

# Beacon College kicks off largest capital campaign yet

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Beacon College in Leesburg had more than 500 students as of fall 2022.  
BEACON COLLEGE



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Beacon College has launched its largest capital campaign yet.

The Leesburg-based private nonprofit college on April 25 kicked off “The Beacon Promise,” a \$12 million campaign for the school, which exclusively serves students with learning disabilities.

The school already has raised roughly half of the amount needed, Rich Killion, vice president for advancement and strategy at Beacon College, told *Orlando Business Journal*.

**Why this matters:** New funds for college facilities can add construction opportunities and jobs.

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"Our students have had a path before they got here where they often got second- or third-best, at times just being pulled out of the classroom and feeling either left out or left behind," he said. "President [George] Hagerty and our board of trustees believe these students deserve the first-best – that's what this campaign is all about."



Rich Killion, vice president for advancement and strategy, Beacon College

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The capital campaign – which Killion said the school hopes to raise in two or three years – would fund:

- **A \$8.5 million, 28,000-square-foot Intramural & Fitness Center:** It will have two university-regulation basketball courts, a fitness center, a running track and meeting space. It will be able to hold up to 1,000 people for events like the school's commencement ceremony.
- **A \$2 million scholarship endowment:** This would be used to help students attend the school.
- **\$1.5 million for academic enhancements:** This would be used to lease or buy property in downtown Leesburg to add classroom space.

Here, Killion spoke with *OBJ* about what is next for the campaign, the school's growth and more:

### **What motivated the new intramural facility at Beacon College?**

We went this route to meet the growing needs of our students, who have been clamoring for activities. Over 70% have been engaged in individual fitness and/or intramural sports. We have personal trainers available for students, and we have a small center for them to participate, but we have outgrown it. We saw the need for the two basketball courts and the track, as well as the expanded weight room to meet that need. Our students have asked for more opportunities for individual and group participation, and this month we were accepted into the U.S. Collegiate Athletic Association. Starting next year, we will participate in that conference for men's and women's basketball, as well as cross country. As part of that parallel track of ensuring more participation and engagement from our students, we hired former NBA player Sam Vincent as the coach of both the men's and women's teams.

### **Where do you expect the intramural facility to be built at the college?**

We have a few locations in mind on campus. We're actively pursuing that now and hoping that is something we can announce in the year ahead.

### **What motivated the college to add scholarship support?**

Scholarship support is critical for working families. Over a third of our students are Pell Grant eligible and 90% of our students receive financial support in the form of scholarships and loans. It's critical that we are able to attain the financial resources to provide these opportunities for students and make sure they are able to continue being at Beacon. We're different from just about any higher education institution because we are solely devoted to serving a population comprised entirely of students with learning differences. These students have taken a different path to get to college than any neurotypical student. Often, their families have had to expend significant financial resources during K-12 by hiring counselors and therapists, or in some cases having to advocate against a K-12 system that hasn't served their son or daughter well. By the time they get to Beacon, they already have gone down not only a road of broken promises, but an expensive one. That's why we need additional financial resources to serve our students well.

## **What will Beacon College look for when it comes to new properties or buildings near campus?**

We realized during the pandemic that as we continued to grow at a percentage level unlike any other higher education institution, we were able to add to our campus footprint additional classroom space. We were able to attain a 225-seat auditorium in the past year to serve not just our students for performances, it's to be able to add on classroom spaces. That really was the catalyst to look not just within our campus footprint, but areas that could be adjacent our footprint, to see if there are any existing buildings or space we could take on [through lease or purchase] and repurpose to fit our current academic model.

## **How much has Beacon College grown over the past few years?**

We've been fortunate to have a visionary president in George Hagerty who has been here over a decade. When he came on during 2013, we were at 187 students. He had a vision that a college of our age – we're under 40 years old – he had a vision he could bring this institution up to 500 students, with that being the ideal level because we have an extensive triadic development model to serve our students, both the mastery of content in the classroom, as well as the support of their transition into college and out of college. He brought that from 187 to 500. We're a community of about 150 full-time employees, and our model is very intricate with a bunch of talented people who are committed to serving our students well. I think that's why our community is able to produce graduation rates at a 64% level and post-graduation employment rates of 83.5%.

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