

PARTNERSHIPS

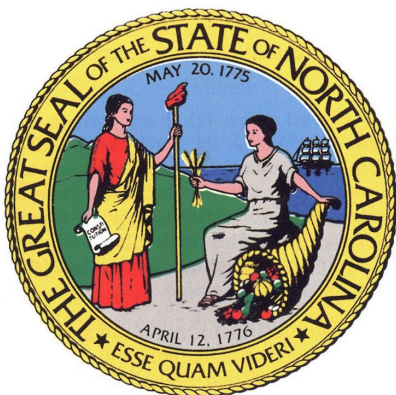
New North Carolina Budget Allocates \$500K for Gardner-Webb, Boiling Springs Partnership

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Funds Requested by Cleveland County Leaders Help Support Construction of Outdoor Performance Complex

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—North Carolina’s General Assembly drafted the state’s FY23 budget (signed into law by Governor Roy Cooper on July 11), and it includes a \$500,000 allocation that will accelerate Gardner-Webb University’s collaboration with the Town of Boiling Springs. Initiated by a proposal from Cleveland County Manager Brian Epley and endorsed by the County Board of Commissioners, the funding will help support construction and operations at the University’s planned outdoor performance complex. State legislators and the Governor also approved additional requests from Cleveland County Commissioners to provide funding for the Cleveland County Fair and the Foothills Public Shooting Complex. All told, the State awarded \$2.5 million to Cleveland County for these three projects.



Citing an economic study requested by County Commissioners, County Manager Brian Epley noted that public investment into projects like the outdoor performance complex enhance population growth and increase the workforce pool. “Cleveland County Government continues to support the efforts of our municipal and outside partners,” Epley related. “The complex will offer many exciting opportunities and add significant value to our community.”

Under Gardner-Webb President William Downs, the University adopted a five-year Strategic Plan in 2020, which included a commitment to aggressively pursue grants from various external sources, including state and federal government. Since that time, Gardner-Webb has received numerous awards for academic enhancement and building improvements across campus. The new grant from the State of North Carolina will help Gardner-Webb’s aspirations to expand the performing and cultural arts, not just to benefit students but also for current and future residents from across the region. Gardner-Webb and the Town of Boiling Springs already succeeded in launching the inaugural WebbStock music festival in April 2022; with funding support from private donors and now the State, the two partners can grow opportunities for concerts, commercial activities, and dining.

“This is an outstanding example of forward-thinking public-private partnership, a true win-win for our campus and for our community,” praised Gardner-Webb President William Downs. “I am especially grateful to Cleveland County Manager Brian Epley and to all the members of the Board of Commissioners for spearheading the proposal that led to generous state funding. With the support of our elected representatives (Senator Ted Alexander, Representative Kelly Hastings, Speaker of the House Tim Moore), we will help bring new energy and new attractions to Boiling Springs. I look forward to working with Town Manager Justin Longino to ensure that Gardner-Webb University continues to build momentum as a catalyst for smart growth in this place we love to call our home.”



▲ Students enjoy WoodStock 2022, hosted by the town of Boiling Springs and Gardner-Webb University in April.

In January 2021, Gardner-Webb purchased a 1.78-acre parcel at 205 South Main Street in Boiling Springs, which had been the site of a Hardee’s restaurant. GWU’s multifaceted plans for that property and for adjacent land already owned by the University include a 600-seat amphitheater, named for donors David and Marie Brinkley who provided the lead gift in May 2022. Gardner-Webb also intends to

construct a Main Street-facing building adjoining the performance venue that will house both a campus shop and a nationally recognized eatery open to the public. As the complex grows, Gardner-Webb University and the Town of Boiling Springs should see an increase in what both Downs and Epley deem “cultural capital,” raising the quality of community life and helping to attract families and businesses to the area.

Longino said the town lobbied for the project with legislators, and everyone on the staff is excited to begin the work with Gardner-Webb. “We are ecstatic that this vision is being brought to reality,” Longino affirmed. “It will be a focal point for the region and complement our transformative Downtown Master Plan and help bring even more changes to downtown Boiling Springs. It’s another great partnership for all involved and a testament to how committed Gardner-Webb, Cleveland County, and the State of North Carolina are to our town.”

Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina’s recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to six professional schools, 14 academic departments, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.