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WKU announces record giving, prepares for next capital campaign

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Interim Vice President of Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement John Paul Blair speaks during an event celebrating philanthropy and donations to WKU on Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2017, at the Augenstein Alumni Center. (Austin Anthony / photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Giving is on the rise at Western Kentucky University, with a new high of \$45 million raised during the 2017-18 fiscal year beating out the previous record that was set just one year prior.

It's good news as WKU prepares to launch its next capital campaign, much of which will be informed by a 10-year strategic plan that WKU's Board of Regents will vote on this week.

"That will be the guiding force behind the campaign," said John Paul Blair, interim vice president for Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement at WKU. "We'll build the foundation on top of it."

According to a news release, the 2017-18 year total saw a 23.9 percent increase in private support over the previous record high of \$36.3 million set in 2016-17.

Blair attributed the increased giving to a healthy economy and stock market, the development of the strategic plan outlining a new vision for the university and work put in by WKU President Timothy Caboni and philanthropy staff.

In a news release, Caboni described private support as a key part of WKU's advancement.

"Private funding from alumni, friends, community partners and national and international organizations is core to WKU's ability to advance and transform the lives of its students," he said.

WKU saw some significant gifts during the 2017-18 fiscal year. In May, WKU announced a \$10 million endowment created by late businessman and local arboretum founder Jerry E. Baker to support student scholarships.

But on top of the all-time giving high, Blair is also impressed with the breadth of supporters.

The giving total included gifts from more than 14,000 donors from all 50 states and eight countries, amounting to more than 31,000 individual gifts, according to a news release. Altogether, 786 different initiatives received support to benefit students, faculty and staff.





WKU is also seeing record levels of giving from alumni, corporations, faculty and staff, the release said. Faculty and staff giving increased 94 percent from the previous fiscal year, giving more than \$1 million.

“This year we have ramped up our emphasis on faculty and staff giving,” Blair said, noting a faculty and staff ambassador program that share ways to give.

With state support making up a smaller share of its budget, WKU is turning to private support to keep costs low for students and increase opportunities. With each passing year, Blair said it's becoming more key to helping the university achieve excellence.

Caboni echoed that sentiment in the release.

“These gifts clearly demonstrate the WKU spirit of giving and are more important now than ever before,” Caboni said.

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