



Tuesday, September 21, 2004

Ken Hightower appointed dean of SHS

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

After acting as interim dean for the past year, Ken Hightower has been appointed dean of the **School of Health Sciences** (SHS), pending approval of the Board of Trustees.

He is replacing Ron Olson, currently interim director of grants, contracts and sponsored research, as part of a phased retirement from the university.

"I'm excited about taking on these new responsibilities because these are exciting times with so many opportunities and challenges," Hightower said. "My mission at OU is to lead us towards greatness, to help transform us into a school that community leaders and professionals come to for solutions, ideas and new developments."

The school is home to programs such as exercise science, occupational safety, physical therapy, and health, wellness, health promotion and injury prevention.

Hightower's vision is for SHS to become a premier academic institution that students seek and compete to gain admittance.

"I want us to have a stellar reputation that says if you're interested in a health care career, we probably have something for you in one of our 10 distinct areas of study, all of which provide theory in the classroom and real-world, clinical experiences in numerous intern sites throughout the state," he said. "The students we educate and stimulate today will seek innovative, affordable prevention and pre-symptom health care treatments that will ultimately save our failing health care system in America."

Hightower will concentrate on adding faculty with clinical experience, such as molecular laboratory science or virtual imaging, a science-based technology that will pave the way for pre-symptom health care and medicine.

"Our biggest assets are our health science students," he said. "They not only want a good, broad college education but want to advance to either graduate studies or entry-level health care professions. This motivates our unique faculty, comprised of both academic and clinical specialists who provide an enriched, diverse environment that promotes exploration, inquiry and compassionate caring about people's health."

The demand for physical therapists and medical laboratory scientists and technologists who focus on radiation treatment and nuclear medicine diagnostics continues to grow.

"One of our greatest challenges is growth, especially in areas of student enrollment so we can begin to match the considerable and steady efflux of baby boomers from the health job market," Hightower said.

To kick off its new vision and initiative, SHS is planning a daylong event called "Healthy Spirit Day" on Wednesday, Nov. 10, in the Recreation Center.

"This will be an annual event to celebrate staying alive and healthy," Hightower said.

Sponsored by SHS, the Recreation Center and University Human Resources, the event will feature both graduate and undergraduate students presenting posters on the latest advances and news in health care. Exhibitors from the health care community will showcase state-of-the-art technologies, products and services.

Keynote speaker Donald Bronn will discuss his pioneering work in pre-symptom medicine that provides virtual scans of both arteries and the GI tract to identify cysts that may some day progress to colon cancer.

Hightower is also working to recruit active volunteers for the SHS Board of Visitors.

“The members of this current board are all very active in the community and have expressed a desire to become engaged in issues that face our school and community,” he said.

Board member Vanette Vereeke, president of M. Rose Construction, already has committed financial support to fund initiatives in the program, including the upcoming Healthy Spirit Day, in addition to other sponsors, including Crittenton Hospital.

“Vanette is a dear friend and graduate of OU,” Hightower said.

Hightower joined OU in 1974 as a post-doctoral fellow under the director of the Kresge Eye Institute to research eye diseases that lead to vision loss or blindness. He was awarded a National Institutes of Health (NIH) fellowship award to fund his salary and intended to stay for a few years. He spent 25 years researching aging and eye disease before joining the School of Health Sciences as a professor of health sciences, teaching and developing courses for the school.

“Thirty years later, here I am,” he said. “OU is hard to leave, easy to love.”

The Board of Trustees is scheduled to vote on Hightower's appointment at its Oct. 6 meeting.

SUMMARY

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