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Illinois Wesleyan University and Bloomington-Normal Marriott Hotel & Conference Center Creatively Collaborate for Clean, Safe Student Housing Solution

BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL, Ill. and ALPHARETTA, Ga. — July 14, 2021 — Nearly 100 college students attending Illinois Wesleyan University (IWU) have successfully experienced the “suite” life, using the Bloomington-Normal Marriott Hotel & Conference Center in nearby Uptown Normal for their student housing. The AAA Four Diamond hotel recently collaborated with IWU to serve as the “Uptown Marriott Traveling Titans” location. The 228-room/suite, nine-story hotel provided Illinois Wesleyan with a clean, safe student housing solution for two semesters during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Bloomington-Normal Marriott is operated by Atrium Hospitality, which is ranked as one of the nation’s largest hotel operators.

Creativity and Communication Were Key

In 2020 in the midst of this pandemic, Illinois Wesleyan, a private liberal arts college in Bloomington, Illinois, identified a housing challenge while thoughtfully preparing for the return of students for the fall 2020 semester. IWU’s on-campus dormitories needed to be reconfigured for primarily single occupancy. The university took a creative approach of contracting off-campus housing for numerous undergraduate college students who typically would have lived on-campus pre-COVID-19.

Kyle Griffith, Director of Residential Life, Illinois Wesleyan University, said, “For the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters, IWU needed more housing space close to campus that was safe and complied with our COVID guidelines. The drop in travel during this pandemic meant that we could block entire floors at the Marriott for our students.”

Griffith collaborated with E. Michelle Wu, CCEP, Director, Conference Services, Illinois Wesleyan University, to source potential options for off-campus student housing. Through a competitive bidding process, the Bloomington-Normal Marriott was selected by IWU as an ideal partner to meet the college students’ needs.

Wu worked with Dena Soden, Director, National Sales, Atrium Hospitality, to creatively design a customized student housing solution that leveraged the award-winning accommodations and hospitality of the Atrium Hospitality-managed Uptown Normal hotel. Bloomington-Normal Marriott General Manager Migidi Tembo and his trained hospitality team delivered on the innovative approach to ensure that the students’ lodging experience was a success. They worked closely with IWU Resident Advisor staff, who resided on student-designated floors at the hotel and saw to the daily well-being of students.

Wu said, “Atrium Hospitality and the Bloomington-Normal Marriott demonstrated excellence in their commitment to our Illinois Wesleyan students and their housing experience. The Bloomington-Normal Marriott’s team went above and beyond in making the students feel like they were living in a community rather than simply being hotel visitors, a shared goal achieved thanks to their attention to detail and thoughtfulness. The hotel was a natural fit for this unique opportunity.”

“Suite” Life for Students

Student residents of the “Uptown Marriott Traveling Titans” location enjoyed the upscale hotel’s amenities, including a 24-hour fitness center, an indoor pool, and an on-site café and marketplace. They could also access a student lounge space, laundry area, and a student-designated parking level in the covered facility connected to the hotel by an enclosed skywalk. Student meal plans were fulfilled on the college campus.

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Griffith continued, “Working with the Bloomington-Normal Marriott General Manager Migidi Tembo and his team was seamless because our goals were so closely aligned. In consultation with our on-site Resident Advisor staff, we worked with Migidi through all the details of our semesters at our Uptown Marriott Traveling Titans location, from move-in, to laundry, to study facilities, to final room checks after each student left for the end of the term. The successful experience was possible because of clear communication and our joint determination to provide an exemplary student experience.”

Clean, Safe Student Housing

The Bloomington-Normal Marriott is committed to enhanced safety standards and protocols, including Marriott’s Commitment to Clean. Use of innovative technology is encouraged for reduced contact options, like Marriott’s Mobile App for guest check-in and check-out. The hotel’s trained team members use EPA-approved hospital-grade disinfectants. Guests will find expanded access to hygiene stations throughout the property and increased frequency of cleaning of the hotel’s public spaces. The upscale hotel was recently recognized with the 2021 AAA Inspector’s Best of Housekeeping designation granted to hotels throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean that earn the highest possible cleanliness and condition scores.

Tembo said, “We value our strong partnership with Illinois Wesleyan University. Our two organizations achieved a smart housing solution during a devastating period in our country’s history. We had a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate Atrium Hospitality’s core values of teamwork and service over the two semesters. I would describe the overall experience as a win-win-win, working out well for the university, student community and our hotel.”

About Bloomington-Normal Marriott Hotel & Conference Center

Situated in Uptown Normal at 201 Broadway Avenue, the 228-room/suite Bloomington–Normal Marriott Hotel & Conference Center is well prepared to welcome back guests to clean, safe stays and reimagined gatherings. The AAA Four Diamond hotel provides convenient access to museums, shopping and local universities and is a TripAdvisor Travelers’ Choice 2020 Winner. The property’s spacious accommodations feature luxury bedding, a flat-screen TV, microwave, mini-refrigerator and an ergonomic workstation. Guests can also enjoy a well-equipped fitness center, a saltwater indoor pool, and a whirlpool. The on-site restaurant, Jesse’s Grille, offers delicious, eclectic dining options for breakfast, lunch and dinner with an emphasis on locally sourced ingredients. For a quick snack and Starbucks® beverages, stop by Caffaina’s Café, or enjoy the hotel’s Fresh Bites in-room dining menu. The stylish hotel offers dedicated concierge-level rooms with lounge access and complimentary food. The nine-story property also features more than 24,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including 15 event rooms. Electric vehicle charging stations are available complimentary. For more information, to make a booking, or to schedule an in-person or virtual tour, call 309-862-9000, go to www.marriottnormal.com, or connect with the hotel at www.facebook.com/bnmarrriott.

About Illinois Wesleyan University

Founded in 1850, Illinois Wesleyan University is a top-tier, national liberal arts university that is exclusively undergraduate. Illinois Wesleyan enrolls approximately 1,700 students from across the nation and around the globe. A highly selective institution, the University offers more than 80 majors, minors and programs in a unique curriculum that combines the liberal arts and sciences with professional schools of art, music, theatre, and nursing, and a division of business. The University is located in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois, a community of 130,000 that is within two and a half hours of both Chicago and St. Louis. For more information, visit www.iwu.edu.

About Atrium Hospitality

Atrium Hospitality is ranked as one of the nation’s largest hotel operators. Headquartered in Alpharetta, Georgia, the company manages a portfolio of 82 hotels in 28 states, representing well-known brands such as: Hilton, Marriott, IHG, and Wyndham, among others. Atrium operates 20,463 guest rooms/suites and more than 3 million square feet of event space. Atrium Hospitality was awarded a Top Workplaces 2020 honor by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. The company’s five core values of Perseverance, Respect, Inclusion, Service and Teamwork steer a culture of unity while encouraging personal growth. Atrium supports a range of civic and community activities, and Atrium properties nationwide are proud to take part in Project SEARCH, a school-to-work program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Atrium also participates at an enterprise level to financially support the Clean the World® initiative of shipping recycled hotel soap and plastic amenity bottles for distribution with humanitarian purposes in communities domestically and around the world. For more information about Atrium, visit www.atriumhospitality.com.

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