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## Rivier welcomes new students to campus

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Staff Writer

NASHUA - Right around midnight Sunday morning, Nathan Kunkel climbed aboard his parents' van outside their Pittsburgh home and settled himself among boxes and bins of things he will need over the next eight or so months.

Some 10 hours later, the Kunkels - Pittsburgh Steelers fans, naturally - rolled onto the campus of Nashua's Rivier University, backed up the van and began hauling Nathan's belongings into the Guild Hall dorm room he'll call home for his freshman year.

While classes begin for freshmen on Wednesday, in the midst of what Rivier calls Welcome Week, Nathan Kunkel is also looking forward to another kind of learning experience come Thursday night: Watching from the heart of New England Patriots country as his Steelers open their season against the region's beloved Pats.

Kunkel, originally from the Pittsburgh suburb of Plum, a city roughly a third the size of Nashua, was one of 188 young men and women who arrived at Rivier's Guild Hall throughout Sunday for freshman Move-In Day, a university tradition. Welcome Week kicks off a schedule chock full of meetings, orientation sessions and mandatory instructional seminars liberally interspersed with informal, optional events like Bingo games, ice cream socials and theater presentations.

The next big event for first year students is the Academic Convocation, a five-hour session that takes place today, Sept. 8. Called a key event of Welcome Week, its purpose is to introduce students to academic life at Rivier.

"Yep, I'm pretty excited," Kunkel said with a grin as he and his parents unloaded their van with the assistance of yellow-shirted "Welcome Team" volunteers - upperclassmen who have been through Move-In Day and offer incoming freshmen everything from muscle to words of assurance.

It was just a year ago that Welcome Team member Jordan Parece was on the incoming side of Move-In Day. "I went through this last year," Parece said, scanning the row of vehicles with open trunks, hatchbacks and double cargo doors lining the Guild Hall parking lot. "We get them unloaded, bring their things up to their rooms then come back with empty carts and start over again."

The operation is well coordinated, with ample staff and volunteers who each have their specific assignments. "We keep them going, in and out," said Parece, who serves as a peer mentor. "Once we're done, (the students) can come back and start setting up and organizing their rooms."

Often the first people incoming freshmen and their families see when they arrive, Welcome Team members see a wide range of emotions from parents and freshmen alike, Parece said. "Yeah, it's pretty emotional for some parents, but others can't wait," she said with a laugh. Same goes for the students, who typically range from apprehensive to eager to get settled and start learning.

Jake Genest embodies the latter, saying he's "very excited ... can't wait" to start his freshman year. A good-sized, athletic kid, Genest, who lives in Salem, did a lot of the heavy lifting as he, his father Bob, and an uncle helped out on Sunday.

Including transfers, a university spokesman said, this year's freshman class has just over 200 members.

Move-In Day for returning students took place on Monday.

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