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Kentucky Museum reopens after almost year-long closure

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Western Kentucky University junior accounting major Addy McDermott political memorabilia and the Seat at the Table exhibit featuring Kentucky State Rep. Patti Minter at present at the Kentucky Museum on Thursday, and Fridays each week from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. throughout the semester un Healthy on the Hill guidelines. (Grace Ramey/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Grace Ramey

The Kentucky Museum at Western Kentucky University reopened Thursday after being closed to the public for nearly a year.

The first day of business brought about 25 visitors, Kentucky Museum Director Brent Bjorkman said.

The museum had been closed to the general public since March, when WKU closed its doors amid the coronavirus pandemic. The reopening adheres to WKU's Healthy on the Hill guidelines to ensure safety to its employees and the public.

"Everyone perceives COVID in different ways," Bjorkman said. "Certainly everyone needs to be masked when they come in. Some people really don't want to leave the house, so we're trying to cater to everyone who feels different levels of anxiety about what we're all going through together."

For the spring semester, the museum will be open Thursdays and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Guests will be required to wear masks at all times and maintain a six-foot distance from other guests.

One of the new rules is that guests cannot visit in large groups. Only individuals or families are allowed.

Hand sanitizing stations are placed throughout the museum.

Hands-on exhibits have been removed.

Visitation is appointment-only for the spring semester, meaning that walk-ins are not permitted.

When visitors enter the museum, they are given a map that directs one-way traffic throughout the building, Bjorkman said.

“We see the museum as a community bridge to the university, and we just wanted to be as safe as possible,” Bjorkman said.

When the museum is not open to the public, employees will prepare new exhibits and work on a new student-generated museum area, classes and projects, Bjorkman said.

“We had three exhibits that were opened either last spring or this summer that really have not seen anybody,” Bjorkman said. “We’re really excited to be able to share those with people.”

Among the new exhibits this spring is A Seat at the Table: Kentucky Women in Office and Kentucky Women Rising, both of which trace the political history of Kentucky women, Bjorkman said.

The museum was not open to the general public in the fall, but some services were still offered.

An online portal offered 360-degree virtual tours of the exhibits in the museum, Bjorkman said.

“It’s certainly nothing like the real thing or experiencing a museum, but we’ve been trying to meet the challenge head-on by being able to fully give service to both the WKU community and the general population of southcentral Kentucky,” Bjorkman said.

Bjorkman said he hopes the museum will be back to normal operations by the summer.