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FEATURED

'THE SCHOOL'S BACKYARD'

WVU President Gordon Gee raids Dairy Creme Corner, emerges with ice cream and community support

By Esteban Fernandez | Times West Virginian
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WVU President Gordon Gee takes a picture with members of the community at the Dairy Creme Corner on July 18, 2024
Photo by Esteban Fernandez

FAIRMONT — West Virginia University President Gordon Gee had an encounter with the sublime at Fairmont's premier ice cream stop, Dairy Creme Corner, on Thursday.

Carting the largest ice cream cone he could, Gee introduced himself to members of the community who had parked themselves at Dairy Creme Corner for a well-deserved treat. Leaders from around Marion County also made themselves present to engage with Gee and discuss anything and everything from WVU to issues of local concern. It's a tradition Gee has carried out for 10 years now.

"There are 55 counties in West Virginia and I like to be in every one of them in the summer," Gee said. "I like to meet with folks who are local community members. It's an opportunity to see places I haven't seen. I've never been to this wonderful spot in the world. So I'm here, but I do do a lot of traveling, to tell the story of the university."

Gee's final year as president begins at the start of the new school year. However, retirement won't keep him away from continuing to work on behalf of WVU. Last year, he oversaw the university's academic transformation, which generated much controversy and headlines after the school cut several degrees and programs from its offerings. Gee argued the school's administration has repositioned the university to be successful.

Gee's visits to communities across the state are important because of the level of influence and power the university has on a small state. It's the state's largest employer and an economic engine, Gee said. These outings are an opportunity for the president to meet people and hear them on what the university should be doing next and how the university can improve its educational experience.

Del. Joey Garcia, D-Marion County, and State Sen. Mike Caputo, D-13, joined Gee.

"We work closely with legislators and other elected officials on different programs, but we like to get out into their counties, districts and meet their citizens, see where they live," WVU Head of Government Relations Travis Mollohan said. "See what the

opportunities and challenges are in their areas. So that's why it's important for us to get out on the road and meet them where they are."

Marion County leaders such as Chamber of Commerce President Pat Snively and Marion County Regional Development Corp leaders Bruce McDaniel and Nick Fantasia joined Gee for ice cream as well.

Gee said Marion County is the school's backyard, leading the administration to be familiar with the challenges and opportunities the county faces. Garcia and Gee spent a few minutes discussing the proposed sale of the John Manchin Sr. Health Care Center, as well as what partnerships Marion County could form with the school long term.

"President Gee has the ear of a lot of people and I think it's important," Garcia said, a WVU alum. "We can collaborate and talk about things that are important to us. Just like we want to know what's important with WVU and how we can help them there."

Gee also met one of the proprietors of the Dairy Creme Corner, Ali Acure. She took a break from behind the counter to get her picture taken with Gee. Her son will attend WVU in the fall as a biomedical engineering student. Gee said the biomedical field is one that's growing at the university. Acure is a WVU alumnae herself.

Acure said she was impressed by the president's willingness to make himself available to the public where they are. He addressed a lot of concerns she had as a parent, such as safety and academics. Acure said she was also impressed by how diverse the WVU campus was and how it's changing to meet today's needs.

"I'm very lucky I'm only 20 minutes away from my son but I think he's going to be well educated, well taken care," Acure said. "It's safe and the quintessential college experience which is all anybody can hope for."

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