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Historic downtown building to be turned into university, housing for students

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SALT LAKE CITY — After nearly 10 years at the southern end of the valley, Neumont University will move its campus, and some of its students, to the heart of Salt Lake's downtown.

School officials announced their plan this week to relocate the for-profit, computer science university to the Ezra Thompson Building at 143 S. Main.

Neumont University President Edward Levine said the decision was made to both increase the visibility of the school as well as provide students with a culturally diverse location in the state's capital. He said at the school's current location in South Jordan, it can be difficult for students — especially those without a car — to participate in arts and entertainment events or try new restaurants and shops.

"We're Utah's best kept secret," he said. "We looked at virtually every available property that would broadly meet our specifications."

Levine said there are currently 275 students enrolled at the school, with the total expected to grow to roughly 400 when the 2012-13 academic year begins in October. Students attend Neumont year-round, in four 10-week quarters, which allows the majority to earn a bachelor's degree in less than three years.

After renovations to the building, the new facility will contain 16 high-tech classrooms, labs, student commons areas and housing for 84 "lucky" students, Levine said. The move to the Ezra Thompson Building is expected to be completed next summer.

He said the university is also looking at downtown locations to establish an additional student housing property.

Vasilior Priskos, one of the building's owners and a member of the Downtown Alliance, said the university is a unique addition to Salt Lake City. Having students living and studying in the heart of downtown will help contribute to a vibrant and active atmosphere, he said.

"I think a school brings life to downtown; brings youth to downtown," Priskos said. "We're going to actually have students living in this building, which will help with our goal of being a 24-hour city."

The Ezra Thompson, which housed the Salt Lake Tribune for decades, has been empty since the newspaper moved to The Gateway in 2005. Priskos said he and his business partner didn't know what to do with the building when they purchased it, but had considered converting it into residential property.

"When the school came by, we were not out looking for a college," he said. "It was one of those perfect fits of a use and a property that we enjoy in real estate."

Neumont was founded in 2003 and focuses on training students through team-based development projects with industry application. In their coursework, students often participate in development projects for business organizations like IBM, Nike and eBay, according to the university.