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College Heights Foundation names building after Hardin County native

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The Cliff Todd Center, new home to the College Heights Foundation at Western Kentucky University, has been named in appreciation for a \$1 million gift from Hardin County native J. Clifford “Cliff” Todd which led to the acquisition of the historic home and property.

Todd, who grew up on a rural farm near Glendale, said he has many good memories from his time as a student at WKU including living in the livestock pavilion known as “The Barn” where the Raymond B. Preston Health & Activities Center now stands, according to a WKU news release. He also remembers working in the cafeteria for 35 cents an hour – a job he began the day he arrived on campus.

“I came to Western with no help at all because I didn’t even know what scholarships were,” Todd said in the release. “I had many, many part-time jobs – as many as five at a time. I studied and worked, and I never missed a class.

The Cliff Todd Center is at 1703 Chestnut St. adjacent to the WKU campus. The Colonial Revival home was completed in 1899 and has been affectionately known as Bird Lawn, the name given to it by Carl D. Herdman, a local ornithologist and flower enthusiast, who occupied it with his family in the early decades of the last century. The home stands on land that was part of a larger farm tract, much of which is now part of the south end of WKU’s main campus.

“Our mission is to transform the lives of our students, and Cliff is making that transformation possible by providing the means through which the College Heights Foundation can provide the support that is so crucial to the successful completion of our students’ college experience,” university President Timothy C. Caboni said at the dedication event last week. “And in addition to providing financial support, Cliff is providing a wonderful example of paying it forward for generations of Hilltoppers to come.”

The idea of inspiring others to support WKU is a large part of why Todd made his first seven-figure gift to the university more than 20 years ago.

“When I was a student, I didn’t know much about the College Heights Foundation, but I became connected in the late 1990s when I made my first donation,” Todd said. “I tried to make it anonymously, but I made it in my name because I was persuaded that it could help inspire others, too.”

Todd received a bachelor’s degree in Agriculture in 1950, and he went on to receive a master’s degree in Public Health focusing on epidemiology in 1958 from Columbia University.

He would go on to serve as the state epidemiologist for Kentucky for 12 years before pursuing different business interests with farms, commercial real estate and development of private prisons.

The College Heights Foundation, established in 1923, will celebrate its 98th anniversary in July. The organization was founded in response to a \$100 gift from a faculty member to provide support and encouragement for deserving students to obtain an education.

In addition to supporting scholarships and the College Heights Foundation, Todd also made a gift to establish the J. Clifford Todd Professorship in Longevity and Healthful Living, highlighting two areas about which he is especially passionate.

Todd said his appreciation for WKU developed an appreciation for education which was not part of his upbringing.

“What inspires me the most to continue to support WKU is that I was raised in an area where education was not considered important and it was not mentioned as an option,” Todd said. “I was never told that I should go to high school. Most people went to work after they finished the eighth grade. I want to give back and help others have the opportunity to go to school.”

Over the years, Todd has served the university in numerous volunteer roles and his philanthropy has been recognized in the Society of 1906 and the Spirit of Western level of the Henry Hardin Cherry Society.

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