Fate of Dominican College to be decided in February

NEW ORLEANS (UPI) — Officials of St. Mary’s Dominican College are expected to decide in February whether the financially-strapped school will stay open past this summer.

In July, Dominican’s board said the 74-year-old college needed $6 million to ensure its financial solvency for the next five years. Board Chairman William S. Smith said the college would close in 1984 unless it was rescued by “unforeseen circumstances.”

“Since October, we have collected about $390,000 in money already paid and have pledges of $509,000. This is the largest amount we have ever given in such a short time,” said Dominican President Sister Waldia Ann Warden.

“It might be possible that we could achieve certain objectives with less money in hand than the $6 million and by working harder in subsequent years.”

Despite the financial black cloud, most of the college’s students have returned for the spring semester. Ms. Warden said an unofficial count showed 606 students already enrolled, a drop of only about 100 from last semester.

Dominican officials had intended to end the fund-raising drive in January, but Ms. Warden said the deadline could be extended.

“We must make it clear that the money requested will be used to move the college in a new direction — one that responds to the needs of today,” she said.

“I think people may hesitate if they believe they are putting new wine in old wineskins.”

Dominican has received several suggestions about its financial situation, including a proposal to use the campus for Benjamin Franklin High School, which is looking for a larger facility.

Ken Ducote, New Orleans Public Schools’ director of planning, said that idea was “a very intriguing possibility. We’re waiting to see if it’s available.”