

Ave Maria University – A Vision in Copper

The first Catholic university established in 40 years is being built, and roofed, with long-term sustainability in mind.



Ave Maria University, Naples, Florida

Personal commitment to an idea is a rare commodity in business, where corporate interests, market forces and the need for profit often undermine the loftiest of goals.

So when Thomas S. Monaghan purchased 270 tons of copper sheet metal to roof his dream project—creating a Catholic university in southwest Florida—he had to do some serious soul-searching when the value of the copper more than doubled within two years.

Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza and former owner of the 1984 World Series champion Detroit Tigers baseball team, is without question a successful and savvy businessman. By cashing in the copper, he stood to gain a quick \$1 million or more in profit, but it would require a major revision of his campus architectural plans.

For a man of big ideas and well-defined goals, like Monaghan, the choice was easy.

"We weren't looking to make a profit," he stated in a recent interview, gesturing around him at the gleaming new campus and copper rooftops of Ave Maria University near Naples, Florida. "Our goal was sustainable buildings—

not 20 year buildings, but 50 to 100 year buildings. If anything were to happen to me, I didn't want my successor to water down the building process. The whole theme is copper roofs."

All of the campus buildings have, or will have when completed, standing seam copper hip roofs with broad copper eaves, reminiscent of the Prairie Style homes designed by master architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Monaghan's vision for the Ave Maria campus stems, in part, from his longstanding admiration of Wright, who favored copper and copper roofs for many of his projects. An avid architecture buff, Monaghan's own copper-roofed home in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to which he commutes when he's not working as Chancellor in his office at Ave Maria, also was designed to evoke Wright's iconic Prairie Style homes.

Larry Peters, the regional manager supporting architectural programs for the Copper Development Association, consulted on the

university's use of copper early in Ave Maria's planning stages. "This is the most extensive use of copper I've seen in the past 10 years, certainly in the Southeast," he says. "These people understand that they're building for the future, and that's why they chose copper. They know they've made a smart investment."

Despite the potential windfall the university could plan to gain by selling off its copper, Monaghan says they will stick to the original plan of roofing all the campus buildings with the metal.

"It's a good long-term investment from an economic standpoint," he says. "I don't consider it a luxury because copper lasts so much longer than tile or anything else. Nothing is more beautiful. Eighty to 90 percent of a structure's appearance is the roof. We didn't have to put more money into the design of the buildings because it wasn't as important." **HP**