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Soccer player
Settimia Tripi, left,
and Nicole
Catalano, a softball
player from
Kenmore West, are
two student-
athletes using the
new residence halls
at NCCC.

James P. McCoy/Buffalo
News

Updated: 09/10/08 10:49 AM

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Campus housing gives NCCC athletics greater range

By Amy Moritz -- News Sports Reporter

It was the first day of classes and Nicole Catalano enjoyed the afternoon by walking across the street from her residence hall to catch the men's soccer game.

Sounds normal enough for a college freshman, but for one at

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Niagara County Community College, it's a new world.

The two-year school opened the academic year with its first residence halls, transforming the campus.

And that has altered the complexion of the NCCC athletic program.

"It's changed the dynamic of how we recruit and where we recruit," Athletic Director Lee Wallace said. "We have a basketball player from Serbia and 14 to 15 Canadian players on our baseball team. It makes us more competitive in all sports and while it changes who we can recruit, it also gives the local students who wanted to go here another option."

There are 38 student-athletes using the NCCC residence halls, which cost between \$4,900 and \$7,200 per student per academic year, according to the school's web site. Men's basketball player Igor Pejic from Serbia traveled the farthest to live on campus and play for the Trailblazers.

Soccer player Steven Stevenson had the shortest move. He went to Niagara-Wheatfield, just up the road from NCCC.

"I don't have my driver's license," Stevenson said. "So instead of waking up my parents and having them drive me to school, I decided to do the housing. It's more convenient for the whole family. As I talked to my teammates, the idea caught on and a lot of them were starting to dorm."

There are factors that make living on campus easier for student-athletes, most notably the proximity to classes, practices, games and training.

It also helps those looking to live on campus while paying lower tuition.

"The residence halls played a huge role in my decision to come here," said Catalano, a softball player from Kenmore West. "I was originally thinking about D'Youville but their tuition is a lot different from NCCC. I really wanted to live away from home, and the day I met with [softball coach Bob McKeown] I got to see the dorms. They weren't even done yet and they were incredible. It seemed like such a good idea and so far, it's been great. Living here is really helping me get comfortable at school."



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The athletic department hopes having students living across the street will increase attendance at games. For the opening week of soccer, it apparently has done so.

“There were a lot of fans at our first game,” Stevenson said. “And a lot of them were from the dorms. As soon as I got back to the dorms people were telling me, ‘Nice game.’ They showed up to watch and it was really great to have that support, during the game and after.”

That’s the type of atmosphere Erie Community College wants to develop. The topic of residence halls has been discussed for a few years but nothing has gotten past the planning stage.

Athletic Director Peter Jerebko said that residence halls was a point of emphasis when new ECC President Jack Quinn made his opening remarks to faculty and staff.

“Not just for our student-athletes but for our academic programs as well, it puts us at a competitive disadvantage,” Jerebko said. “It’s something that’s high on his agenda and hopefully in the next few months we’ll be able to have some conversations about it. We do lose recruits based on the fact that we do not have residence halls. That’s no secret.”

ECC football coach Dennis Greene has been practically salivating at the thought of the school constructing residence halls, particularly on the South Campus in Orchard Park where the football facilities are.

Every year, Greene and his staff spend time helping incoming players find housing.

“Each year it gets tougher and tougher,” Greene said. “More people don’t want to rent to college students and we just find it’s getting increasingly difficult to find places for these guys to live. We’re going to lose some good ball players and it’s going to hurt the kids who can’t come here to play and go to school.”

In the Northeast Football Conference, half of the schools have on-campus living — Alfred State, Lackawanna and Dean. And those programs have been successful in recent years.

Not all are sold on student housing. NCCC wrestling coach Eric Knuutila said, “Kids will be kids and now, when someone does something wrong, the whole campus will know about it when before, with them off campus, right or wrong, nobody knew but me. There are pluses and minuses from the coaches’ standpoint but I like them right here for the most part. Time will tell.”

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