

Wagner College takes new course

Fresh programs pump new blood into college

By MARY ENGELS

Daily News Staff Writer

For several years, Wagner College on Grymes Hill, Staten Island, suffered from an identity crisis. Plagued by declining enrollment and fiscal woes, it was a school in trouble.

"Frankly, there were many who didn't even know it existed," said Norman Smith, president of the college.

However, when Smith went to Wagner almost two years ago, he vowed to change all that. "It was a school waiting to happen, and I felt it was time to get the word out to let everyone know we had a great thing here," Smith said.

Indeed, the 108-year-old college had much going for it: From its location high on a hilltop overlooking the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and New York Harbor and its proximity to Manhattan, where cultural and employment opportunities prevail, to its small—but safe and serene—environment.

The fact that people didn't know about it spurred Smith to get the message out in a creative and marketable way.

Brought in Dusenberry

To launch the program, he brought on board Philip Dusenberry, one-time chairman of the board of the Batten, Barton, Dursten and Osborne (BBD&O) Agency and creative director for the APPLE Computer programs.

Dusenberry's assignment for Wagner was to develop a campaign concept that would create a "recognition

factor" for the private, liberal-arts college in areas outside New York.

Smith contended that "once people come and see the place, they are usually sold."

The result of these endeavors have been a plus for the school.

Enrollment is up 30%, with a student population of more than 1,300. And, last year, the college had a balanced budget for the first time in eight years.

Improvements also were to be found in various areas, from the dormitories, spruced up to attract more residential students, to a new fitness center in the student-union hall.

Sound body and mind

Smith, a big fan of physical fitness, said, "It is a habit which has to be developed, and I feel it's part of a good college education. If one is physically fit mentally and emotionally, it can go a long way toward getting good marks."

Plans call for an even larger center to be built as part of a gigantic sports complex that Smith envisions will attract even more students, faculty and staff—and keep them on campus, creating a stronger sense of community at the college.

The 80,000-square-foot complex is scheduled to be built adjacent and connected to the side of the Sutter gymnasium.

It will house a 3,500-seat basketball arena, a fitness center with a suspended running track, a pool, exercise bicycles, treadmills, rowing machines and weight machines.

Also planned is a sun deck by the pool, a reception room and lounge areas.

Smith called the \$9 million complex "a need and a dream."

New computer center

Last fall, the college opened a new computer center, which was carved out of several classrooms in the communications building.

A contribution of \$250,000 from Donald Spiro, chairman of Wagner's board of trustees and chairman and chief executive officer of the Oppenheimer investment firms, helped to fund the center.

Smith said, "Without it, the school would have failed in its mission of



WAGNER PRESIDENT Norman Smith has a look inside model of the new sports center.

providing a quality education."

It features the latest high-tech equipment, ranging from word processing to elementary robotics programming.

As Smith strives to get the word out that Wagner is here—and here to stay—he is seeking to attract endowment monies to the school.

"Private colleges like Wagner cannot rely on tuition income alone if they are to be among the best," he

said. "Those colleges that have relieved themselves of tuition dependence have done so by building an endowment that generates annual interest to complement tuition income."

"We have a long way to go to relieve our tuition dependence, but we are on our way," he said.

Tuition is 9G-plus

Tuition at the four-year undergrad-

uate college is about \$9,000 a year. Expenses can go as high as \$14,000 for those who board at the school.

Smith, who served as dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University before coming to Wagner, said he's proud to be at the school now that people are "finally discovering us."

"It's pretty exciting," he said.