

Message from the President

On October 22 we held our annual Campus Sustainability Day, which offered a variety of activities and speakers, including a special and historic event -- the formal decommissioning of WCU's 50-year-old, coal-fired power plant.

When I became president of West Chester University in 2009, most of our North Campus buildings were heated with steam from this plant. But in 2010, I signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, which commits WCU to make a good faith effort to achieve a carbon neutral environment by 2025. Since then, we have been extremely busy implementing one of the nation's most ambitious energy-conversion projects. These efforts were supported by a \$5 million grant from the Department of Energy.

As of this fall, we are heating and cooling 50 percent of our buildings with geothermal energy and 50 percent via high-efficiency natural gas boilers, making the coal-fired power plant obsolete. Let me share some of the amazing numbers behind this energy-conversion project. From 2006 to now, we have reduced our sulfur oxide emissions by 86 tons, our nitrogen oxide emissions by 54 tons, and our particulate matter emissions by 43 tons. And the University has reduced its annual carbon foot print by 7,500 tons of CO₂.

The WCU Foundation and University Student Housing have been important partners in WCU's energy-conversion initiative. Their three new residence halls -- Allegheny, Brandywine and Commonwealth -- represent a significant part of our geothermal system.

Beyond geothermal, all WCU building projects are designed with environmental sustainability in mind. For example, recycled wood was used for the hardwood flooring in the East Village complex, which opened in August 2013. The South New Street Parking Structure, which added 452 parking spaces to campus, features a green wall of plants that provide aesthetic benefits while helping to cool the facility on hot days.

While we have made significant gains in addressing our obligations to the environment, we are not resting on our laurels. New WCU buildings will be LEED certified. That includes our Business and Public Affairs Center, which had its groundbreaking ceremony last month. When it opens in 2016 it will be the largest academic building on campus and fully LEED certified.

I am very proud that West Chester University is recognized as a leader in sustainability, in part because of our commitment to using green technologies and sustainable energy to reduce our carbon footprint. Our alumni have been communicating their pride in WCU's sustainability efforts, too. Recently, Michael Brune, the executive director of the Sierra Club wrote to me in an email:

I am thrilled that West Chester University is retiring its on-campus coal plant and replacing it with a clean geothermal heating system. As a father and alumnus of West Chester University, I want to thank you for protecting our air and climate by moving beyond dirty, outdated fuels. I am proud that my alma mater is choosing to invest in abundant, cost-saving clean energy.

I am always interested in hearing your thoughts about WCU initiatives. Please contact me at president@wcupa.edu. You can learn more about sustainability at WCU at www.wcupa.edu/sustainability/sustainability.asp.