



RCCC presidential candidate Carol Spalding talks to faculty and staff at the college Wednesday. Jon C. Lakey, Salisbury Post

When Florida Community College at Jacksonville needed more classroom space, Carol Spalding knew she had to get creative.

As an administrator at the school, Spalding helped convince the Board of Trustees to renovate an old shopping mall in town and convert it to a college campus.

More than 10 years later, the building still features the mall's escalators and elevators. During the design phase of the project, school leaders got input from faculty and staff about what makes a successful learning place.

Now the award-winning building is a popular spot for teachers at the five-campus college, Spalding said.

"That was really a team effort of what we liked and what we needed for a good student space," she said.

Spalding said she wants to bring that kind of outside-the-box thinking to Rowan-Cabarrus Community College. She is one of five candidates to take over the president's post when Dr. Richard Brownell retires this spring.

Spalding, 58, has spent most of her career at Florida Community College at Jacksonville. In fact, she said, she hasn't interviewed for a job in about 30 years.

She earned a bachelor's degree in international studies from the University of Louisville before she went on to Pepperdine University, where she earned a master's degree in human resource management.

Spalding went on to get a doctoral degree in education from Columbia University.

She had planned to become a high school teacher, but her career shifted instead to higher education. She has held several titles at Florida Community College at Jacksonville. Now she's the campus president of one of the school's branches.

In that role, Spalding oversees military training programs, economic development programs, online courses and more.

The school's success in offering online coursework is something Spalding is especially proud of, she said. The online program has grown to serve about 15,000 students currently.

The Internet provides a cheap, easy way of globalizing a community college, Spalding said. Her background in international relations has made her passionate about ensuring that students know a broader world is out there.

Schools can host international fairs, sponsor student-exchange programs and offer tele-courses with students from other countries, she said.

The N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis will likely bring the world to RCCC's doorstep, Spalding said.

"You're going to see your own neighborhoods change, I think," she said.

As research jobs come into the area, it will be important for RCCC to meet the community's needs, Spalding said. In Florida, she has worked with her school to provide training programs for the military as they are needed.

"We'll do whatever the next big thing is," Spalding said.

And when it comes to money to do those next big things, Spalding said, sometimes leaders need to get creative — just like the mall project in Florida.

During the last two weeks, Derrick Atkins, associate vice president of business and finance at RCCC, has asked all five presidential hopefuls how they would handle state rules that can make getting things done a little tough.

Atkins liked Spalding's answer, which was this: If the state won't cough up the money for a certain project, find someone else who will.

"Resourcefulness and creativity are great strengths," Spalding said.

Money is always out there, she said, it's just a matter of finding it. The research center in Kannapolis will likely position RCCC for more grants, she said.

But beyond state and local money, Spalding described herself as "a proponent for other people's money."

RCCC already has a lot going for it, Spalding said. "You've got a very successful college, and I would like to make it more successful," she said.

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