

Dr. Frank Campbell, Gardner Webb, The Shelby Star, Sunday November 30, 2003  
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BOILING SPRINGS — The philosophy of Dr. Frank Campbell:

Never let your position dictate who you are as a person.

Treat people the way you'd like to be treated.

Open your office door with a friendly smile.

Then, as you open your ears, open your heart.

In his year as interim president of Gardner-Webb University, Campbell has taught these things — even if he's too humble to admit it.

The pupils who have learned these lessons from him: the community at large, university alumni, faculty, staff and students, and those who closely watched the school evolve after its year of controversy.

That includes The Star. Today The Star recognizes Campbell as a Spirit of Freedom award recipient for his efforts to unite the campus and the community, mirroring the newspaper's values of integrity, community and respect for others.

Many have deemed Campbell's tenure at GWU, a year of "healing."

GWU's wound came from a controversial decision by the school's now-former president, Dr. Chris White, to order the school registrar to use a different grading policy for a star athlete, making him eligible to play basketball when he otherwise would not have been. White's decision divided the school, alumni, trustees, and supporters. The storm that followed eventually led to White's resignation.

GWU is now in the process of responding to a 22-page allegation of wrongdoing by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which governs college athletics.

An important part of recuperating has been Campbell's unassuming presence.

"He's never had to introduce himself as president of Gardner-Webb University," says GWU Student Government President Chip Carter, a senior. "He just introduces himself as Dr. Frank Campbell.

"The first thing you notice is how down to earth he is. He comes across as somebody who doesn't look at himself as being above someone else. He's just another person working to make the school better."

Campbell began the healing by listening to people at a time when many needed to vent their frustrations.

"He has a remarkable ability to listen to what people have to say regardless of what it is," said Glenda Crotts, senior assistant to the president. "He may not always agree or react to what you have to say, but he listens and takes it into consideration when he makes his decision."

Although his title says "interim president," Campbell has not approached the position that way. Renovations are currently underway to GWU's stadium and apartments as part of a five-year strategic plan Campbell and the senior staff recommended to GWU's board of trustees.

Longer-term plans include changes to the fine arts and science departments.

“He is not a caretaker president,” said Neal Alexander, chairman of GWU’s board of trustees. “We clearly feel the Lord led him to Gardner-Webb at this time.”

Those continuing changes are part of the reason the board voted for him to stay with the university until 2005 — and Campbell accepted.

“I think his willingness to stay for an extended period of time indicates his willingness to the university and the university family,” said Scoot Dixon, GWU’s vice president of university relations and development.

But Campbell is not one to boast about his leadership.

“I think he would blush at that thought because he is an appropriately humble person,” said Dr. Ron Williams, faculty chairman. “I have developed a personal friendship and respect for Frank Campbell and feel that the style of leadership that he is providing fits very well with this community.”