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Gatton Academy students included in \$5 million gift to UK

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Philanthropist Bill Gatton (center) recently donated \$5 million to the University of Kentucky in scholarship funding for current UK students and undergraduate students from the Gatton Academy. Standing next to Gatton is Mike Richey (left) and UK President Eli Capilouto (right) at the dedication of the Gatton Student Center on Aug. 31, 2018.

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The University of Kentucky announced Thursday that philanthropist Bill Gatton gifted the school \$5 million in scholarship funding for current UK students and undergraduate students from his namesake Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science at Western Kentucky University.

The gift is intended to target critical areas for Kentucky's future workforce and health care needs by focusing on students from medically underserved areas who want to attend medical school at UK and by prioritizing first-generation students.

Lynette Breedlove, director of the Gatton Academy, said the "exciting" announcement would benefit the state economically in the long term.

"Mr. Gatton has been an incredible supporter for our students and for education overall," Breedlove said. "I think it's important for the state of Kentucky to have a donor like this. Mr. Gatton has been very focused on giving back and lifting those up through education. That's something we try to instill in our students to try and give back.

"Currently, Gatton Academy students are eligible for scholarships at UK," she said. "I look forward to how this will impact opportunities for our students when they attend UK. I hope others will be inspired by Mr. Gatton's gift and focus on educational philanthropy."

Breedlove said investing in education provides a "level playing field" and brings people together no matter their background or financial status.

The gift will specifically target three types of students in the state.

Current UK students from each of the state's 120 counties will be eligible for awards with an average scholarship of \$5,000 to \$6,000 based on financial need and academic progress toward graduation. The first set of awards will occur this spring.

First-year UK students from Muhlenberg and McLean counties and undergraduate students who attended the Gatton Academy will be eligible for scholarship awards.



Forty scholarships of up to \$25,000 will be awarded for Kentucky students at UK's College of Medicine. Preference will be given to students from medically underserved areas.

Mike Richey, a recently retired vice president for philanthropy and alumni engagement at UK, works closely with Bill Gatton and told the Daily News the university will be in contact with Gatton Academy leaders for details concerning the application process for students.

"It's a very, very significant gift for the University of Kentucky," Richey said. "It also showcases the heart of Mr. Gatton. He is our leading philanthropist, but he also loves the state of Kentucky. We have aspirations as a university to increase our graduation rate and retention rate as well."

Richey said students who graduated from the Gatton Academy will be given special consideration.

As part of the scholarship program, UK will utilize its LEADS program in identifying eligible students in terms of financial need.

The LEADS program uses unmet-need modeling to match scholarships, grants and targeted one-time aid to students.

The initiative has attracted philanthropic support from donors and alums to direct aid to students with unmet financial need from counties throughout the state.

“It’s just a big day for the university,” Richey said. “He (Bill Gatton) is doing something very significant to advance student success here with this gift.”

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