

ENHANCING THE HEART OF CAMPUS



BOLIVAR, Mo. – Aaron Hayes saw a need on campus and wanted to find a solution.

He noticed there were more people on Southwest Baptist University's Bolivar campus eating their meals outside or just choosing to be outside this spring in part to more restrictions inside related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I would see some of my friends sitting on the hot concrete being blinded by the sun and think, 'There's definitely a better way to enjoy God's beautiful nature,'" said the junior social work major and Student Association (SA) Campus Improvement Chair.

SA reached out to SBU administration and that solution was to add seating outside of the Goodson Student Union as part of the Burnidge Memorial Forum.

"The approach of the campaign was to evaluate the future SBU Campus Master Plan and take a step toward it by providing an area that we could," Hayes said. "Dr. Brad Johnson (SBU interim president), Dr. Allison Langford (vice president for strategic planning and initiatives) and Robbie Bryant (director of facilities) worked extremely hard to make this a reality from the start. Along with Dr. Nathan Penland, director of student leadership and engagement, SA President Anna Saffels and the rest of the SA team, we were able to come together to complete such a huge project in a month and a half."



Saffels said the entire SA team was excited when Hayes brought the idea to them.

"Outdoor seating addition ideas have been tossed around in the past, but was never much a priority," said Saffels, a junior intercultural studies major. "However, with indoor restrictions and mask requirements, the idea of outdoor dining and study areas became much more of a need.

"Aaron has worked hard on this project putting together research, scouting out the best areas to utilize, and collaborating with upper administration. I want to thank Dr. Johnson, Dr. Langford, Robbie Bryant, and Dr. Nate for facilitating and bringing to fruition this project; it was definitely a team effort.

"I am proud of this project and of the encouragement, teamwork, and fellowship that SBU administration embodies."

Dr. Johnson was encouraged and excited to see students take the lead on this type of project.

"To all those who had a part in making this project a reality, we say, 'thank you.' In particular, I want to thank Aaron Hayes and Anna Saffels for bringing this fun and creative idea forward for us to consider," Dr. Johnson said.

"Their leadership and initiative have helped the University accomplish one of the goals in our Master Plan, 'setting the table' for increased student satisfaction and a more robust campus life experience. Students will enjoy the fruit of their work for years to come."

Once the tables were delivered, it didn't take long for them to be put to use.



"I love having more seating options outside," said Bailey Major, a junior biology education major. "It's great since it is so close to the buildings, which makes Wi-Fi accessible. Also, I enjoy taking a green box and eating outside to enjoy the warmer weather."

In addition to providing more outdoor seating as options for places to eat, study, have Bible studies or watch the sunrise, Hayes also hopes it will promote an atmosphere of community in the heart of campus.

"My hope is that God uses a little thing like outdoor seating in a bigger way than I could hope," Hayes said, "using it to be the place that two friends share their testimonies for the first time, a student eating with his family on a visit decides to attend SBU, or future students gather to pray over their friends' many decisions, like a 'ring before spring.'"

PHOTO: SBU Student Activities officers (from left) Aaron Hayes, Anna Saffels, Britney Clark and Ally Coats show off the new seating area on the Burnidge Memorial Forum.

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