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## WKU dedicates First Year Village with ribbon-cutting

By JOHN REECER [jreecer@bgdailynews.com](mailto:jreecer@bgdailynews.com)

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Western Kentucky University President Timothy Caboni laughs after cut the university's new First Year Village residence halls, Normal Hall and F Ramey/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Grace Ramey

Western Kentucky University leaders dreamed of the day when they could provide a transformative experience for first-year students. On Wednesday, they celebrated the realization of that dream.

WKU President Timothy Caboni and other officials marked the “official” opening of its First Year Village during a ribbon-cutting event on campus at Regents Hall.

Regents Hall and Normal Hall make up the First Year Village and have been opened to students since the previous fall semester.

The pod-style residence halls are made up of Living Learning Communities, where groups of students with similar social and academic interests share a floor and its amenities.

Caboni attributed the news that WKU had a record retention rate among first-time, first-year students to the creation of the village and Living Learning Communities.

He recently said in a campuswide email that 90.9% of the first-time, first-year students who were enrolled at WKU for the fall 2021 semester returned to the university this spring. That is WKU’s highest fall-to-spring retention rate among those students since it began tracking that data more than a decade ago.

“That is a tremendous achievement for our community and our university,” Caboni said of the record. “We knew the launch of the First Year Village and the LLCs would

provide a boost for our Hilltoppers. That success is what we celebrate here today.

“I want to thank all of those who have developed, who have led and supported our 21 LLCs in our First Year Village,” he said. “You may have heard it said, ‘It takes a village.’ Well, we created that village here at WKU.”

Caboni also said while the construction of the two new dorms has been an attractive recruiting tool, the real significance lies in the community created by LLCs.



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Students who participated in an LLC during the fall 2021 semester were retained at a rate of 95.2%, which was 5.9% higher than non-LLC participants.

Mike Reagle, assistant vice president for enrollment and student experience, said the \$48 million living complex was a dream more than 10 years in the making.

“We are celebrating a transformation of the entire south end of campus,” Reagle said. “Every residence hall in this area has seen updates and improvements to foster better experiences and connections. And we are just getting started. We know in the coming years, LLCs will only continue to grow.”

Amenities included in the recently opened Normal and Regents Hall include common areas like a kitchen and a lounge with a view of campus.

Both residence halls feature pod-style housing, meaning groups of up to 25 students will share spaces.

The new residence halls also feature classroom space for meetings with faculty or gatherings with roommates and music practice rooms.

Two new dining venues serving coffee and sandwiches add options to the bottom of WKU’s hill.

The project is a part of a 10-year strategic plan to optimize the on-campus living experience for current and future students.

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