

MAIN LINE TIMES

Thursday, September 13, 2012

(Page 3)

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Page 3

St. Joe's buys 8.9-acre estate

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After a major expansion of its campus holdings on the Lower Merion Township side of City Avenue, Saint Joseph's University is poised to grow its main campus in Philadelphia.

The university announced Sept. 7 that it has signed a letter of intent with the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to buy the 8.9-acre estate at 5700 City Ave. known as the Cardinal's Residence. The property sits

across Cardinal Avenue from the 48-acre Philadelphia campus.

The purchase price is put at \$10 million.

The university's interest in the parcel, including a 16-room mansion, has been

See **ST. JOE'S**, Page 6

Saint Joseph's set to purchase archdiocesan cardinal's mansion

ST. JOE'S, from Page 3

known since early 2012, after Archbishop Charles Chaput put the estate on the market, along with other holdings of the archdiocese.

In recent weeks, there have been reports that the two parties were close to a deal.

The university indicated that it has no immediate plans for development on the property. In the short term, it may be used for administrative offices.

"Acquiring this property presents an opportunity that will be integral to the university's long-term strategic planning," said SJU President C. Kevin Gillespie in a statement. "As we look to the future, this opens exciting possibilities for the university community, and it will further enhance our students' experience for decades to come," he continued.

Relocated to Philadelphia's Wynnefield section in 1927, Saint Joseph's has been somewhat landlocked in that location as its enrollment grows. Having begun to acquire properties in Lower Merion Township after World War II, it made a major step with the

purchase of the 38-acre former Episcopal Academy campus in 2008, gaining more classroom space, green space, and, important, athletic fields.

After a lengthy zoning dispute with Merion neighbors over the upgrade of those fields for college-level play, a new varsity baseball field, softball field and field-hockey and multi-purpose fields have come online in recent months.

Late last month, with the beginning of the new academic year, Saint Joseph's also opened the new 400-bed Villiger Hall freshman dorm, immediately across Cardinal Avenue from the archdiocesan property.

The university notes that the letter of intent is the first step in the acquisition process. It is expected that both parties will sign a purchase agreement within the next several weeks.

Funding for the purchase is coming from a combination of donor support and university resources, it stated.

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