

If anyone knows how to raise money for a school, it might be Leary Bell.

So if he becomes the next president of Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, he will focus on asking for money, he told RCCC staff on Friday.

"I'd be very, very interested early on in working on fundraising," he said.

Bell is one of five candidates for Dr. Richard Brownell's job. Brownell is retiring after about 30 years as president of RCCC.

Bell is currently the associate chancellor for community outreach at the University of South Carolina at Beaufort. As part of that post, Bell is in charge of creating partnerships in the community — one of his true passions, he said.

Before he went to USCB, Bell spent five years at Armstrong Atlantic State University in Savannah, Ga. There, he served as vice president for external affairs and executive vice president of the school's foundation.

When he started, AASU was raising about \$250,000 a year, Bell said. He helped increase that to more than \$1 million a year.

It was possible because the school worked to build a foundation, Bell said. The school sent out mass mailings, embarked on community campaigns and held fundraising events, he said.

It's important for schools to seek as many small donations as possible, Bell said.

Bell's enthusiasm for fundraising made Daphne Lewis happy. As director of grants development at RCCC, Lewis said she wants the school's foundation to become more active, seeking donations and hosting fundraising campaigns.

Now, the school depends on grants. When RCCC has a powerful mix of grants and donations, the school will be headed for greatness, Lewis said.

"When the two are working together, phenomenal things can happen," she said.

Those things could include student scholarships and new technology, Lewis said.

Bell said that as president of RCCC, he would consider it one of his primary duties to ask businesses for donations. In turn, Bell said, he would ensure the school's academic programs are preparing students for the local workforce.

"My passion is working with the communities," he said.

Bell earned a degree in mathematics from Georgia Southwestern State University. He went on to earn a master's degree and a doctoral degree in mathematics from Auburn University.

He starting teaching math at Columbus State University in Georgia in 1976. Later, he became the chairman of the mathematics and computer science program. He helped create a new computer science program at the school.

Throughout his career, Bell said, he has been very interested in economic and workforce development. RCCC's relationship with the developing research center in Kannapolis is exciting, he said.

RCCC will surely play a big role in getting local students ready for research jobs, he said.

"You all have an awful lot going on, and the opportunities are limitless, I think," Bell said. "You're not going to be a typical community college very much longer."

Bell said his background and his focus on academics, alumni affairs and community needs make him a great candidate for the job. It doesn't matter that he doesn't have experience in a community college setting, he said.

That's because his work in Georgia and South Carolina focused on the community's needs, he said. He helped create programs that prepared students for the local workforce.

"I think we would be a match made in heaven," Bell said.