

***Insurance Times***: NY insurance school became respite center for Sept. 11 relief workers  
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NEW YORK — After surviving a merger, a name change and catastrophic terrorist attacks barely two blocks away, it's safe to say that it was an eventful year for the College of Insurance.

In June 2001, the 100-year-old Manhattan college merged with St. John's University and took on a new name -- The School of Risk Management.

Four months later, terrorists took over the cockpits of two passenger jets and smashed them into the World Trade Center, just two blocks away from the school's 10-story, Murray Street building in lower Manhattan.

A quick evacuation followed, plus a hasty relocation of the entire school -- including 100 dormitory students -- to the St. John's Queens campus.

The School of Risk Management -- or SRM as it's known in-house -- reopened in January after playing a crucial role in the recovery efforts at the World Trade Center site.

It's now gearing up for its fall 2002 semester, as well as renewed focus and growth as a financial-services college.

"There was much good done here at our campus while we were away," St. John's University President Rev. Donald Harrington said. "Now we will continue to do good."

The College of Insurance/School of Risk Management educates about 100 full-time undergraduate students plus several hundred continuing education part-time students in insurance, risk management and actuarial science.

Only a handful of schools like it exist around the country.

"It is a very unique institution," said Jody Fisher, media-relations director for St. John's University.

Wall Street supplies the student-body, with insurance agents and brokers and other financial professionals taking either extra classes for professional requirements or maybe getting a degree. They also can take advantage of the campus insurance library, which Fisher said is one of the nation's largest.

#### Merger with St. John's

The College of Insurance completed its first big change in June, when the private, independent college merged into St. John's University, a Catholic university founded on the teachings of St. Vincent DePaul.

St. John's University wanted a Manhattan location. The College of Insurance had been looking for a university partner with larger financial resources. Both sides concluded a merger would work best for everyone, Fisher said.

"Things seemed to come together," he said, "in a way that benefited everyone."

And so the College of Insurance became The School of Risk Management, a unit of St. John's Tobin College of Business and the fifth campus in the St. John's University system. The move capped St. John's, five-year search for a Manhattan campus.

St. John's also has campuses in Queens, Staten Island, Oakdale and a graduate center in Rome, Italy.

St. John's officials had very little time to celebrate their new college acquisition. Four days into the new semester the Sept. 11 attacks took place a few blocks away from The School of Risk Management.

School officials were particularly worried because many students and employees worked in the World Trade Center.

"We were very concerned," Fisher said, "because a lot of our students had internships right in the towers, (though) we were very lucky in that we did not lose a single student or employee."

Still, The School of Risk Management evacuated about 120 students and employees immediately (100 students live in dorms in the school's top four floors).

School officials had everyone meet at the St. John's Queens Campus, where it had alternative dormitory space.

To help get students and faculty to safety during such a chaotic day, St. John's parked vans at the Queens side of the 59th Street Bridge, which thousands crossed on foot to reach safety after the attacks.

Administrators scrambled to get the displaced dorm students soap and toothbrushes and supplies and place them in new living space in Queens. (Students also regained some of their possessions after federal officials allowed St. John's personnel to visit the site and retrieve some things.)

"We were determined to not let them become victims of the attacks," Fisher said.

#### Lower Manhattan Closed

They also worked quickly to move the SRM's entire academic department and programs from its Manhattan campus. They had to because the federal government closed much of lower Manhattan following the attacks.

The Manhattan building was in bad shape following the attacks, "damaged but useable," Fisher said, with foundation problems, disabled elevators and situations on campus where "beams were a little twisted and had to be straightened out."

After a frantic attempt to rearrange academic schedules and accommodate last-minute changes, St. John's was able to resume classes for its SRM students a week after the attacks in the University's Queen's Campus.

Even though the SRM building couldn't be used for classes, it served an important role in the city through the weeks after the attacks.

New York officials told St. John's that the American Red Cross needed to run a respite center and that the SRM building – damaged but useable – would be perfect for their needs.

Through November and much of December, a building that educated New York's financial professionals became a 24-hour center serving World Trade Center rescue and recovery workers.

In that time, 542,000 meals were served; 1.4 million snacks handed out and 21,803 cases of first aid administered. Over 14,000 recovery workers camped out at the site.

#### Resumption of Classes

By mid-December, Red Cross workers no longer needed the campus, so St. John's officials worked overtime through Christmas break to repair the campus and prepare it for a resumption of classes in January.

They succeeded, with classes resuming in January and resident students returning to their dorm rooms.

Looking ahead, St. John's plans to keep The School of Risk Management as it was as the College of Insurance.

But the school is looking at ways to increase enrollment, Fisher said and expand course offerings to students.

For the foreseeable future, as with many other businesses and institutions affected by the Sept. 11 attacks; St. John's University is still trying to figure out its insurance costs.

The school is covered, Fisher said, and so far its insurance policies have come through. p