

Chillicothe Gazette

OU-C turns 65

CHILLICOTHE -- With humble beginnings in a local high school, Ohio's first college branch took root in its first capital 65 years ago.

Ohio University-Chillicothe opened at what then was Chillicothe High School in 1946, two years after the G.I. Bill became law, giving World War II veterans an avenue to further their education. Local veterans took advantage, accounting for 70 percent of OU-C's fall 1946 enrollment --a mere 281 students.

No campus to speak of existed, but students fostered a sense of [community](#) by forming a booster club to host social functions. In 1960, the growing demand for daytime classes led to them being offered at First Presbyterian Church.

Not until Bennett Hall opened in 1966 did OU-C truly have an academic venue to call its [own](#). From that single academic building, the campus grew. So did enrollment, surpassing 1,000 students by 1978 and 1,500 students by 1989.

Today, OU-C boasts a 100-acre campus -- the largest among OU's five regional campuses -- and an enrollment of about 2,300 students. Demand for an OU-C education is greater than ever before.

Those who shaped, and were shaped by, OU-C have a fondness for the hilltop institution and what it means to the surrounding community.

"This is, after all, a major research institution we're talking about, and for Chillicothe to have in its midst Ohio University is a win-win-win," said Ken Breidenbaugh, an OU-C alumnus and current faculty member who helped revive its theatre program in the 1990s.

At age 17, the Chillicothe native saw OU-C as a less intimidating path to higher education. He knew he wanted to pursue theater studies in Athens, but he found "a sense of safety" close to [home](#).

"It was the perfect way to transition comfortably into the somewhat intense [environment](#) of Athens," he said.

Enrolling at OU-C was a practical decision for Ross County Auditor Steve Neal. The tuition was more affordable, he said, plus he still could live at home and maintain a day job.

The unconventional student mix at OU-C also sets it apart, Breidenbaugh and Neal

said.

"I think one of OU-C's strengths is that it has people of so many backgrounds," Breidenbaugh said. "I like the texture of the differences we have here."

"It has given a lot of folks an opportunity for a **quality** college education that they would not have had otherwise," Neal said.

Lifelong Chillicothe resident and OU-C's resource development coordinator, Joyce Atwood, agrees.

"If the campus were not here, students could not stay here, and that's what they want to do," she said. "They would leave, and there would be no reason for them to come back. OU-C grounds that desire to remain in Chillicothe."

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