

## Professor elected to Canton Board of Aldermen

By Burton Hodges  
Staff Writer

The very essence of Brevard College is experiential education. It's more than just our mission statement, it's the means by which we operate. Whether it's a semester of immersion in nature, an exercise science course full of student athletes or a journalism class that requires weekly submissions to the school paper, Brevard College relies on the world that surrounds our campus to educate as equally as much as the classroom.

On Tuesday evening, Brevard College took another step further in living our mission. Dr. Ralph Hamlett, associate professor of political communication, was elected, alongside three other candidates, to serve as alderman for his hometown of Canton, N.C.

Among the six candidates running for the four vacant alderman seats, Hamlett finished fourth with a total of 316 votes. He will join Carole Edwards (375 votes), Zeb Smathers (362) and Gail Mull (359) in office to help direct the affairs of the town of Canton for the next two years.

Born and raised in Canton, Hamlett has a rich history with the town. He returned

in 1996 to raise his own family inside its comfortable mountain hollow.

Despite his connection to the community, he described the campaign as an "uphill battle to begin with."

At no point was the campaign easy. He had, as he put it, "basically zero" name recognition. "Had I run when I was 30," he said, "it would've been a different story, but my father retired as the police chief 41 years ago. His name is distant memory.

"I work in Brevard," he added. "Brevard College is my community, so I really had to get my name out there."

Hamlett's campaign required monumental effort in all territories. "He had to hit the ground full throttle, and make up ground that others did not," said Alderman-elect Gail Mull.

As he saw it, Hamlett was an outsider; unlike many in Canton, he felt that his doctorate degree, infamous red Converse All-Stars and daily dedication to neck-ties would distance him from the people of the small blue-collar town of Canton. In fact, Ralph was even told during a luncheon by a former Alderman of Canton to "never wear a tie again."

On several occasions, the local newspaper grossly misspelled his name or left him off of a list of candidates completely. On any given day this semester, Hamlett could have been found walking the halls of the McClarty-Goodson building shaking his head and muttering under his breath, "This campaign is an absolute nightmare."

"I have taught political science all my life and have worked on campaigns throughout my career. I had no clue what I was getting into," he said.

The last week of the campaign would prove to be one of the most trying times of this career. While preparing for the final push eight days shy of the election, Hamlett's father-in-law passed away in Kannapolis, N.C. He received the news while commuting to Brevard for morning class, and he immediately turned his car around, grabbed the family and left for Kannapolis, virtually abandoning all hope for a last-minute push in his uphill battle.

"I would've taught my students that leaving town the last week of the campaign was political suicide," he said, "but I did what I know was right. My family always comes first, even if it would cost me the election."

Disaster would continue to surround Dr. Hamlett as the election drew closer. While in Kannapolis tending to his wife Susan's family, her grandmother suffered a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital.

"It was a week from hell," he said.

Susan's grandmother would survive, but the Hamletts did not return to Canton until 11 p.m. on Sunday, just two days prior to Election Day.

Anticipating defeat, Hamlett campaigned as hard as he could and left the rest up to the work he had put in all semester. The polls closed at 7:30 p.m. and without an exit poll, he had very little evidence to suggest any hope.

His daughter called the election around 8 p.m. Tuesday evening. The votes then being reported indicated he would be defeated by a landslide, so they changed the incoming results on WLOS-TV to watch "Supernatural."

His mother went to sleep and his youngest daughter Suzanne consoled him by saying, "I still love you daddy."

Somewhere around 9:30 p.m. he began to



**R**alph Hamlett (middle) and other Canton Alderman candidates along with Mayor Mike Ray began their campaigns at the polls as early as 7:30 a.m.