Lost River Cave/WKU

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More than sixty thousand visitors from all over the world tour Lost River Cave here in Bowling Green each year.

In this week’s View from the Hill, Amy Bingham explores the WKU connections that have made the tourist attraction what it is today.

Did you know WKU owns the Lost River Cave entrance and 25 acres of the Valley? The land was generously donated to WKU by Raymond Cravens, Owen Lawson and the Highbaugh family in 1986. It’s rented for a dollar a year on a 99 year lease to the Friends of Lost River who in turn operate one of the most popular tourist attractions in South Central Kentucky.

It’s a nature lovers dream…..

 “We have the wetlands, butterfly habitat, several polinary gardens.”

But it hasn’t always looked like this.

 “From 1960 to 1990 this thing was a landfill people pulled up to mouth of landfill anything they didn’t want was thrown here.”

All that began to change 25 years ago when The Friends of Lost River, led by WKU hydraulogy professor Dr. Nick Crawford, began a massive clean up of the cave.

 “We consider Dr. Nick Crawford the godfather of Lost river, it was his vision for the cave as a tourist operation or attraction that got the ball rolling.”

The first walking tours started in 1995 followed by boat tours in 1997.

 “The purpose of the dam was to back up water and float boats to offer tourism through the cave which became our primary revenue stream through the years.”

Now between 25 and 30 staff members, many of whom are either current WKU students or alum, maintain more than 70 acres for the public to learn from and enjoy.

 “Now we focus on getting families back to nature through every nature tour or every way possible through environmental education.”

An education many don’t realize was made possible because of Western Kentucky University.

 “We’ve been very successful in talking to our out of state visitors as they come in off I-65 about WKU and the early volunteers who got us started but a number of community people are not aware that WKU is such an integral part of the cave.”

In just the last few years, Lost River Cave has added a Kids Discovery Crawl, Nature Trading post and an outdoor classroom.

To plan your trip to Lost River Cave, call 1-800-326-7465.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

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