Change at the top

In accepting appointment as AU's interim president last week, Ed Richardson promised quick action to lead Auburn off probation by its regional accrediting agency.

Interim president begins term

Edward R. Richardson starts his first week as interim president of AU today with a short list of priorities. At the top of the list is removal of probation by Auburn's regional accrediting agency.

Richardson's appointment last Tuesday by the AU Board of Trustees followed the resignation four days earlier of William Walker as AU president. Walker had served 15 months as interim president and 19 months as president.

Richardson's appointment at AU became effective following his resignation as state superintendent of education on Thursday. In leaving that post after eight years, he also gave up his ex-officio membership on several boards of trustees, including Auburn's, to assume the AU post.

The change in AU administration came one month after the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools placed Auburn on 12-month probation over compliance issues related to institutional commitment to the accrediting process, the role of the Board of Trustees in university governance and institutional control of athletics.

His main priority for this week and the remainder of this year, Richardson stressed, will be lifting the SACS probation sanction against Auburn.

"I am committed to getting us off probation and making sure we have the policies and procedures in place to make sure we never go back on probation," he said. In addition to addressing governance issues that the accrediting agency cited in placing Auburn on one-year's probation in December, the campus is undergoing its regular 10-year accreditation review this year.

The interim president will also represent the university at an NCAA investigation of AU's basketball program in February. Although not directly linked, the NCAA case fits within the framework of institutional control of athletics, one of the concerns cited by SACS in its December ruling.

"In accepting this offer, I want to say I will be in charge of this university within the established governance system," Richardson told trustees. "I think it's going to take some time to demonstrate that, and I think that's a critical issue to demonstrate to SACS." (See Richardson, page 2)
Cynthia Reed, director of the Truman Pierce Institute and professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology, for significant contributions by a junior professor to the advancement of education administration.

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The organization recognized Reed for her ability to connect teaching, research and outreach with each other. Reed was cited for her work in leadership and implementing effective evaluation and assessment approaches.

"I was honored and humbled to receive this award. Our work in West Alabama continually challenges us to reconnect our communities, to broaden horizons, to fully embrace our democratic responsibilities and to actively model what it means to be an engaged citizen."

The West Alabama Learning Coalition, established in 1997, organizes and assists collaborative leadership teams to help improve the West Alabama region improve educational quality and opportunities.

"The coalition is built around the concept that schools cannot be separated from their contexts, nor can communities be separated from their schools. With this concept in mind, the coalition seeks to connect economic and community development with educational improvement," Reed said.

Richardson (continued from page 1) and the NCA Dean, who is president, is in charge of the administration of this university.

Several board members, including Gov. Bob Riley, who is an ex-officio chairman, commented Walker's approach to helping the university achieve financial stability and other accomplishments during difficult economic times. Riley added that he hoped all segments of the university community would follow Walker's parting advice to put aside their differences and focus on helping Auburn succeed.

Richardson holds bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from Auburn. The former AU-Montgomery faculty member and former Auburn city schools superintendent said he planned to retire from the Alabama education system in about two years, and the transition at Auburn would enable him to meet that goal.

"I am not interested in becoming the permanent president of Ahmad University," Richardson said. But, in confronting the university's immediate challenges, he added, "I am prepared to lead Auburn.

Richardson said he promised to look for key leaders and other helpers for in confronting those challenges. He is scheduled to speak at a called meeting of the University Faculty at 3 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 3, at Brown Hall auditorium. Faculty leaders moved the session back a week from Jan. 27 following the change of administration.

Addressing SACS concerns about trustee involvement in administrative matters, Richardson said he will ensure a clear separation between the policy-making powers of the board and the administrative authority of the president. For example, he said, the president's office will keep the trustees informed of major administrative decisions but will cease producing lengthy reports of many administrative actions in that time. In discussion leading up to the selection of an interim president, faculty representative Barb Stramper requested a delay to permit more input from faculty and others. She noted that some faculties would perceive immediate action as lack of commitment by the board for a faculty role in shared governance. She recalled that the board had cited urgency in bypassing the faculty to select an interim president in 2001 and 2003.

Riley, noting that he had not been involved in earlier decisions on selection of a president, said the university would not risk further delay and had the right person on hand to address the SACS challenge and other pressing issues.

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"We will have additional space, more than 3,000 square feet," Thornton said. "This will enable us to complete our expansion plans that will focus our operation in three primary areas: commercialization, administration of patents and license agreements, and legal affairs and compliance."

AU Vice President for Research Richard Mairtary said the office also will identify and develop broader funding sources for research support. "While there are disciplines that have more opportunities than others to garner research support, the research under way in all disciplines is important to the university," Mairtary said. "By maximizing the earning potential of our intellectual properties, we also are producing a source of support revenues for the breadth of Auburn's research activities."
Hotel-conference center renovations to be complete in March and April

The AU Hotel and Dixon Conference Center is in the final stage of renovation of its exterior and the hotel’s restaurant.

The restaurant renovation, which started in late summer, is on course for completion in mid-March, and the exterior renovation, which began in January 2003, is due for completion by late April, says Alvin Bettcher, the hotel’s director of sales and marketing. “Our customers have been very understanding about inconveniences caused by the changes, and many have said they are looking forward to seeing the final outcome,” said Bettcher. “They will soon have that chance, and so will the entire Auburn community. We think people will like what they see and experience here.”

Portions of the AU-owned hotel have been draped in scaffolding for a year as crews from Stone Building Co. of Birmingham removed the original brick facing, added new waterproofing underneath and replaced the brick to upgrade the building from commercial to institutional construction standards.

Except for some changes at ground level to accommodate exterior seating for the restaurant, the hotel’s exterior will look much the same as before. Inside will be a different matter as the entire first floor of the north wing will be converted into a family-oriented, moderately priced restaurant in Italian décor.

The exterior work began before West Paces Hotel Group of Atlanta signed a contract with the university in March to assume management of the hotel and conference center. The interior changes are for an academic purpose as well as reflecting the new management team’s concept of customer service, Bettcher said.

The new management team launched the restaurant renovation as part of a plan to upgrade the hotel’s interior to international quality standards for the hospitality industry. In academic partnership with AU’s College of Human Sciences, the West Paces team is integrating all aspects of hotel, restaurant and conference center management into the college’s instructional program.

Bettcher said the expanded restaurant, along with other aspects of the facility, will introduce students in hotel and restaurant management and related majors to the latest technology, philosophy and management practices in the service industry. “The new restaurant and its kitchen will be a true teaching facility where students learn the best practices from expert chefs, management and staff,” he added.

The restaurant’s customers, as well as students, will benefit from the changes, he said. “This will be unique to the community, especially in quality of service and foods, yet we are making sure that we are not pricing ourselves out of the local market. Prices will be no more than people in the area are now paying for family dining.”

The facility will seat 150 inside and up to 50 on the new terrace, which is also under construction. It will have the atmosphere of an authentic Italian bistro and will include a Starbucks coffee stand next to the terrace.

The restaurant will be named Ariccia, after the hilltop town near Rome that is home to the College of Human Sciences summer program in Italy. The hotel’s restaurant management also operates the Museum Cafe at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art. Bettcher said that restaurant is becoming a destination in itself for area residents and visitors seeking a more upscale and leisurely luncheon service usually available only in larger cities.

AU Marching Band wins Sudler Trophy

The AU Marching Band has been named the 2004 recipient of the Sudler Intercollegiate Marching Band Trophy. Many collegiate band leaders cite the Sudler Trophy as the top award for college and university marching bands in the nation.

Administered by the John Philip Sousa Foundation of West Lafayette, Ind., the Sudler Trophy is awarded annually to a university marching band that has demonstrated the highest of musical standards and innovative marching routines and ideas, and which has made important contributions to the field.

The award recognizes long-term contributions of a school’s marching band and its directors rather than a one-time contest. The AU Marching Band is directed by Professor Johnny Vinson, a member of the Department of Music faculty since 1979.

Officers of the John Philip Sousa Foundation will present the award on Sept. 23 at halftime of the Auburn-Citadel football game and in conjunction with the 2004 Auburn Alumni Band Reunion.