

Notre Dame's move-in day a time for new president to move ahead

University to launch online degree in risk management, update campus master plan

By LARRY PERL

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Kellie Johnson was well outside her comfort zone on move-in day at Notre Dame of Maryland University.

At home, "I have my own room," said Johnson, 18, of Temple Hills.

At Notre Dame, Johnson, a freshman, was assigned two roommates in one of the university's grande dames of dormitories, Meletia Hall, built in 1910.

Johnson had butterflies at curbside, where students and their families unpacked their cars and transferred the contents to Residence Life bins provided by dozens of smiling faculty and staff members, alumnae and other volunteers.

"It's a little nerve-wracking," Johnson said.

Making the experience as painless as possible were university representatives like professor of education Mark Fenster, who stood in a drizzle with campus visits and events coordinator Emily Topper, class of 2012, and admissions counselor Mackenzie Kegley.

"That's what we stand for," Fenster said. "That's who we are and what we do."

In the lobby of Meletia Hall were more volunteers, hot coffee and stacks of pillow cases with the words, "Home Sweet Notre Dame."

"It's exciting," said new university President Marylou Yam. She used move-in day as an opportunity to meet and greet students, and is heading a week of welcoming events.

"Their enthusiasm is so contagious," she said. "I tell them to study hard and have fun. The first step is to get them into their rooms and get them unpacked."

Yam too is enthusiastic, and quick to note that Notre Dame is the only women's college in Maryland and the nation's first Catholic college to offer women a bachelor's degree.

It is also the largest provider of new

teachers in Maryland and the only private institution in the state with a school of pharmacy, said Yam and Notre Dame spokesman John Rivera.

The Bronx-born Yam, still a licensed registered nurse, came to Notre Dame from St. Peter's University, a Jesuit institution near New York City, where she was provost and vice president for academic affairs.

Yam, 56, succeeds Joan Develin Coley, who took over for one year after the resignation of Dr. James Conneely, who was the first man to lead Notre Dame.

Notre Dame is Yam's first presidency, and she is already putting her stamp on the university.

She is working on a five-year strategic plan for the university, renovating Dolye Hall's dining hall, renovating Gibbons Hall, the oldest building on campus, and readying an online, post-baccalaureate program in risk management for an October launch. Nearly all graduate programs at the university will be online soon, she said.

Yam has also arranged for inspirational speaker Liz Murray, who went from homelessness to Harvard University, to speak on campus Oct. 7. Students will be reading Murray's book, "Breaking Night," as part of Notre Dame's curriculum, Yam said.

Rivera brought his daughter, Leah, 13, to move-in day. For her, it was an early glimpse of college life.

"I'd probably have a lot of stuff to bring," she said.

While some students wrestled their brimming bins into the dorm, junior Miriam Tekola stood calmly in the lobby with a single suitcase.

"It's a lot quicker, now — now that I know what I'm doing," said Tekola, 20, of Oxon Hill. "I got lost a couple of times when I was a freshman."

He father, Tekola Jaya, was with her but said, "I don't help her. She knows what she's doing."

Natalie Stephens, of Cecil County, also was relaxed as she and her husband, Bill, helped their daughter, Shannon, a junior, move in.

Compared to Shannon's freshman



year, "It's not nearly as stressful," her mother said.

Kellie Johnson, the freshman, was still feeling her way, filling a bin with everything from ramen noodles to a clothes separator.

But her mother, Angela Johnson, said she wasn't worried.

"She's close enough (that) I can come get her," Angela Johnson said.

Her daughter got some welcome news. It turned out she would only have one roommate.

"I just got switched from a triple (room) to a double," she said.



STAFF PHOTO BY LARRY PERL

Two women haul a bin into Meletia Hall during move-in day at Notre Dame of Maryland University.