



Article and photo provided by: LeAnn Dilbeck, Editor of The Polk County Pulse

Phillip Wilson has been named the new president of Rich Mountain Community College [RMCC] following a meeting last Thursday of the Board of Trustees. Wilson was selected out of 28 applicants in a diligent two-month long national search. Carole Martin, chair of the search committee, said it was crucial that the selected candidate embraced the “community” concept in Rich Mountain Community College.

“It is the most humbling experience thus far in my life,” said Wilson after he received the offer Thursday evening. “I am so humbled by the confidence that the Board has placed in my ability to lead this institution...I am terribly excited.”

Demonstrating their confidence, the seven-member board offered Wilson a three-year contract, the first in RMCC history. While not uncommon in the state, past RMCC presidents have worked under two-year contracts.

RMCC Board Chair Vicki Stanley said following the announcement, “We have all of the confidence in the world that Phillip will take RMCC to greater levels than we have ever seen. He has the enthusiasm and the passion to grow and make us bigger and better.”

Past RMCC President Bill Abernathy and the person responsible for hiring Wilson initially back in 1999 to teach accounting said, “First, I want to congratulate the Board on making such a fine selection. I’ve known Phillip all of his life and he is a fine, fine young man. He is very capable and very knowledgeable. Perhaps his greatest ability is his strong ability to work well with other people.” Abernathy is an icon synonymous with RMCC, leading the college through its transition from a vo-tech to a community college in 1983.

Ironically, also championing that cause was Wilson’s wife’s grandmother, Rachael Goforth, and her grandfather, Richard Carver. Goforth served on the Board of Trustees from 1983 until 1997 and Carver served from 1983 until 1988.

Wilson was currently serving as the Vice-President of Student Affairs, a position he has held for the last five years. He was also serving as the interim Vice-President for Administration following the June 30 resignation of Brenda Gillogly.

Wilson said his long-term plan is to re-establish RMCC as a community partner, “We are a beacon for this community. We’ve got to get back to putting the community first. When you do that...everything else will fall into place.”

Wilson spoke of RMCC as a community resource and said the college exemplified its ability to respond to community needs with the closing of one of Mena's largest employers, AalFs Manufacturing. “We responded immediately and began re-training and re-educating people. That was a tough, tough time for Mena and RMCC stepped-up...immediately...and did what we are here to do.”

Wilson added that his most immediate goal was to fill the vacancies of four key administrative positions, some that have been vacant for up to six months. The Director of the Foundation will be combined with the Community Relations Director position. Next, Wilson wants to fill the Vice-President of Administration position. The Human Resources Director position that would report to the Vice-President of Administration will not be filled as the college continues to look for ways to cut costs dealing with very tight budgets. Wilson said it will be the VP of Administration’s responsibility to hire a new Maintenance Director.

Wilson said he is also eager to meet with the administration at the Cossatot River School District and explore partnership opportunities.

Extending high school students' concurrent enrollments in RMCC's three-county service area is also a short-term goal of Wilson's. The Board has approved a special rate for students' in this program and it averages less than \$50 a class. Wilson said many high school seniors can graduate having 12 to 15 college credit hours, an entire college semester. "Not only is that a cost savings and a huge advantage to that student, I believe in many cases, is just the confidence builder some student's need to continue pursuing a college degree," said Wilson.

His final short term goal is to work to promote scheduling that enables students to take a full course load by attending only two-days a week. Recognizing that most students, whether traditional or non-traditional, need to work and the two-days a week allows a much more employable schedule.

Stanley said she and the entire board are excited to finally be moving forward, pleased of the results of their diligent search. She expressed her sincere gratitude to Dr. Steve Rook, the Vice-President of Academic Affairs who stepped in to serve as Interim President following Dr. Wayne Hatcher's resignation in April.

"This is the beginning of a new era for RMCC. I see only great things for the college in the days and years ahead," said Stanley.

The college has planned a reception welcoming Wilson in his new role for Tuesday, September 13, 2011 from 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. in the St. John Library on the RMCC Mena campus.

THE MAN BEHIND THE TITLE

Wilson, who began as a student worker, and continued to work up the ranks, knows RMCC, its people, its students, and its purpose, inside and out. Wilson grew up in Pencil Bluff and like Abernathy, is a graduate of Oden High School. He continued his education and holds a BA in Political Science from Hendrix University, an MBA from University of Arkansas, and is completing his dissertation to earn his Ed.D in December.

As mentioned earlier, Wilson was hired by Abernathy to teach accounting. He then taught Computer Systems Technology at RMCC for six years while completing his MBA before eventually being promoted to Vice-President of Student Affairs. "I owe a debt of gratitude to both Mary Jo and Bill [Abernathy]."

"I believe education changes lives...we see that on a daily basis here at RMCC," said Wilson when he spoke of being "unfulfilled" while working in the business sector. He'll be the first to tell you that becoming an educator, or a college president, has not been a childhood dream...but more of a snowballing process once he got the "treble hook of RMCC." "I have worked here for RMCC and there has not been one day in 11 years that I did not look forward to coming to work."

Wilson said he began getting the "fever" for becoming an administrator while he worked as a program director for the college and liked the challenge of balancing the needs of the community and college with the political machine. He said he is grateful for the mentorship of Abernathy, his brother-in-law Dr. Chuck Welch, ASU System President, and his father, Marc.

Wilson and his wife of 11 years, Kristi, share four children: Aaron Pasquino (14), Marc David (9), Rachael (7), and Kate (3). Kristi is a Family and Consumer Sciences instructor for Mena Public Schools. The family is active at the First United Methodist Church and various civic organizations.

Knowing the profound difference RMCC has made in his own personal life and now ultimately the leader he has become, Wilson is poised to meet today's tough economic challenges and is committed to having an impact on EVERY student that selects RMCC as a resource for self-improvement. "I am the most blessed individual. I have an outstanding Board of Trustees, phenomenal faculty and staff, and the perfect support at home so that I can work as hard as I possibly can to keep and build RMCC to be as strong as it can possibly be."