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Published on *University of Colorado* (https://www.cu.edu)

CU receives warm welcome from south Denver [1]

April 8, 2014

By Chris Casey | *CU Denver*

The University of Colorado received a warm welcome from the south Denver community at a reception to announce the university's arrival in the fast-growing region.

This fall, CU opens classroom space at The Wildlife Experience, which hosted more than 180 guests at the April 3 event. The Wildlife Experience sits at the center of the south metro area filled with robust and varied industries that are in need of an educated workforce.

CU President Bruce Benson explained that the expansion follows in the university's mission to serve the state. "This is a huge deal," he said. "This will allow us to meet the educational needs in this part of the city. It's a great area that's growing so fast."

Benson noted that CU's Anschutz Medical Campus and Denver Campus are starting the expansion at The Wildlife Experience with high-demand programs in business, computer

science, education, nursing and public health. He said the university has heard from south Denver residents and businesses that want to advance their careers and grow, respectively. Benson expects that all of CU's campuses will eventually provide programs at The Wildlife Experience that also align with state's evolving demographics and student needs.

"We're going to be turning out some really high-quality programs, and I'm just delighted that we're here," Benson said. "Our priority is to create strong, mutually beneficial partnerships. We're going to improve the quality of life and we're going to advance this economy."

Benson and Don Elliman, chancellor of the University of Colorado Denver | Anschutz Medical Campus, both hailed the vision, community service and partnership of David and Gail Liniger, co-founders of The Wildlife Experience. They also thanked The Wildlife Experience's board and staff for being so accommodating as the university converts 11,000 square feet?on the second floor and in the basement?into classroom and lab space.

'An unbelievable opportunity'

Since its opening in 2002, Liniger said, The Wildlife Experience has seen more than 2 million visitors. He said he and his wife had no idea back then that the facility would evolve into an educational center teaching K-12 students about wildlife and conservation. The museum and its programs will continue as the partnership with CU, which The Wildlife Experience's leadership initiated, grows and evolves.

"It's an unbelievable opportunity to work with CU," Liniger said. "We certainly did not anticipate that we would also be a facility that could house training for college education, for nursing, business, entrepreneurial and other studies."

Elliman said he received nothing but positive responses from deans at CU Denver and CU Anschutz about the possibility of adding and extending programs in south Denver. Enrollment will begin April 15.

"Those schools and courses that we picked were not chosen at random," Elliman said. "We did an extensive market survey that made us realize that the opportunity for higher education in this community was immense and it was underserved and one that, as part of our mission, we were delighted to fulfill."

Maureen Tarrant, president and CEO of Sky Ridge Medical Center, gave a heartfelt thanks to CU for bringing health care education, particularly the high-demand nursing program, to a location that neighbors her fast-growing hospital.

CU brings the best of the best

Tarrant said that when people go to a hospital it can be one of the most joyous times in life?such as the birth of a baby?or one of the most difficult times. "I just want you to think for a moment about the people you want at your bedside," she said. "And to have CU as my partner to bring the best of the best to the bedside to take care of every one of us?the ones we love and our constituents?it truly makes me proud."

Tarrant said Sky Ridge has hundreds of volunteers?both teenagers and professionals who are retraining in the wake of industries that have retrenched?and they are getting a sense of what health care is all about. "As CEO, to give them career paths, with the educators and leaders at CU, and to do it just a stone's throw away from my hospital, is truly as pleasure,"

Tarrant said.

Other attendees included Regents Sue Sharkey, vice chair, and Stephen Ludwig; Rep. Chris Holbert, District 44; and Tony Smith, new executive director of CU's south Denver location.

Elliman concluded the festive evening by emphasizing how CU wants to continually serve the south Denver area. "That's why we exist. We're here for you, not the other way around," he said. "The university as a whole wants to serve this community, and we're thrilled to have the opportunity to do it in this facility."

(Photo by Patrick Campbell.)

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