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Hefty Final Four tab for UMass; School officials spent freely on entertaining

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During the college basketball Final Four weekend last spring, the chancellor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst spared no expense in entertaining supporters and school staff in his complimentary \$ 450-a-night hotel suite.

The bill for Chancellor David Scott's room shows \$ 2,873 in room service charges, \$ 5,546 for food from the hotel restaurant and \$ 77 for laundry.

Three floors above Scott, in a suite paid for by the school, Vice Chancellor Royster Hedgepeth was also opening his door to supporters. His room service bill at the Sheraton Manhattan: \$ 2,123.

"There were hospitality suites going all day," said Michael Warren, a Sheraton manager whose staff replenished food and bar supplies in those two suites.

Although trustees ordered a cost-cutting review at UMass last year, the spending did not end at the hotel. University officials rang up tabs at numerous New York City restaurants, including \$ 538.47 at Michael's and \$ 436.80 at Martini's in the Theater District.

During the Final Four weekend, administrators spent at least \$ 50,000 to wine and dine each other, along with hundreds of alumni, donors, and politicians. In the end, the event cost UMass almost as much as it earned for participating.

Records show the school spent all but \$ 15,438 of the \$ 227,328 it is slated to receive in revenue and reimbursements from the National Collegiate Athletic Association. That includes airplane tickets, hotels, and mileage reimbursements.

While university administrators and supporters stayed in Manhattan, the basketball team and most members of the athletic department stayed at a Marriott hotel closer to the arena in New Jersey.

Expenses for the team, which traveled to New Jersey by bus, were modest. Among the charges were team meals at McDonald's and Dominos, movie tickets for players and \$ 20 for gum and juice.

UMass lost to Kentucky in the semifinals.

School officials said the money was spent to promote good will, which they expect to help increase donations and support for UMass.

"We anticipate that the excitement generated by the event, and the hospitality we were able to extend to the university's many supporters, will redound to our considerable benefit, financially and otherwise," said Associate Chancellor Susan Pearson. "We are trying to build on the success of one component of the university and translate it into broader success for the entire institution."

Pearson noted that the hospitality suites hosted hundreds of people, and that a reception at the Sheraton attracted a crowd of 1,000.

While school officials stressed that tournament revenue will cover all of the costs from the Final Four, that assertion is less certain in the wake of revelations involving a former star player last week.

The player, center **Marcus Camby**, allegedly admitted to taking money from a professional agent. If true, the NCAA could take action against UMass that could cost it some of the tournament revenue.

A UMass official familiar with the school's spending in New York said: "Clearly some people went there just for the party." But the official, who asked not to be identified by name, also said there was also a legitimate "strategic effort" to use the event as a fund-raising tool.

In addition to top officials from the Amherst campus, UMass president William M. Bulger attended the Final Four at his office's expense. The president's office also paid for Bulger's wife Mary to fly to the event and for the expenses of three aides who attended the game.

Bulger's expenses for the weekend totalled \$ 582, an amount kept low because he stayed in one of the four complimentary suites provided to the university by the Sheraton.

One of the largest expenses during the weekend was a reception for 1,000 UMass supporters at the Sheraton. The university kicked in \$ 18,436 for the event. The remainder was covered by a \$ 10,000 contribution from Citizens Bank and two \$ 5,000 payments from alumni.

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