A ROUGH START

Heritage floods 2 days after move-in

On Sunday, Aug. 25, only two days after opening, five apartments on the first floor of building three at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s brand new, upscale apartments, the Heritage at Cajun Village, flooded, forcing the residents to temporarily relocate.

According to Director of Facility Management Bill Crist the flooding was caused by a towel getting caught on a wooden stake that had been driven through the sewer line.

"What happened was the contractor, after he laid all the sewage lines under the building, before they poured the slab they had to drive stakes into the ground to hold the formwork for the slab, and one of the stakes drove into the pipe and caused the obstruction," Crist said. "It wasn't until it got fully loaded from the students and some items might have been flushed down the toilet or ran down the drain that weren't supposed to by the students."

Items like sanitary napkins, baby wipes or Q-Tips at times can clog a pipe.

"It's very possible it could have drained for years and never been a problem, but then a towel of some type was flushed down the toilet and it got hung up on the piece of wood and that caused everything else to back up and caused the problem," Breanna Booker, a graduate student in the architecture program, had just finished moving into her new home when the flooding started.

"I hadn't even been in the apartment for 3 hours before the water in the toilet wouldn't flush and water started coming up from the drain in the floor," Booker said. "The building staff called the emergency maintenance people and they came to see how bad it was. Once they did that it took them two more hours to tell us what was going on. They separated me and my roommates and moved us into empty spare rooms across the complex while our apartments are getting repaired."

Booker has since moved back into her three-bedroom apartment, which, according to the UL Lafayette housing website, costs $3,543 per semester to live in.

Interim Director of Housing Dawn Miller issued a statement on what housing has done to remedy the situation.

"Housing was able to provide temporary housing arrangements within our apartments for all affected residents," Miller said. "We have also given residents updates as the work has progressed. We appreciate our residents' understanding and patience as we get this unfortunate issue resolved."

Booker said she felt the university should do more for residents who were forced to relocate due to flooding.

"I understand that in rushed cases in which the Heritage was finished things happen," Booker said. "But this was just poor planning on their part. I am more concerned with how they will truly compensate us as residents for the emotional distress being that this occurred the night before school and the personal items damaged."

Crist said problems like these are not uncommon for new buildings.

"You run across these things all the time on a project and we test and retest everything in all of the buildings, in all of the rooms, as often as we can, but until it gets fully loaded up with people, sometimes these things come up," Crist said. "We didn't want any problems, nobody ever does, but when you're building a $40-million, $50-million complex there are going to be some issues, and this is one I would call relatively minor."

Jack Ellis, a sophomore in elementary education who lives in Heritage, said he is not worried about future problems at the apartments.

"I'm not too worried because the reason for the flooding was because of the residents not the utilities," Ellis said.

Repairs to Booker's apartment were completed a day ahead of schedule on Friday, Aug. 30.

"I'm just glad to finally be able to settle into my apartment," she said.