



Vying for top job: Dr. Henry 'Hank' Dunn talks with the staff and faculty at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College during a special meeting in the Student Center at RCCC North Campus. Dunn is a candidate for the post of college president.

Jon C. Lakey, Salisbury Post

Henry "Hank" Dunn knows community colleges.

And it's not just because he has served as an administrator at them for years. It's also because he attended one.

After he graduated from high school, Dunn earned an associate's degree from Indian River Community College in Florida. It was his hometown school, and it seemed like a natural next step.

"I just wanted a smaller school experience," Dunn said.

Dunn, who is one of five candidates to take over the president's post at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, has been passionate about education ever since.

He went on to a four-year university, eventually earning a doctoral degree in higher education administration from the University of Florida.

Dunn met with RCCC faculty and staff Tuesday to share his ideas of what the school would be like under his leadership.

Since 2006, Dunn has served as the chancellor at the Central Indiana Region of Ivy Tech Community College in Indianapolis.

Before that, he spent four years as the vice president of student affairs at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio.

Dunn has also served as the dean of students and as the director of admissions and registration at two community colleges in Florida.

Dunn wants his next career move to be in North Carolina for several reasons, he said.

For one, he and his wife, who is an attorney, own a home in the mountains here.

"We love North Carolina," Dunn said.

Besides that, RCCC is a quality school connected to a good community college state system, he said. And the research center in Kannapolis will likely bring welcomed changes.

"You look like you're poised for more great stuff coming," Dunn said.

But the role of community colleges should come into play long before they are preparing students for the workforce, Dunn said. Community colleges should also have strong partnerships with high schools to help prepare those students for college, he said.

Too often, students graduate from high school without the necessary skills to succeed in a college setting, Dunn said. He wanted to help fix that.

In Ohio and in Indiana, Dunn said, he helped create programs for juniors and seniors in high school to increase their skills. The self-paced program allowed students to work on what they needed to.

Dunn is proud of the results. A program at Sinclair Community College resulted in 65 percent of the students testing well enough to show they were ready for college, he said.

"I think the same is needed at every community college," Dunn said.

While RCCC could do great things for local youngsters, the school also needs to continue to accommodate non-traditional students, Dunn said. A program he has worked with takes a case management-style approach.

Counselors determine students' risk factors — sometimes life circumstances — to help them succeed and ultimately graduate, Dunn said. The approach benefits students, sometimes without them realizing extra care was given, he said.

But the trick of successful schools is being in tune with the local marketplace. "What does the community need?" Dunn asked. "Really, that's the secret of a community college. Go out and do it well."

As president of RCCC, Dunn would spend about half of his regular 12-hour workdays off campus, he said. He would be out talking to business leaders about what RCCC really needs to offer.

And through it all, Dunn said, he would never really feel like he was working.

"I love what I do," he said. "This is almost as much a mission for me as a job."

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