Hundreds gathered on the main floor of Old Main Thursday morning to welcome Robert "Bobby" C. Robbins as 22nd president of the UA.

"I'm just appreciative and really blessed and humbled to be in this position," said Robbins, whose arrival at the building was celebrated with appearances by Wilbur and Wilma Wildcat and members of the Pride of Arizona marching band and pom line.

Following brief welcome remarks from Robbins, as well as Provost Andrew Comrie and employee and student leaders, members of the campus community had the opportunity to meet and visit individually with the new UA president.

He encouraged everyone to come up and get to know him, noting that he's already met many people on campus and "there are so many great stories here."

"Thank you each and every one of you for what you do for the University," Robbins, dressed in a red UA polo, told the crowd. "We're only as strong as our weakest link, and everybody here has an important job you do everyday."

Many at the event praised Robbins who had asked that Comrie introduce him as "Bobby" for being so open and accessible.

"I thought he was very sincere and warm. Usually, you don't hear people in higher positions say, 'just call me Bobby,'" said Treya Allen, a senior academic advisor in the Colleges of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

Allen said she came to the reception to show support for new leadership.

"We're all one band, with one sound, and I want to support him coming in because he's now part of the family," Allen said, adding that she is hopeful for the University's future under Robbins.

"I want to see the continuation of some of the great things we've put in place, but also have fresh eyes on the things we can improve upon," she said.

Sangita Pawar, assistant dean of research in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, also expressed optimism for the future and said she likes Robbins' "down-to-Earth" nature.

"He seems very approachable," Pawar said. "At CALS, we want to grow and do better, especially in research, and he'll be a great partner in helping us get there."
Robbins, who comes to the UA after serving five years as CEO of the Texas Medical Center in Houston, vowed during the reception that he will be a visible presence on campus—perhaps to the dismay of those who keep his schedule, he joked.

"I'm going to be out on campus; I'm going to be involved," he said.

Robbins has already been active on campus, even before officially landing the job. He revealed during his March UA visit as a presidential finalist that he had strolled campus incognito, in a baseball cap, talking to passersby about their experience at the University.

It was in that sort of informal setting that UA senior Robert Johnson first met Robbins.

A humanities major and a student-employee in the Office of Global Initiatives, Johnson said he recognized Robbins walking through the Student Union Memorial Center and said hi. The two then stopped to chat, discussing Robbins' time in Arizona so far and the potential of the UA's Downtown Campus, among other things.

"It blew my mind that he was so aware already. I'm excited for his ideas," said Johnson, who also is senior director of InnovateUA, a student-led innovation and entrepreneurship hub at the UA.
Johnson, who attended Thursday's welcome reception to talk more with Robbins, said he thinks the new president will lead the UA in a positive direction and help bring campus together.

"The president impacts the student experience by impacting morale and giving everyone the feeling of being one community," he said.

During the welcome reception, Robbins praised existing UA leaders, particularly Provost Comrie for his "grace, thoughtfulness and intellect." He also lauded the work of his predecessor, Ann Weaver Hart, whose four-year tenure included such successes as the Old Main renovation, the $1.5 billion Arizona NOW fundraising campaign and the UA's agreement with Banner Health, to name a few. Although Hart was in Salt Lake City and did not attend the reception, Robbins said she sent him flowers for his first day.

Robbins, whose first day on the job also included visits with students, local media and Tucson mayor Jonathan Rothschild, urged guests at the morning reception to "bear down to move up."

He also was sure to put in a plug for the UA's first home football game on Sept. 9 against the University of Houston, where his friend Renu Khatur is president.

"When she comes to town, we're going to show her a great Wildcat welcome," the former Houstonian said, "but we need to win that game."

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