Zuheir Sofia/Commencement Preview

12/12/13

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Fourteen hundred people will transition from WKU student to Alumni during two commencement ceremonies on Saturday.

In this week's View from the Hill, Amy Bingham tells us about one of WKU's most successful international students who will receive an honorary doctorate this weekend.

Zuheir Sofia is Chairman and CEO of Business Bank of Florida Corporation and Sofia and Company.    The 1969 WKU graduate can attest that his alma mater is a Leading American University with International Reach.

Zuhair Sofia spoke very little English when he came to WKU from Lebanon in 1965.

"He came at a time when people leaving Lebanon couldn't take any money with them. So he came to the US without any money."

"Here's someone who started with almost everything against him and as a result of his intelligence and his drive and people he met here, he really built a wonderful life."

Costello says Sofia, who is a 1998 member of WKU’s Hall of Distinguished Alumni , is now considered one of the most successful bankers in the country.

"Dr. Thompson and Dero worked very closely together through those years when Zuheir was here and they became very close to him.  They saw in him the ability to do whatever he chose to do to be successful."

Harriet Downing and retired faculty member Randy Capps remember Sofia's time on the hill well.  Dr. Capps says International Club Advisor Bob Worster even predicted Sofia's success.

 "He would say time after time, this Zuheir Sofia is going to surprise everybody.  He's going to be so successful and really help put Western on the map."

Still he never forgot his start at WKU. In the mid-90's he made a gift to turn the Downing's former home into the Sofia-Downing International Center.

3:00 "He wanted to do something for International students but didn't want it to be just his name, he wanted it to be Dr. Downing and his."

"Our whole family was there the day of the dedication.  It was quite an emotional event."

No doubt emotions will run high again when Sofia returns to receive his honorary doctorate.

 "He represents everything we hope for students.  He found his own home here, he found faculty that gave him encouragement and tools he needed."

Commencement Ceremonies will be held at 9:30 am and 2 pm on Saturday at Diddle Arena.  Sofia will become WKU’s first recipient of an honorary doctorate in Business Leadership at the 9:30 ceremony.

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

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