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TOP STORY

Making history: Local med school launches with 'white coat' event

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com Aug 3, 2018



Connor Donley (left) of Alvaton puts on a white coat Friday, August 3, 2018, with the help of Dr. Mark Newman, University of Kentucky HealthCare executive vice president for health affairs, during a white coat ceremony for the first students of the University of Kentucky College of Medicine-Bowling Green at Van Meter (Totrong)

Historic Van Meter Hall made some history of its own Friday evening. And it may have launched some history-making careers in the process.

The first building constructed on the Western Kentucky University campus in 1911, Van Meter was home to another first as the inaugural class of the University of Kentucky College of Medicine-Bowling Green campus went through the white coat ceremony that launched the medical-school experience for the 30 fresh-faced students.

It was the realization of a dream for those students and the culmination of years of work for UK, WKU and Med Center Health leaders who partnered in putting together a medical school to serve southcentral Kentucky.

“For you guys, this is a big deal,” said J.K. Phillips, past president of the UK Medical Alumni Association as he addressed the new students.

He could have been addressing the leadership of the three partners who put together this second satellite UK medical school campus. The 24,000-square-foot portion of a \$28.3 million building on the Med Center Health campus isn’t quite ready, but that didn’t detract from the excitement Friday.

The 30 students, 26 of them from Kentucky, toured the work-in-progress school Friday and will start their studies Monday through a contingency plan that will utilize The Medical Center at Bowling Green and WKU facilities until the med school is ready in mid-September.

That transition may be the least of the challenges facing the students over the next four years of their medical studies.

As Phillips put it: “If you enjoy being challenged, you’ve come to the right place.”

Don Brown, assistant dean of the Bowling Green campus and the one reciting the many academic and extracurricular accomplishments of the students Friday, believes he and his colleagues have assembled a group that is up to the task.

“I think this class is a great group of ambassadors for the community,” he said. “This (selecting the class) was a very competitive process.”

The end result, said Bowling Green campus Associate Dean Todd Cheever, is a class that fits well with the College of Medicine’s goal of addressing the need for more physicians in Kentucky.

“The vast majority of the students are from Kentucky, which is the mission,” Cheever said. “And the ones from out of state have Kentucky ties. I believe we have the right 30 students.”

The Bowling Green campus is certainly the right fit for students like Mallory Vaughn, a Bowling Green native who has known since elementary school that she wanted to be a doctor and saw the plans for the Bowling Green campus as a godsend when she heard about them a few years ago.

“That was an absolute dream for me,” said Vaughn, one of seven WKU graduates in the class. “I get to work in the hospital I was born in. I’ll be able to prepare for my professional career and give back to the community that has nurtured me.”

Likewise, Greenwood High School graduate Connor Donley was excited when he learned that Bowling Green was getting a medical school and ecstatic when he was selected for the inaugural class.

“The timing (for opening the school) couldn’t have been more perfect for me personally,” said Donley, a University of Kentucky graduate. “I’m excited that I’m going to be getting my education in the community where I grew up.”

For Donley, the excitement is only enhanced by the challenge that lies ahead.

“The difficulty of it gets me excited,” he said. “I know it’s going to be a challenge, but that turns into excitement for me personally.”

Donley and Vaughn are among five Warren County residents in the class, which includes students from 14 Kentucky counties as well as students from Ohio, Tennessee and Florida.

The complete class:

Enes Atici, WKU

Madison Campbell, Eastern Kentucky University

Celina Charles, Duke University

Katherine Citak, WKU

James Cloud, University of Cincinnati

Andrew Croft, UK

Reece Dempsey, Bellarmine University

Connor Donley, UK

Emily Fryman, UK

Caitlyn Galloway, WKU

Luke Gaskin, WKU

Hassan Haider, University of Pikeville

Mary Heslin, Troy University

Joshua Karsner, Centre College



Darrin Laswell, Transylvania University

Zachary Lewis, College of Charleston

Amanda McGeorge, Lindsey Wilson College

Austin Messner, UK

Devin Morrow, University of the Cumberlands

Shannon O'Hara, UK

Carrisa Schwartz, WKU

Dixi Secula, WKU

Zachary Setters, Berea College

Andrew Simpson, UK

Shelby Stringer, Campbellsville University

Coleton Towles, Miami University

Morgan Uebelacker, Kentucky Wesleyan College

Mallory Vaughn, WKU

Paden Vernon, Transylvania University

Rachel Whittaker, Florida Gulf Coast University



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