

Rutgers' new president: it's a time for innovation

By Gene Racz
Staff Writer

NEW BRUNSWICK — Rutgers University's new president, Dr. Robert L. Barchi, outlined his vision for the institution on Wednesday morning, calling for a change in higher education's funding, function and focus.

Barchi — a neuroscientist, medical neurologist and experienced academic administrator — was unanimously elected by the Rutgers Board of Governors, then spoke to an overflow crowd at Winants Hall.

"The business plan for higher education that we have all lived with for the past 50 years simply will not sustain us for the next 50 years," Barchi said.

"We need a fundamental change in the way we teach, the way we do research and the way we finance those entities as we move forward.

"We need innovative, constructive movement in that direction."

Barchi, who will take office as Rutgers' 20th president on Sept. 1, succeeds Richard L. McCormick. Barchi comes to Rutgers from Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, where he is president. Prior to Jefferson, Barchi was at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was a member of the faculty from 1972, serving most recently as Penn's provost and chief academic officer.

Barchi said Rutgers was positioned at "the right time and the right place" to be a national leader in redefining the structure of higher education.

"We have fundamental issues to deal with," he said. "I think we have to restructure these large land-grant universities into public-private hybrids that can satisfy their role as flagship universities for states like New Jersey. We have to be more sustainable, less buffeted by year-to-year shifts in state funding and economic environment. We have to be more diversified, more pro-active in looking at alternative revenue streams."

Barchi outlined a few approaches he thinks could help Rutgers be proactive in defining its own destiny. They include:

» Increasing emphasis on funded research, particularly in the area of life sciences, where, he said spending in the U.S. continues to increase;

» Partnering with major industries and small businesses in the state;

» Creating novel educational products that take Rutgers beyond simply existing as a degree-granting entity;

» Transforming the university's intellectual property into economic benefits for the state and the institution;

» Increasing private philanthropy.

"In short, what we have to do here is create a new concept of higher education at the state-university level which is a public-private hybrid," Barchi said.

At 65, Barchi was given a base salary of \$650,000. His contract states that he will hold office as president "indefinitely at the pleasure of the Board of Governors," subject to terms of his contractual

agreement.

Barchi said Rutgers cannot lose sight that it is first and foremost an educator of undergraduates that he called "the cornerstone of our mission moving forward." His introductory remarks drew loud, sustained applause when he said that when he talks of being the best at the undergraduate-business, he meant not only the Rutgers campus in New Brunswick but the campuses in Newark and Camden, as well.

Merger controversy

A controversy is raging over the proposed merger of Rutgers-Camden into Rowan University as proposed by Gov. Chris Christie and some senior state Democratic leaders.

"I'm not taking a political stance here, I'm stating a fact, that we are a single university of three campuses, which all contribute to what makes this university great," Barchi said. "The undergraduate experiences in Newark and in Camden are not necessarily synonymous with New Brunswick but add their own value and their own



Robert L. Barchi (right) was named Rutgers University president on Wednesday. MARK R. SULLIVAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

set of perspectives with what we have to offer.

"Keep in mind that they were part of this institution for a half-century and longer, before Rutgers became the state university of New Jersey."

Barchi emphasized the importance of including faculty in the governing process and strategic planning of the university. At Jefferson, he said, he created a faculty senate to facilitate greater input.

"I am looking forward to having an active and participatory role of the

faculty in the joint governance of this organization," Barchi said. "If the faculty is not on board with where you're going, you're not going."

Barchi said he also would do his utmost to avoid polarization regarding union contract negotiations. Some of Rutgers' unions recently experienced a two-year salary freeze that sparked numerous protests. The university has worked out settlement agreements with some of its major unions within the past few

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months.

Lucye Millerand, president of Union of Rutgers Administrators-American Federation of Teachers (URA-AFT) Local 1766, welcomed Barchi's comments.

"I think the Rutgers staff — those of us who are not faculty but do all the other work besides teaching — would love to see a new relationship with Old Queens, which is how we refer to the Rutgers central administration and management," Millerand said. "We would love to see mutual respect and two-way communication. That has not been the case in the recent past."

Barchi is married to Francis Harper Barchi, a senior fellow in the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania, where she is engaged in education and research activities relating to international research ethics. Born in Philadelphia and raised in Westfield, Barchi said, his grandfather emigrated from Italy in 1910 and first settled in Raritan Borough.

Gene Racz writes for the Home News Tribune.