

Novel atmosphere appeals to serious students

Undergrad landlord found early success, now manages 36 rooms

By LAURA LUETTGER

When Jesse Casper was in his second year as an undergraduate student at Rochester Institute of Technology, he decided it was time to move out of his parents' home. Unlike most college students, he used a number of credit cards and bought a house.

After renting out the other rooms in his house to his friends, Casper, 27, realized there was a demand for quality college housing and from there sprung his idea for a business. Roc Rooms & Rentals LLC was established in 2003, offering affordable, convenient housing for college students.

After Casper graduated from RIT in 2004, his business took off, responding to a demand for his services. He purchased a duplex following his graduation to further the growth of his small company. Roc Rooms now employs four, up from one staffer at its inception.

Based out of his home in Rochester, Casper devotes his nights to his business. During the day, he works as a software engineer for One Communications Corp.

As a part-time employee of his own company, Casper says most of the business decisions are made by Brett Iwanowicz, his

first employee and property manager. Iwanowicz, 25, performs the day-to-day operations of the company, including working out contracts and ensuring students' needs are met. Iwanowicz joined the business in April 2008.

Roc Rooms is committed to providing a suitable environment for those who are dedicated to their studies, Iwanowicz says.

"The dorms just don't have this atmosphere," he says. "We want students to have peace of mind."

In order to maintain this peaceful environment, Casper and Iwanowicz have developed a set of rules on cleanliness and parties, by which each tenant must abide.

"There are basic problems that cause people to move out, so we try to take them out of the picture," Casper says.

If there is a problem, Iwanowicz will try to mediate, he says. If unsuccessful, Roc Rooms helps tenants find another place to live.

Casper owns five of the seven properties his business manages. The other two are owned by out-of-state investors who have found managing the properties too difficult at such a distance, he says.

Since April, the number of rooms managed by Roc Rooms has increased from 15 to 36, Casper says. He hopes to keep growing that number.

Average rent per room costs \$500 per month, but ranges from \$350 to \$600 de-



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie
"We want students to have peace of mind," says Jesse Casper, second from right, with employees Brett Iwanowicz, Michelle Caracci and Natasha Noras.

pending on the size of the room and amenities, Casper says. Rent includes all utilities and a monthly cleaning service. Roc Rooms & Rentals outsources to Pristine Maids LLC for their cleaning services. Each room comes with a bed, desk and dresser—the homes are fully furnished with couches, televisions and kitchen utensils.

Another feature students enjoy is that they can pay their bills online, Iwanowicz

says.

In order to apply for a room, prospective tenants use Roc Rooms' Web site to file a room request form. They must then sit down with company officials to discuss the living arrangements and go through the application process.

When matching tenants as housemates, the firm attempts to pair students as best they can, based on major, gender and interests, Iwanowicz says.

"We don't just cram people into a house," he says. "We try to create the best fit for every room."

Roc Rooms currently focuses on UR and RIT. Casper hopes to soon expand to the areas surrounding St. John Fisher College, Nazareth College of Rochester and Monroe Community College. Additionally, Casper says, the business is looking to either expand to other cities, such as Buffalo, or begin managing larger complex buildings. He has not yet decided which direction to take.

The company advertises the available rooms on its Web site and through other online venues. Employees also are looking to attend more college housing fairs to find students looking for the type of housing they offer, Iwanowicz says.

"We don't just provide off-campus housing," he says. "We provide quality off-campus housing."

Laura Luettger is a Rochester Business Journal intern.

Fast Start is a biweekly feature focusing on young entrepreneurs. Send suggestions for future Fast Start stories to Associate Editor Smriti Jacob at sjacob@rbj.net.



START WITH DINNER. END WITH BREAKFAST.

NEW YEAR'S EVE PACKAGE

\$299
PER COUPLE

DINNER ONLY
\$55
PER PERSON

GUESTROOM ONLY
\$149
PER ROOM

CELEBRATE NEW YEAR'S EVE DINNER
IN PALLADIO RESTAURANT AT
HYATT REGENCY ROCHESTER

DECEMBER 31, 2008, 8:00 P.M. — 1:00 A.M.

Ring in 2009 in Palladio Restaurant at Hyatt Regency Rochester. Our New Year's Eve celebration includes a gourmet four-course dinner, open bar, live DJ and an unmatched view of the fireworks display at midnight. Guests will stay to enjoy deluxe accommodations and our breakfast buffet. Feel the Hyatt Touch.® For reservations, call 585 546 1234 or visit rochester.hyatt.com.



125 EAST MAIN STREET, ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

Price valid 12/31/08 at Hyatt Regency Rochester and Palladio Restaurant. Reservations are recommended by calling 585 546 1234. Package inclusions listed above. Price does not include tax and/or gratuity. Guests must be 21 years old and present valid ID to receive alcohol; non-alcoholic substitutions available. Other restrictions may apply, call for details. Hyatt reserves the right to alter or withdraw this program at any time without notice. The trademarks HYATT, Hyatt Regency® and related marks are trademarks of Hyatt Corporation. ©2008 Hyatt Corporation. All rights reserved.



Sometimes being first is as good as a home run.

Congratulations Naomi Silver, Rochester Red Wings CEO, Chairman of the Board, and First Niagara Community Advisor, for being named the first female Minor League Executive of the Year by Baseball America.

