

**F**or more than 50 years, the Champlain College campus has gained luster as one of Burlington's prized architectural jewels. The College's Victorian-style dormitories blend with attractive, state-of-the-art buildings capturing light and commanding views from a vantage tucked snugly into the historic Hill Section. ● As any campus tour guide will attest, the campus makes a strong impression on visitors. Ask students, faculty, and staff members, and they'll tell you that it's a pleasant place to live, study, and work. For the past four years, one team of staff members has worked to open the College's doors to others who can benefit from the campus's aesthetic and functional qualities. The Conference & Event Center at Champlain College, under the direction of Linda Wheeler '80, has marketed and promoted the campus to an array of companies and organizations seeking a place to gather for retreats, conferences, camps, and the like.



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Photographs by Kathleen Landwehrle

# Working the Room

Guests include youth groups, such as the School of Cinema and Performing Arts (SOCAPA); government agencies, such as the Vermont Department of Health; nonprofit organizations, such as the NeighborWorks HomeOwnership Center; and companies of all description—ice cream maker Ben & Jerry’s, accounting firm Gallagher Flynn, and Web analytics consultants EpikOne, to name just a few. When the College is not in regular session, campus beds are sometimes occupied by guests affiliated with such nonprofit organizations as the Vermont Mozart Festival and Burlington City Arts.

According to Sue Corcoran, Conference & Event Center sales manager, the College’s media exposure, particularly regarding expansion and enhancement of the campus footprint, may be having a beneficial effect on attracting guests. “We’ve been in the press so much for our growth that people have become curious,” she says. Corcoran also notes that the campus environment seems to foster a sense of community for groups that choose to hold their meeting or event there—just as it does throughout the academic year.

A stay of any duration on the Champlain College campus is likely to boost the College’s profile. Wheeler and her team’s overarching mission, however, is to turn otherwise unused space into additional revenue for the institution’s bottom line. A look at recent conference and event traffic indicates that they have been successful.

For fiscal year 2008–09, Wheeler reports, the Conference & Event Center housed more than 1,500 individuals over 9,000 “bed nights”—in all, more than 5,000 guests representing 79 organizations during this period.

Wheeler sees several key selling points in Champlain College in the marketplace of hotels, conference centers, and resorts:

- Campus facilities are notably lacking in cinder-block dorms and, instead, include varied, well-lit spaces. The Miller Information Commons Vista Room—offering one of the best views of Lake Champlain in the entire city of Burlington—is also “a great room for thinking outside the box,” Wheeler says.
- The College’s considerable technology resources appeal to individual guests and groups that need to make presentations, connect to the Internet, and undertake other computer-centered activities.
- The campus is competitively priced among other venues.
- The campus location—in particular, its proximity to Church Street, Lake Champlain, and the mountains—makes it easier for event planners to schedule ancillary activities, such as entertainment outings. “You just turn them loose,” Wheeler says.



Residence Hall Room



Dining Hall in the IDX Student Life Center



Classroom



Argosy Gymnasium in the IDX Student Life Center

According to Corcoran, an advantage that the Champlain campus offers over other college venues is that the Center creates a one-stop shop for arranging housing, dining, and so forth. Such efficiency is appealing to guests used to hotel-style service, seeking, as Wheeler puts it, “to meet responsibly, not extravagantly.”

Students in Champlain's Hospitality Industry Management program reap an educational benefit in working at the Center. “It’s a nice match,” Wheeler says. “It lets them get their toes wet. It puts them in the fray.”

While the campus bustle from May to September testifies to the Conference & Event Center’s success, Wheeler is most pleased by repeat business. The guests “had such a good experience,” she says, “that they leave talking about when they’ll return.” 🌿



IDX Student Life Center Terrace



Dining Hall in the IDX Student Life Center



Hauke Family Campus Center Classroom

For more information on the Conference & Event Center, visit [www.champlain.edu/Conference-and-Event-Center.html](http://www.champlain.edu/Conference-and-Event-Center.html).