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WGLT news brief on IWU's new President

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After a nationwide search, Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington is going just 60 miles down the road to Urbana for it's 18th president. WGLT's Willis Kern has more...

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There's more of the interview with IWU president Richard Wilson on the web at WGLT dot ORG.

Willis Kern: Illinois Wesleyan University has chosen Richard Wilson to succeed the late Minor Myers as President. Wilson is currently Associate Chancellor for Development at the U of I as well as Vice-President of the U of I Foundation. He's been with the university for 26 years, serving in a variety of administrative roles but his main focus recently has been in leading Illinois' \$1 billion private fundraising campaign. The Illinois Wesleyan Board of Trustees voted unanimously to appoint Wilson as President. Board Vice-Chairman Gil Dorsey chaired the search committee. He says Wilson is well-positioned to lead IWU as it attempts to emerge as a national leader in higher education.

Gil Dorsey: He has contacts even internationally, I think, so I mean I'm sure that he has a great number of contacts and has the ability to do that just judging from the reference list that he gave us when we're talking about the President of the University of Texas, the Chancellor of Illinois, and former chancellors. He's just—his reference list is who's who.

Willis Kern: Wesleyan's Board of Trustees President Greg Hart says one of Wilson's best qualities is his well-roundedness.

Greg Hart: Well I think he's an accomplished higher education leader. He's a man of great integrity and honesty and I think a leader who has been highly respected in his 26 years at the University of Illinois.

Willis Kern: Wilson says the challenge of leading Illinois Wesleyan to national prominence is the main reason he sought out the school's presidency but he says he first needed to make sure that commitment was shared by other groups on campus.

Richard Wilson: We're not here worrying about building the excellence, it's here. What the faculty and staff and students here want to do is to move it forward and to really move among the most distinguished liberal arts institutions in the country. I want to be part of that.

Willis Kern: One of Wilson's accomplishments during his tenure in Urbana has been spearheading efforts to diversify the U of I campus. He helped secure funding for Illinois' new Center for Democracy in a Multiracial Society. During a news conference announcing his appointment, Wilson said diversity will be a major focus of the early stages of his administration and, again, he highlighted work already done.

Richard Wilson: The one thing that I sensed as I interviewed was that as much as any place that I've ever been and places that I know, there seemed to be a consensus view on this issue that the—it was an important priority for the campus. Students said, "We want this campus to be more diverse." Faculty said, "We want this campus to be more diverse."

Willis Kern: Wilson says he's fortunate that attitude is pervasive because it's often the most difficult aspect of building diversity. But where will this diverse population come from? As far as students go, Wilson says he plans to broaden Wesleyan's base which is currently dominated by state residents.

Richard Wilson: Some element of that is out of state. Some element of that will be international. Some element of that will be minority. So what we're trying to do is to broaden the perspective of students and faculty.

Willis Kern: Wilson succeeds Minor Myers who died last summer following a six-month battle with cancer. Myers presided over construction of major buildings and renovations on campus including the Hansen Student Center and the Shirk Athletic Center. Wilson says there are few remaining building projects at Wesleyan but his focus is going to be elsewhere.

Richard Wilson: But I think the needle is going to move in the direction of securing funds to support people and programs and I believe that will occur by building the endowment to support those programs on a continuing basis so that—I think it's not that we're going to do one to the exclusion of the other but I think the balance is going to shift but that's only possible because of the work that's been done in the past.

Willis Kern: Minor Myers was much loved on the Wesleyan campus and was well-known for his personal touch in developing relationships with faculty and students. Wilson says he was aware of Myers' reputation but never met the late president. He says his own style of leadership is based on collaboration.

Richard Wilson: One of the things that I've learned in development work over the last ten years is the importance of listening to people and so I try to pay attention to what people are telling me.

Willis Kern: Richard Wilson begins his duties as Illinois Wesleyan's eighteenth president July 1st. IWU officials are not releasing Wilson's salary information. I'm Willis Kern, WGLT News.