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WKU renames residence hall in honor of first Black student, graduate

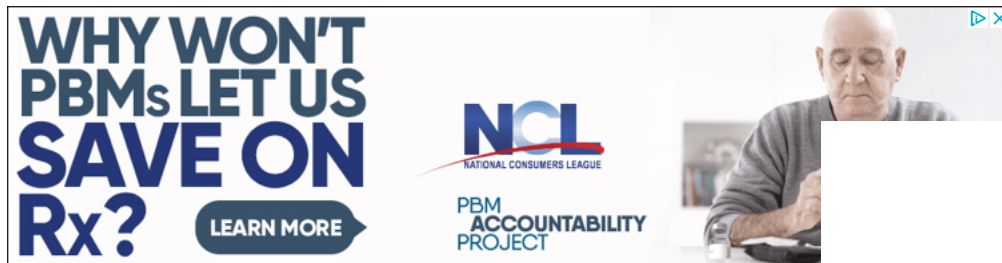
By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com
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Margaret Munday is shown in 2013 at her Auburn home.
Daily News File

More than 60 years after she attended Western Kentucky University as the school's first Black student and graduate, WKU's Board of Regents has voted to rename Northeast Hall in honor of Margaret Munday.

"It's an honor that is well-deserved – and for our institution – well-past time," WKU President Timothy Caboni told the board during its third quarterly meeting Friday.

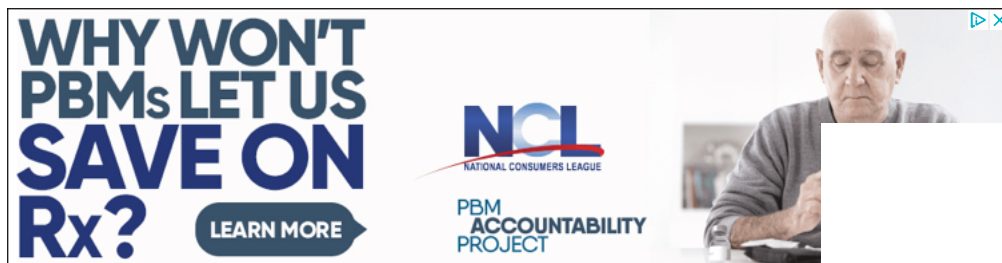


A graduate of the Class of 1960, Munday majored in music and went on to a career in music education, teaching at every school in Logan County, Caboni said. She made her mark on her students, and today there are “thousands who adore her,” Caboni said.



Regent George Nichols III, who is Black and a Bowling Green native, spoke for many in the local African American community who have felt alienated from the university throughout much of its history.

Nichols said many in the community have “always looked up to the Hill and always wanted to be a part of it,” though they haven’t always been welcome on campus.



“For us to take this action at this point in time, I think, is admirable,” Nichols told the board. He then made the motion to approve the name change.

Munday had been previously honored by the university – she was inducted into its Hall of Distinguished Alumni, for example – but she is the first African American individual to have a building on campus named in her honor.

The move comes after a months-long process during which the university has grappled with the legacy of slavery on its campus.

Several buildings or college names on campus bear the names of people who either owned slaves themselves or directly benefited from slavery. Foremost among them is the Potter College of Arts and Letters, the Ogden College of Science and Engineering and Van Meter Hall.

Nearly a year ago, Caboni convened a task force of campus representatives to make recommendations for university leadership to consider. The group surveyed the broader campus community for feedback, but its work was largely conducted in private and out of the public eye.

Ultimately, Caboni went with some, though not all, of what the task force recommended. He did not follow the recommendation to drop the names of the Ogden and Potter colleges and Van Meter Hall.



Caboni declined, citing his “fiduciary responsibility,” and suggesting that such a move would put some gift agreements at risk.

“I have a fiduciary responsibility to the university and cannot accept any recommendations that would cause us immediate and lasting financial harm. Nor can I put at risk any agreements that are in the long-term best interest of the institution,” he stated in a campus memo last month.

Still, Caboni vowed to immediately implement nearly a dozen other recommendations from the task force that he assembled.

Additionally, he added one of his own: renaming Northeast Hall to Munday Hall, a recommendation he vowed to make to the university’s Board of Regents at its next meeting.

“As part of our conversation during the past year, it became clear to me that something was missing from our campus. That even though we’ve been around for a long time, there was not a single structure named for an African American at WKU,” Caboni told the board Friday.

As president, “I want our students at WKU who walk our campus to see names and symbols that reflect who they are and what they can be,” Caboni said.

Additionally, Friday’s meeting saw the swearing-in of two new regents: Doris C. Thomas of Smiths Grove and Matthew Winger of Bowling Green, WKU’s Student Regent. The two were sworn in by Board of Regents Chair Dr. Phillip Bale.

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