



## WKU PRESIDENT **TIMOTHY C. CABONI**

Timothy C. Caboni, a 1994 Western Kentucky University graduate, returned to the Hill on July 1, 2017, as WKU's 10th president. Shortly after assuming the president role, Caboni launched a comprehensive strategic planning process aimed at developing a roadmap for the University's next decade of growth. Thus, WKU's 2018-2028 strategic plan, *Climbing to Greater Heights*, was finalized in summer 2018, and its implementation is well underway.

President Caboni quickly generated a renewed institutional focus on student-centeredness, applied research, recruitment, retention and growing partnerships within WKU's 27-county service region and beyond. Of particular importance to President Caboni is WKU's responsibility to advance the City of Bowling Green, the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the world by inspiring innovation, elevating communities and transforming lives.

A number of key initiatives launched during President Caboni's tenure at WKU, including the Summer Scholars program, the Intercultural Student Engagement Center Academy, the Burch Institute, the First Year Village, the Commons at Helm Library, the Opportunity Fund, the Innovation Campus, centralized advising, a revised institutional scholarship program, a comprehensive academic program review, the Early College Program at WKU in Glasgow and revised admissions standards. The intentional groundwork laid through the strategic plan and these initiatives, supported by collective university-wide efforts under President Caboni's leadership, has created significant positive momentum and record-breaking successes at WKU.

Since his arrival in 2017, President Caboni has overseen campus improvement projects totaling \$418 million. In 2018, he dedicated Ogden College Hall, which houses most of WKU's science disciplines. President Caboni championed the construction of WKU's First Year Village, which opened in fall 2021 and is home to many of the university's Living Learning Communities (LLCs). The Commons at Helm Library opened its doors to the campus community in the spring 2022 semester. This unique, modern, multipurpose facility transformed a traditional campus library into an intellectual hub where students, faculty and staff gather to share ideas and engage in active learning. In summer 2023, the university broke ground on a state-of-the-art home for the Gordon Ford College of Business. Additionally, President Caboni recently announced a significant investment in Cherry Hall to facilitate needed preservation work as well as a reimagining of one of campus's most iconic structures. Other projects of note include improvements to existing athletics facilities as well as the construction of new facilities to benefit WKU's football, men's and women's golf, soccer, softball, baseball and the men's and women's basketball programs, including the Soccer/Softball Complex and Hilltopper Fieldhouse.

In just five years (AY 2016-17 to AY 2021-22), WKU's first-to-second-year student retention increased 6.7 percentage points, and underrepresented minority (URM) retention jumped 15 percentage points – both representing the largest five-year increases in WKU's history. First-to-second-year retention among low-income students also experienced significant increases, jumping 11.1 percentage points in five years.

Western Kentucky University's fall 2022 first-time, first-year class returned the following spring in record fashion. Overall, 91% of first-time, first-year students who were enrolled at WKU for the fall 2022 semester returned in spring 2023, a 4.7 percentage point increase in just over five years. Fall-to-spring retention among first-time, first-year underrepresented minority students rose to 90.8 percent, an increase of nearly 11 percentage points during the previous five years. Fall 2022 first-year students who participated in WKU's Living Learning Communities, housed primarily in the First Year Village at WKU, were retained at a rate of 95.7%, which is 6.2 percentage points higher than non-LLC participants.

With President Caboni at the helm, more students are choosing WKU because it's been made more attractive and more accessible than ever before; more students stay and complete their degrees because of the growth and enhancement of its targeted student-support structure; and more graduates are choosing to remain in Kentucky because of the growing partnerships in the University's 27-county service region and beyond.

During the last five years, President Caboni has overseen the transformation of the university's 285,000-square-foot Center for Research and Development into an Innovation Campus – an environment where students, staff and faculty connect with entrepreneurs, industry leaders, and business resources to create jobs, develop talent pipelines and propel the region's economy. Numerous local, national and global companies, such as Kentucky to the World, Logan Aluminum, Holley Performance Products, MyXR, Lunae and beingAI have since established a presence at the University's Innovation Campus, and WKU students are benefitting from the opportunity to research, create and learn alongside industry leaders.

In 2022, WKU tied for the highest score among Kentucky's public, four-year institutions on the Council on Postsecondary Education's (CPE) diversity, equity and inclusion report. WKU also increased its Campus Pride Index star rating, receiving a 4.5 out of 5 in the fall of 2021, a three star increase in just two years. Additionally, in 2022, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities recognized the university's ONE WKU Campaign, launched in 2020, for national excellence and innovation. This comprehensive campaign drives WKU's efforts to provide a welcoming, inclusive environment for all.

Under President Caboni's leadership, the University has also experienced significant fundraising success. Shortly after arriving at WKU in 2017, he announced the creation of the WKU Opportunity Fund, an effort to support WKU students experiencing financial difficulties. In just four years, the fund surpassed its initial goal of \$50 million, and in 2021, President Caboni announced an even more ambitious \$100 million goal. The Opportunity Fund has already grown to \$87.3 million and has resulted in the creation of 217 endowed scholarships.