

Even the undertakers win

# Convention life swamps summertime campus

In Winters Residence this summer, an International Worldcraft delegate walked up to the front desk and asked for a room.

He was followed by 1,199 friends. And 26 members of the National Soccer Team, 80 Life Underwriters and 1,200 delegates from the Reformed Church in America.

From May 1 to August 31, the campus was flooded with environmental studiers, wedding parties, gymnasts and hockey players, all wanting rooms in York undergraduate residences, at \$7 a night.

As York's conference manager Jack Moore explains it, the money generated by this summertime hostelry is the economic lifeblood of the university.

"If it weren't for this type of activity, a great many people would be without gainful employment for the summer," said Moore.

"There are so many ramifications. The stores in Central Square, AV, the physical education facilities, food services, physical plant, duplicating, parking permits — everybody gets money from us."

"I used to say that if a businessman told me his line of work, I could tell him some way he benefitted from conventions. Even if he were an undertaker — in a convention of 40,000 people, by the law of averages, there's bound to be a death or two."

The convention concept has been active at York since its origin, almost by default; somebody heard the residences were empty and asked to use the space. But the first concerted effort at a business operation began with the hiring five years ago of Moore, previously an employee for 10 years of Toronto's Convention Tourist Bureau.

Under his guidance, York was the first university in North America to take a commercial advertisement in a trade magazine for business purposes.

"Some groups go searching for a place like this," he explained. "They want outdoor areas with large facilities which are relatively inex-

pensive."

While most groups are impressed by the campus accommodations, the occasional guest screams "where's the bellboy?" or "my husband refuses to stay here unless we have a private bath".

A regal envoy from Morocco took one look at the residence and went to stay in the Airport Hilton. Others were less than pleased with the prospect of sharing a washroom with 45 other people.

Generally the checking-in procedures were smooth. Three shifts of students daily manned the front desk in Winters, control centre for the main campus residences, while a similar operation hummed at Glendon. Students were hired to clean the rooms as well, and at one point 23 were on the payroll.

The problem was convincing guests to return their keys when they checked out.

"We usually didn't know they'd left until four weeks later, when the maid brought down the key and said the room was empty," said desk clerk Bernie Beales. "Then we had to remake all the bills."

The residences were usually filled to capacity with guests paying the \$7 nightly rate, but students could pay a cut-rate \$3.50 for rooms on the third and fourth floors of Winters.

The big bugaboo was the phone.

"Most of the time we were taking complaints and directing people to 'Vener' or 'Stone' College," said Beales. "We had to tell callers that their friends didn't have phones in their rooms and that we couldn't take messages, but would post them on the wall. That wasn't good enough."

"We got one call for a person who didn't appear on our guest list. After five minutes, we found out the caller wanted the Royal York."

Jack Moore isn't too anxious to tell the many stories he's collected, since, among other things, some would be "libellous".

"We don't want to take the attitude that we're laughing at the misfortunes that befall



Carlo Sgussero, photo

Pictured above are visitors to an Irish symposium held earlier this year, one of countless conferences which reap a tidy

sum for the university. During the summer, the residences are turned over to paying conventioners.

our guests," he said, "although some things happened that were downright comical."

This summer's guests, including a delegation formed to see Lawrence Welk at the CNE and an American couple spending their honeymoon in Stong, brought the university about \$750,000 in revenues.

"That money is used to subsidize the residence and meal fees during the school year," said Al Spengel, a student in food and hotel administration at Guelph and this

summer's front office supervisor. "Any surplus is put into the food services and residence accounts."

Moore's job during the school year involves handling small conventions, weddings, and one-shots like election polls on campus.

"Anything that's non-academic we have to stick our feet into."

As for the summer operations, satisfied customers like the Harris-Keon Hockey School have already booked ahead to 1978.

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