

# **Sturnick retrenches Montserrat**

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## **Montserrat by the numbers**

Total payroll: \$4.3 million

Amount student body spends annually in local economy: \$17.5 million

What college spends locally on goods and services annually: \$2.7 million.

Dressed in a lavender suit, set off by a polished-stone necklace, new Montserrat College of Art president Helena Judith Sturnick knows how to make an artistic statement. With a recently concluded fundraising campaign that exceeded its goal by \$600,000, a \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million gift from a yet-to-be named donor for four new residential-style dormitories and a recently signed purchase-and-sales agreement on the college's 294 Cabot St. property, also to help fund the dorms, Sturnick also knows how to execute a business plan.

The result means Montserrat College of Art likely will be an economic, philanthropic and artistic force in downtown Beverly for years to come.

"We've stabilized our enrollment this year," said Sturnick, who recently dropped the "interim" from her title of college president. Enrollment stands at 270, down from about 400 several years ago.

"We plan to add five to 10 students per year until we have about 300 students," Sturnick said. At that rate, the college should reach its enrollment goal by 2010. "We want to stay small and student friendly."

Sturnick, in a career that includes three college presidencies, work with the United Nations and raising \$50 million to build five new buildings at Keene State College in Keene, N.H., has evolved a philosophy of an integrated, creatively oriented education that produces what she calls a "rounded" leadership style. This opposed to the "flat, thin leadership" she associates with the more traditional business education.

"A person with an art background is more apt to ask the right questions," she said. "Creativity is about asking questions."

"The world is colored by shades of gray," said Sturnick and she wants Montserrat College and its students to see and exploit those shades, bringing that creativity to real-world jobs and to college-community relations. "The MFA is the new MBA," she said. It is a style she brings to her own office, which she recently moved to the Hardie Building, the downtown campus' nerve center housing classrooms and gallery space. Her door stays open. A flow of administrators poke their heads in to check on meetings, this detail or that. Her old office, just a block away, was too far away from the action for Sturnick's taste. So, she settled for a room with a single window and just big enough to hold a standard desk and a round table with four chairs.

"I wanted to be more accessible and part of the campus," she said.

For the city, Sturnick's approach means emphasis on a mutually beneficial synergy between the college and the community. She acknowledges the college does take property off the tax rolls and she appreciates the fact the city gives the college a home. At the same time, she notes the city receives many tangible and intangible benefits in being home to Montserrat.

Students, Sturnick notes, annually spend 2.5 times their tuition in the local economy. According to a 2003 study by the college, that amounts to \$17.5 million. The college employs 110 with a total payroll of close to \$4.3 million. The college also provides the equivalent of one scholarship annually to Beverly High School art student graduates. It provides \$15,000 for the upkeep of the Beverly Common.

"We've also become one of the magnets that attracts people and businesses to the community," said Sturnick. "We're part of that draw."

As far as Sturnick is concerned, the college will be "part of the draw" that brings people and businesses to the city for the foreseeable future. The sale of college property at 92 Cabot St. and, now the neighboring building behind, 94 Cabot, doesn't mean the college is pulling up stakes. Instead, it is retrenching, consolidating around the Hardie Building, across from the Beverly Library and next to the common.

The property sales and the recent gift will allow the college to move ahead with plans originally announced several years ago for four residential-style dorms with 86 beds, across from the Hardie Building, at the intersection of Essex and Winter streets.

At one point, the college thought it might expand at 92 and 94 Cabot St., a block that includes a health-food restaurant and a cobbler. Instead, Sturnick said the college decided to sell the Cabot properties to help fund the dorm expansion closer to the campus' heart.

"We wanted to keep the campus compact and centrally located," said Sturnick. By design the dorms won't have food service — part of the "rounded" approach to education.

"We want our students out in the community," Sturnick said.

That daily contact with the general Beverly community, grabbing a late-night snack at Michele's or a sandwich at the Atomic Café, becomes part of the general Montserrat education, a not-so-subtle message that art and creative thought goes beyond the classroom, the studio and the canvas, camera lens or computer screen. Montserrat also makes a point of combining work experience with art education, what Sturnick calls "real jobs in the real world." The college requires a job internship of all its students in their junior year. This spring it will expand a one-credit class, "Professional Issues," to a required three-credit course in which students meet with professional artists, curators and gallery owners to learn about finances, presentation, record keeping, contracts and documentation.

"We want to take art and put it in a practical package," Sturnick said.

Even without the new emphasis on combining art and practical education, a recent alumni survey shows the college does a pretty good job of placing its students. The college sent out 1,000 surveys to alumni last spring, with a 12 percent return. Of those who responded, 72 percent were working in their field, with only 3 percent not creating any art at all. Ten percent earned no income from art and 67 percent reported incomes of between \$20,000 and \$100,000, with 56 percent reporting earning the majority of their income from art or art-related work.

The numbers reflect Sturnick's emphasis on art education as a springboard to a student's overall development and growth.

She noted the college accepts many students who might not have fit into the standard academic mold in high school.

"We probably don't get a lot of class valedictorians," Sturnick said. Many students are first-generation college students. Many come from single-parent households earning \$42,000 or less.

"They are immensely talented," said Sturnick, "and they are looking for a place to develop that talent."

