

Distinguished alumna Suzanne Clifton donates \$500,000 charitable gift policy to college

By RANDY BRANTLEY

Director of Foundation and Corporate Relations

A visitor to Chowan College will quickly sense a renewed sense of optimism throughout the campus community.

Dr. Stan Lott has assumed his duties as the 21st president of the college. He brings with him 15 years of experience as academic dean at Louisiana College, a sister Baptist institution.

Students are excited about policy changes and increased social activities on campus. The Student Life Office, led by new Vice President Ed Dadez, has been working to insure student satisfaction and retention.

Mrs. Austine Evans and the Enrollment Management staff are responding to an increasing number of inquiries from college-bound high school students.

The athletic program, under the direction of Mr. Jim Garrison, began the year on a high note when the men's soccer team won the Blue Ridge Tournament, defeating Lynchburg, Western Maryland and Marymount.

Academic Dean Frank Lowe and Assistant Dean David Gowler are continuing their work with curriculum transformation. In addition to offering three new majors—psychology, athletic training and biology—the Academic Affairs Office is working to insure that Chowan graduates receive both a solid core of liberal arts courses and superior preparation for an evolving job market.

On August 21, a Chowan alumna, Suzanne Clifton, placed a cherry on top of all the optimism. After joining the faculty and staff for dinner, Clifton presented President Lott a Jefferson-Pilot Life Insurance Company charitable gift policy in the amount of \$500,000. For several months prior, Clifton had arranged for the policy with E. Vincent Tilson, Chowan's vice president for development, and Jefferson-Pilot representatives.

A resident of Cary, Clifton is owner and president of Executive Staffing Services, Inc., a company she herself founded in 1984. With sales in the millions of dollars, Executive Staffing Services has operated under the motto, "A promise of honesty and professionalism."

On September 5, Randy Brantley, Chowan's director of foundation and corporate relations, traveled to Clifton's office located in Cary's MacGregor Park. In the following interview, Clifton discusses her family, her business and her obvious love and support for Chowan College.

RB: Suzanne, you are a 1964 graduate of Chowan College and a 1991 Distinguished Alumna Award recipient. Tell me about your memories of Chowan College.

SC: Well, Randy, as I think back now, I can say I was very apprehensive. I didn't know what to expect. It was a time in my life—and I am sure most students feel this way—when I was leaving my family and doing something other than being right at home every day. I knew that I wanted to do something more, but I didn't know what it was going to be. I think many students do that.

Today there is a greater need for professors, staff—whomever—to direct young people into the workforce or life itself. They've had more experience than these young people. I think guidance and direction are needed.

Now, for my fondest memories. I do remember a lot of the professors, but as a person grows older, she can't put them all in place. If I sat down and thought about each subject, I probably could put them in place.

The other night I was at the opening dinner for staff and faculty and saw Jim Chamblee. I understand Warren Sexton is coming back on an interim basis. I'll always remember Mr. Sexton because he was a very unique person, and I'm sure he has affected a lot of people in positive ways. Anna Belle Crouch was the kind of person who cared about students. These people stand out in my mind.

I felt that I could go to someone and get help or could get direction in my subjects or about what was happening on campus. I didn't get lost, so to speak, in the process.

The one thing that does stand out in my mind about Chowan, though, is the day that the president of the United States was assassinated. I was walking across campus. I had just come out of a government class. I don't believe I'll ever forget where I was or what was happening, and the results of that weekend. We turned around and went back into class and talked.

That is the very sort of approach that is needed in colleges today. A college can affect a student's life in so many ways.

RB: You're going to make this interview very easy for me, I can see.

SC: Why?

RB: I think that's a great answer, particularly in light of what's happening on campus right now with curriculum transformation and with professors asking questions about how they redefine their roles.

People are asking questions about the job market? What is the demand out there right now, and how can professors prepare students for life, as well as a particular subject. So you're speaking the language.

SC: My business is in the middle of it, and we see so many young people. We employ over 500 people. In the next 3 to 5 years, we're going to employ 5000 to 7000 people. Look at how many lives we're going to affect.

When they come to us, we've got to have them ready to understand what it is that's going to be happening to them in their life. We can't just start when they get here. We've got to have some kind of foundation.

RB: That's a big responsibility on both ends of the situation. Now, tell me about your family.

SC: Well, I'm married. My husband owns a company himself, so therefore, we don't get much time to talk to one another unless we happen to be in a car that we're driving three hours like we did on the trip to Chowan.

RB: You probably have a good relationship.

SC: We do. I have two sons. And then Larry has three children, two sons and a daughter, so we really have five children. We have three daughters-in-law and five grandchildren.

And grandchildren are just wonderful. You can love them and give them back and watch the parents go through what they need to go through.

My family is very special to me and very important. I am just trying to get my life in a position where I can enjoy them more.

RB: And you're originally from Roanoke Rapids.

SC: Oh yes.

RB: Do you have family there now?

SC: No, I do not. No family whatsoever there. My last relative, who was my aunt—and almost my second mother—died two years ago this coming November.

RB: Let's get into business a little bit. Founding a temporary staffing agency in 1984 was a very timely decision. What prompted you to do so at that point in your life?

SC: As you know, I graduated from Chowan in 1964. By 1984, I should have been gearing down, but I wasn't. I was gearing up. I taught school when my children were growing up—in interim positions because at that time I also had the luxury of being at home with them.

I chose interim positions because I am the kind of person who has to be doing something. I can't just be washing clothes or playing golf

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SUZANNE CLIFTON . . . distinguished alumna

Founded company in 1984; sales now in millions of dollars annually

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