

https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/four-year-wait-culminates-in-commons-at-helm-library-ribbon-cutting/article_6b18cd33-f02f-5abc-a12d-6a0f612cc730.html

Four-year wait culminates in Commons at Helm Library ribbon-cutting

By SARAH MICHELS smichels@bgdailynews.com

Aug 31, 2022



From left, Western Kentucky University Chief Facilities Officer Bryan Ru Donovan, Gensler Principal Meghan Webster, WKU Board of Regents Ch Body President Cole Bornefeld, Lockett & Farley Project Manager Jessica ribbon to officially open the WKU Commons at Helm Library above the b Aug. 31, 2022. (Grace Ramey/gramey@bgdailynews.com)

Grace Ramey

The main floor's a coffee shop, the basement's a food court and the second floor's a library. Wide windows flood the area with natural lighting as conversations coalesce at the building's center – the original center circle of Western Kentucky University's old basketball court used from 1931 to 1963.

Students percolate in and out, lounging on red couches, waiting in line for Rising Roll and settling into study spaces upstairs, Spencer's Coffee in one hand, laptop in the other.

Several months after the Commons at Helm Library's April opening, stakeholders gathered Wednesday for the official ribbon-cutting. The celebration came four years after WKU President Timothy Caboni first shared his vision for the space.



Caboni said he wanted to transform Helm Library from “a materials repository” to “a place where learning continues beyond the classroom walls, where our entire community

gathers over a meal, shares and shapes ideas and celebrates the spirit of togetherness.”

WKU partnered with Aramark to pay for the \$35 million renovation. WKU Planning, Design and Construction, Gansler Design Firm and Lockett & Farley architects were charged with executing the vision.

Caboni thanked Susann deVries, dean of university libraries, for being open to putting a food court in her library. She said she was proud of the building’s potential.

“Libraries are transforming but yet remain the same. It’s always been an intellectual hub. It’s always been a natural gathering place,” deVries said. “I call the library the third place on campus. It’s not the dorm, it’s not the classroom but it’s the third place on campus where students can expand their horizons.”

While the Commons was originally scheduled to open in fall 2021, complications arising from COVID-19, workforce shortages and supply chain issues delayed completion. However, during the postponement, Caboni said the project steering committee had the opportunity to “pour even greater creativity and ingenuity into the Commons.”

The committee always knew there would be three levels but wasn’t sure how they would “activate that space.” The pause got them thinking about things like how their furniture choices could support student learning and gathering, Caboni said.

“So if you look around the space, you’ll find nooks and crannies, but every one of those spaces was designed intentionally to create community and a space for folks to gather together over a cup of coffee or a book,” he said.

The Commons offers Rising Roll, Moe’s Southwest Grill, Panda Express, Bene Pizzeria, Spencer’s Coffee and a variety of rotating vendors. WKU junior Saib Music said the expanded options are a positive change from the previous dining situation, when everything was “crammed at DSU.”

Several students said the food lines have been long, but that everything else has exceeded their expectations. Caboni said that restaurant hours may be adjusted in the coming weeks and months based on student demand.

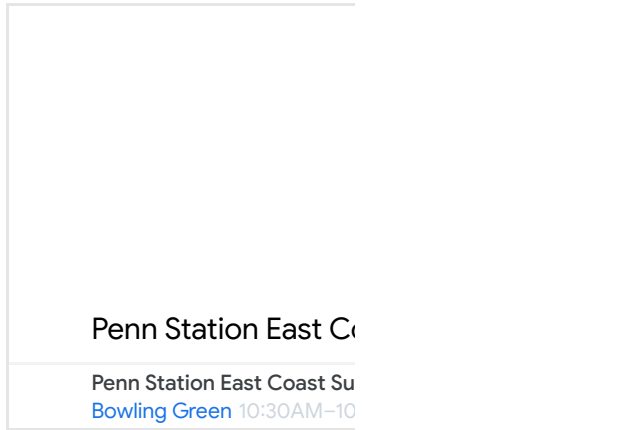


TH Tony Henon
CONSTRUCTION, INC.

STARTING
Aug.
15th

2022
BEST
of Bowling Green
Presented by **GRAVES COLLEGE CLINIC**

We would appreciate your vote
for Best Local Home Builder at
www.bgdailynews.com



Music, along with other students, said he enjoys the variety of study spots available.

“I have never not found a place to be,” said sophomore Rio Napier, who called the Commons his favorite campus study spot. “There is always somewhere that is open.”

While construction was ongoing, junior nursing student Mikayla Hamilton opted to study at home or in Downing Student Union study rooms. She said she’d been waiting for the opening for a while.

“I feel like it was needed,” Hamilton said. “We haven’t had a lot of space that you can bring food, and this environment ... I love how it’s really open. It definitely exceeded my expectations. I’m here every day.”

The Commons is WKU’s seventh building to be LEED-certified, meaning that it meets certain environmental sustainability standards, said Bryan Russell, chief facilities officer.

“It’s really a process about energy efficiency and doing the right thing for the environment,” Russell said.

And there is more to come. On Tuesday, the RFQ (request for qualification) went out for Cherry Hall, one of the first steps toward its renovation.

Similarly to the Commons, Caboni said he plans to combine the new and the old in Cherry Hall, by keeping the 100-year-old marble stairs while reimagining classroom facilities for modern-day students, faculty and staff.

The Commons was the first step in recreating WKU’s first president’s vision for a collaborative academic village at the top of the hill, Caboni said. Cherry Hall is the next.

“That window that you see there is a window to where we’re headed next, up the hill, transforming the top of the hill for our students to be able to walk and enjoy their time outside, to continue to gather in spaces that are unique to WKU,” he said.

– *Follow regional reporter Sarah Michels on Twitter @sarah_michels13 or visit bgdailynews.com.*

– Follow regional reporter Sarah Michels on Twitter @sarah_michels13 or visit bgdailynews.com.

Sarah Michels

