a small farm community, so I love every experience I have with every different business or venue since it is something I was not accustomed to."

Service learning, a requirement of many UDM programs, also has given Hill a chance to get to know the city. "It's a great way to make students more aware of our surrounding areas," she says. "This is when I feel most connected."

Keeping talent close to home

Last year, UDM started another program to build up its neighborhoods. It began offering down payment assistance to faculty and staff who purchase homes in neighborhoods in close range of campus. This includes their main campus as well as their Dental School, located in North Corktown, and their School of Law, located Downtown.



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Somer Roberts, who works in the office of financial aid and scholarships, took advantage of the program when he purchased his home near Seven Mile and Livernois in October 2008. "It's a street that I basically grew up on -- it was my home away from home on the weekends as a child," he says. "It's a wonderful, stable place to raise my children, and hopefully my children will get to experience the same thing I did as a child. I felt safe and secure on that block."

Another employee who found a home in the area is James Williams, who actually works downtown at the School of Law, but ended up buying near the main campus. He is a first-time Detroit resident.

His home has hardwood floors throughout, a newer roof and a large kitchen. "These amenities drew me to the house," says Williams. "It had everything I wanted in a home."



Plus he is near Buddy's Pizza, one of his favorites, and has already found nearby Sav-On Foods to be a quality grocer.

Williams credits the university's homebuyers program with enabling him to become a Detroit homeowner. "The down payment assistance made it much easier for me to purchase a home, and it was truly a dream come true," he

says. "You just could not ask for anything better."

Williams, Roberts and Hill are just three of the thousands of staff, students and alumni that have become connected to Detroit through their association with UDM. Making those connections is important, especially given the brain drain situation the state is in, because it gives students a reason to stay in the city, and maybe even fall in love with it.

Notable alumni have made their mark in the D, including Faye Nelson, the president of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, infamous broadcaster Bill Bonds, best-selling author Elmore "Dutch" Leonard, Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson (yup), and two current Michigan Supreme Court justices.

It's hard to forget the Titans when they're all over the place.

Model D Development News editor Kelli B. Kavanaugh is a Titan alum. While attending UDM, lived in three different dorms, then a house in the University District. She graduated in 1998 with a degree in civil and environmental engineering. Send feedback [here](#).

Photos:

U of D Campus

University Neighborhood


James Williams in the living room of his new home

All photographs by Detroit Photographer [Marvin Shaouni](#) Marvin Shaouni is the Managing Photographer for [Metromode](#) & [Model D](#).

■ Neighborhoods: [University Commons - Palmer Park](#)



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