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WKU's new 'First-Year Village' opens this fall

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Western Kentucky University officials take media members on a tour of 1 residents halls that will be open to freshmen this fall, on Tuesday, May 4, first-year students this fall. (Grace Ramey/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Grace Ramey

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WKU prepares
to open new
First-Year
Village
residents halls
for students in
fall

When incoming freshmen come to Western Kentucky University this fall, campus administrators hope to give them an experience worth coming back to, namely with two new, high-end residence halls that are on track to open for students in August and showcase WKU's new First-Year Village.

“Students don’t succeed alone. They are most successful when they are surrounded by a support system,” WKU President Timothy Caboni said Tuesday, explaining a key feature of the new dormitories: living-learning communities.

Through living-learning communities, groups of students with similar social and academic interests will share a floor and its amenities. Regular activities designed to be relevant to students’ studies will also help build community, campus administrators have said.

“The living-learning communities will help our students connect socially and academically and chart their best course forward here at WKU,” Caboni said.

In the newly completed Normal Hall, which sits along Normal Street, those amenities include two community bathrooms, all-gender restrooms and common areas like a kitchen and a lounge with a view of campus. Both residence halls will feature “pod-style” housing, meaning that groups of up to 25 students will share spaces.

The adjacent Regents Hall is still under construction, but both halls will be open to students this fall.

Under the university’s strategic plan, each WKU freshman will get to join a living-learning community. Most of the 635 students occupying both residence halls will likely be a part of a living-learning community, though Caboni clarified that there will be an application process students go through to get a sense of where they best fit.

The new residence halls also feature classroom space for meetings with faculty or gatherings with roommates and music practice rooms. Two new

dining venues serving coffee and sandwiches will also add options to the bottom of WKU's hill.

With the number of high school graduates to recruit from projected to peak and then start declining by the mid-2020s, WKU administrators hope the glossy new First-Year Village will be an indispensable recruiting tool.

To local media, Caboni pitched the new First-Year Village as an Ivy League experience without the back-breaking tuition.

“Many of our Ivy League institutions are built around college halls where young people come together and live in small communities,” Caboni said. “You know what the price tag is on an Ivy League education, but why shouldn't that be available to every student ...

“We want to make sure that every student finds their place,” Caboni said.

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