

Valley Realty Group President Steps In As New JMU Board Rector

By EMILY SHARRER

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HARRISONBURG — Harrisonburg native Joe Funkhouser, president of Coldwell Banker Funkhouser Realtors, did not attend James Madison University. But the well-known business leader does have a storied past with the institution — one that extends back more than 25 years.

Funkhouser, 67, has served on the JMU Foundation's board of directors and on the Executive Advisory Board for the College of Business. He is also credited with chairing some of the university's capital campaigns, including one for the Robert and Frances Plecker Athletic Performance Center.

Last month, Funkhouser stepped into his newest role with the university, as the rector of the 15 member board of visitors. Funkhouser will succeed another Harrisonburg resident and businessman in the position, James Hartman, who has served his maximum two consecutive terms on the board. And yet another city resident, Lois Forbes, serves as vice rector.

In the role of rector, Funkhouser will work directly with JMU President Jonathan Alger, conduct board meetings and appoint board members to serve on the board's six committees.

"I'm looking forward to it and feel honored to have that position," said Funkhouser, who was appointed by Gov. Bob McDonnell to a second term on the board of visitors in July. The governor appoints all of the board's members, but the board itself is charged with electing one of its own rector.

Funkhouser says communication — especially making sure everyone is on the same page as far as the board's and state's vision for JMU — is key to a successful tenure, for both himself and the entire board.

"I feel that the job begins with understanding the commonwealth's goals for higher education," he said.

That includes appropriately seeing to it that the board, which chooses university presidents and appoints administration and faculty, chooses a president who understands those goals as well, said Funkhouser.

Differing opinions between some members of the University of Virginia board of visitors and President Teresa Sullivan is what landed the U.Va. board — especially Funkhouser's counterpart, Rector Helen Dragas — in hot water with the university community last month. Dragas spearheaded the ouster of Sullivan, who Dragas said was not effecting change fast enough at the school. The board, facing pressure from faculty, students, lawmakers and even McDonnell, subsequently reappointed the popular Sullivan.

"The board of visitors does have a pretty large responsibility to make sure the individual who's leading

the university and managing the university is someone who can go along with not only the mission for the university, but the commonwealth's goals as well for higher education," said Funkhouser. "I cannot speak as to what or why what went on at U.Va. over the president's position, but I have no reservation whatsoever of going into this position."

Funkhouser says his and the board's job lies in meeting state and federal educational goals, including turning out more graduates — especially in science, technology, engineering and math fields — and ensuring the accessibility and affordability of a JMU education. Boards of visitors at the state-run universities are responsible for approving budgets, policies and the schools' top administrators and faculty, and making other decisions affecting the schools' long-term direction.

Holding a leadership position is nothing new for Funkhouser, who has a breadth of experience on local, state and national boards, including the Virginia and National associations of Realtors, Rockingham Memorial Hospital board of directors, Harrisonburg Electric Commission, RMH Capital Campaign and Rockingham Heritage Bank Board.

He also served on the Virginia Real Estate Board from 1995 to 2003 and was reappointed by McDonnell to the board in 2010. Nearly seven of the first eight years Funkhouser served on that board were as chairman.

In 2009, Funkhouser was named the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce Business Person of the Year.

"Any time you hold chairmanship positions you learn a great deal of not only procedures, but how to deal with your fellow board members and how to deal with [the] public when you need to," said Funkhouser.

Moving forward, he says he has plans to "continue to run the board the way it has been run," which he says is according to Virginia statute and with faculty and students in mind.

"I think JMU is one of the best higher education institutions in Virginia. ... The mission at JMU probably tells the whole story," said Funkhouser, alluding to JMU's mission statement: "We are a community committed to preparing students to be educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives."

Said Funkhouser: "I think if all institutions did that, we might have a better world."

Contact Emily Sharrer at 574-6-286 or esharrer@dnronline.com