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WKU's Caboni visits Madisonville

President talks economic development, journalism

BY Jon Garrett Reporter jgarrett@the-messenger.com 15 hrs ago

Jon Garrett/The Messenger

WKU President Tim Caboni, left, talks with Messenger Publisher Rick Welch Wednesday afternoon as part of this tour through the area.

The man wearing the bow tie from Western Kentucky University made his way through Madisonville on Wednesday as part of a tour of counties in the far-western part of the commonwealth.

Tim Caboni, WKU's president since 2017, said he views Kentucky as a "relationship state," and part of his job as the face of the Bowling Green-based university is to strengthen those bonds.

"As president of WKU, there's nothing I like more than to talk to one of our students on campus and tell them I've been to their hometown," said Caboni, a Western alum who had previously worked at Kansas University in Lawrence. "I think it's important for me to know where our students come from and to understand what's going on in those communities."

Caboni, the university's 10th president, has developed a bit of a reputation for his trademark neck attire, which he said comes from his New Orleans roots.

"I was more of an oddity in Lawrence than I am here," he said. "I really stood out there, but I look at it as a conversation starter. It makes me more approachable, I feel."

Caboni said he had additional meetings set up with Madisonville Mayor Kevin Cotton, Hopkins County Judge-Executive Jack Whitfield Jr., and school Superintendent Dee Dee Ashby to complete his day before heading on to other stops planned as part of his three-day, multicounty trip.

In speaking with The Messenger Publisher Rick Welch, Caboni hit on a wide range of topics from the state of the local economy to his school's nationally acclaimed journalism program.

While Caboni praised the journalism students, he also spoke of other fields of study, including the school's meteorological program that recently had him as part of a "storm chasing" group of students in the path of a tornado in Texas.

"That definitely got my attention," he said. "It's important to me to get out and be a part of what's going on with our students. I'm not one to sit behind a desk."

Caboni said the school claims more than 1,000 alumni and 166 current students from Hopkins County.

"We have a large footprint here," he said. "What we have to do is keep communicating with the leaders in cities like Madisonville so we better understand the issues that are out there."

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