Howard Bailey Retires

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A man who spent 45 years in higher education will leave WKU at the end of the year.

Amy Bingham talks with Howard Bailey, Vice President for Student Affairs in this week’s View from the Hill.

Except for a one year stint at NC State University, Howard Bailey has spent his entire career mentoring and shaping lives at WKU. He’s now preparing to retire but not before looking back on both the highs and lows of his time on the hill.

“Little country guy from the mountains has had a great ride.”

Howard Bailey grew up in Middlesboro in southeast Kentucky and was the first person in his family to attend a predominately white college.

“My grandmother, who graduated from Knoxville College, was beside herself. She said why are you doing this? I said I don’t know, just think it would be a great thing to do.”

Turned out to be a good decision. Logging time as an RA while attending college, Bailey got a job in student affairs after he graduated, never dreaming he would work his way all the way to the top.

“Me going from RA to VP no. There’s absolutely nothing in my nature could have envisioned anything of that nature.”

For nearly half of his time here, Bailey has worked along side Gayle Ruble, his administrative assistant.

“Gail is the daytime wife.”

“We can have conversations and we finish each others sentences. It’s kind of like a marriage.”

I asked Gail what WKU will lose when Howard retires.

“They will lose an enormous amount of historical reference. Someone who can interact with students, parents, faculty and staff.”

Unfortunately those interactions haven’t always been positive. Bailey has been the one to contact parents when tragedy befalls a student.

“I still remember the first time and every time I’ve had to call a parent and tell them their son or daughter is deceased.”

While looking back at the past and toward the future, he’s considering writing a book about his career.

“Some people I’ve encountered will get a sentence, some will get a paragraph and some will get a chapter, you’ll have to wait and see who gets a chapter.”

Bailey’s retirement is effective December 31st. Brian Kuster, Executive Director of the Student Life Foundation at WKU has been appointed Vice President for Student Affairs for the next two years.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

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