

College's new leader known for innovation Spalding opened a branch of her current school in a shopping mall

GAIL SMITH-ARRANTS

The new president of Rowan-Cabarrus Community College has had her eye on the school for more than a year.

The college's board of trustees voted on Monday to hire Carol Sue Spalding, who is president of the open campus of Florida Community College at Jacksonville.

She will succeed the retired Richard Brownell, who served RCCC for more than 30 years.

Spalding, 58, explored North Carolina last summer with her husband. They traveled with a laptop computer and a card allowing Internet access.

As they came across community colleges on their road trip, they researched the schools on their laptop.

"As we drove by RCCC, we read (Brownell) was retiring. It's just been in the back of my mind for the past year," Spalding said.

She has just finished 30 years with Florida Community College, which has 60,000 students. RCCC has 20,000 students, most of them part time.

Spalding -- selected from among five finalists -- is "a perfect fit" for the college, said Ray Paradowski, chairman of the RCCC board. She has created unique environments to meet needs of students and the workforce, including establishing a campus in an old shopping mall, he said.

"She illustrates a desire to create an environment for learning," Paradowski told trustees and faculty members who had gathered to hear the board's decision.

Spalding's annual compensation will be \$153,428 plus benefits, Paradowski said. Brownell, who retired May 31, was making \$169,380 plus benefits, Paradowski said.

Spalding, who is expected to start work Aug. 11, has been president of the open campus at Florida Community College since 1988. She also was president of the downtown campus from 1998 to 2001 and interim college president in 1997.

Since 2005, she's been a board member of the American Association of Community Colleges.

Spalding, who grew up in Louisville, Ky., has a bachelor's degree in international studies from the University of Louisville, a master's degree in human resource management from Pepperdine University in Santa Ana, Calif., and a doctorate in education from Columbia University in New York.

But she said she's familiar with the Carolinas, since her mother was born in Rock Hill. While on another road trip after her April interview, she explored the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis. RCCC is offering an array of biotechnology courses to help train workers for campus jobs.

Spalding said she was impressed with the campus and the opportunity it represents for the college.

"The North Carolina Research Campus is extraordinary," she said. "That's the biggest economic development project I think I've ever seen.

"To go from textiles' tragic end to being on the cutting edge of the next big thing in health is so exciting."

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