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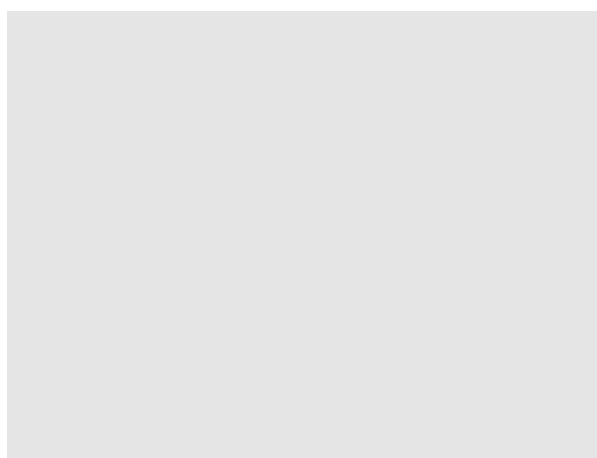


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\$50 million fundraising campaign creates new opportunities for WKU students

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Sep 13, 2019



Donald Smith

The launch of a \$50 million fundraising campaign to support recruitment, retention and experiences beyond the classroom at Western Kentucky University helped create at least 43 scholarship funds, according to the College Heights Foundation's 2018 Annual Report.

According to the report, which focuses on several philanthropic milestones the foundation reached by the end of 2018, there's often only a few hundred dollars standing in the way of a student finishing his or her degree at WKU. The fund's goal, in part, is to help students close that gap.

“They simply need a little bit of extra help,” said Donald Smith, president of the College Heights Foundation, adding that the amount holding students up can often be as small as \$500 to just more than \$1,000.

According to the report, first-generation undergraduate students make up 35 percent of WKU’s student population. And as many as 64 percent of full-time undergraduate students are receiving assistance in paying for college. Campus jobs can help, but they’re limited.

However, financial assistance through the Opportunity Fund is about more than helping students navigate sudden emergencies that can keep them from graduating.

The campaign also aims to help students take full advantage of their experience at WKU, and the foundation is seeing a few more scholarships that try to get that, Smith said.

According to the report: “Students’ educational experiences are significantly enhanced by attending conferences, studying abroad, pursuing research, participating in national internships and other similar experiences beyond the classroom. Yet, these opportunities can be out of reach for students who are struggling to make ends meet.”

The report notes other milestones the College Heights Foundation reached last year.

By the end of the 2018 calendar year, the foundation’s total assets had reached \$74,270,226, and its liabilities \$6,452,264. The foundation’s assets have been on the upswing since 2009, when they were slightly lower than \$40 million, according to the report.

Since then, it’s seen an increase of about 96 percent in its total assets, the report said.

In 2018, the College Heights Foundation awarded more than \$5.5 million in scholarships with the average scholarship award totaling about \$1,500. The foundation awarded scholarships to nearly 2,500 students, and 657 recipients were first-generation college students. More than half of students receiving scholarship awards were either juniors or seniors.

Smith attributed the foundation's growth to donors who want to make a lasting change in a student's life.



“What people realize is that education is the hope of the future,” he said. “That degree is going to pay dividends not just for their families but for their communities long term.”

Going forward, the foundation is planning to relocate to its new headquarters at the Cliff Todd Center at 1703 Chestnut St. Thanks to a gift from 1950 alumnus Cliff Todd, the foundation will move its offices into a historic Colonial Revival-style home completed in 1899.

Named Bird Lawn by an ornithologist and former occupant, the home was most recently occupied by John and Susan Minton. When the couple considered a move, they also considered how to make a gift to WKU through a bargain sale in the process, the report

said.

Smith said the foundation will relocate its offices sometime this fall.

The full report is available with this story at bgdailynews.com.

– Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.

Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.

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