

Tri-Lakes Edition

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MALVERN

Ouachita Tech seeks new name, image

BY WAYNE BRYAN
Staff Writer

What's in a name? For Ouachita Technical College, maybe a misperception.

After almost 20 years as a college, OTC is seeking a new name that breaks away from an outdated image and can better reflect what the college is and whom its students are.

"For 20 years before it became a college, it was a vocational-technical school," said Barry Ballard, OTC's president. "It still has that image, especially with the parents and grandparents of our students."

Today, Ouachita Tech still helps students earn technical and proficiency certificates in fields such as computer repair, hair care and truck driving. The school offers a career center for high school students to learn welding, equipment maintenance and auto service.

However, the school offers as-

childhood education, accounting, management, criminal justice and teaching. These degrees are the stepping stones to bachelor's degrees at four-year colleges and universities.

In addition, many students attend Ouachita Tech to take core curriculum or general studies courses that then transfer as credit toward degrees at four-year schools.

"We have Ph.D.'s in history, biology, psychology and the medical sciences teaching here," Ballard said. "Yet this year, an educator who has worked with the school for many years in the community, asked if we offered college courses."

The classes students can take as part of their degree programs at other colleges and universities include mathematics, English, world literature, physics, political science, economics, and humanities studies in music, art and theater.

The trustees for Ouachita Tech



RUSTY HUBBARD

After almost 20 years, Ouachita Technical College is seeking a new name to break away from an outdated image.

school's name before, but the need was highlighted by a series of focus groups brought in to look at why students attend the variety of schools in

"We talked to local high school students, and they could say why they wanted to go to Henderson State

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University, National Parks Community College, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff," Ballard said. "They didn't have a reason why they would come to OTC if they were going on to a four-year college."

The problem was that most high school students knew only about the vocational training available.

"The word 'Technical' is killing us," the college president said. "People are thinking something different than we want them to think. We are not reaching those we want to reach."

Charged with the sensitive and far-reaching job of picking a new name for the school is Martin Eggenesperger, the college's vice president for instruction, who chairs the name-change committee.

The committee includes faculty and staff, the college communications director, Seventh District Court Judge John Cole, State Rep. Mike Burris, members of the board of trustees, and members of the Malvern-Hot Spring County community.

Committee members decided that the name should reflect the "variety of educational services of the college," and "position the college for growth and expansion in the

years to come." The name would also "convey a more dynamic approach to the mission of the college."

The committee has been collecting hundreds of names from alumni, community members, other colleges and the school's Web site.

The committee narrowed the list to nine possible names, then reduced that number to five on Friday.

The committee was given a list of don'ts for the name. The new name cannot mention "community," "junior" or "technical," Eggenesperger said. The school will not be named after a person, and there will be no directional or restrictive term, such as Malvern, Hot Spring County, South or Central.

"Those rules did tie our hands," Eggenesperger said. "It also focused our attention."

Without revealing the names, the committee chairman said Ouachita remains a popular suggestion, and words like "polytechnic" are a good approach, but the committee is seeking something broader.

After more study and research, Ballard said the committee will present two or three names to the board of trustees.

Once the board makes its final decision, it will not be official until the new name is approved by the Arkansas Legislature, probably in the 2011 session.

The name will be a legacy

for those making the selection.

"The name will be steeped in history and opportunities," Eggenesperger said. "It's scary, but I am comfortable that not everyone will be happy with what is selected."

Ballard said the name change will not be expensive for the college. He said most materials for the school, such as the catalog of classes, are reprinted every year and that school letterhead is electronic and generated with each new letter.

"There will be signs and this box of business cards," Ballard said, opening his desk drawer. "We need new signs, and I said, 'Wait until we have a new name.'"

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