

Burnett tapped as next William Carey University president

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (Special) – William Carey University (WCU) administrator Ben Burnett will succeed the retiring Tommy King on Aug. 16 as president of the Baptist-affiliated university based in Hattiesburg.

“The Board of Trustees is very thankful for Dr. King’s lo



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Burnett holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership (2002) from the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) in Hattiesburg; a Master's degree in Music Education (1989) from USM; and a Bachelor's degree in Music Education (1986) from USM.

Burnett began his career in education in 1986 as assistant band director for Meridian High School in Meridian. In 1988, he returned home to Lamar County to become band director at his alma mater, Oak Grove High School, and grew the band from 50 members to more than 220 members.

In 1997, Burnett moved into administration as principal of Oak Grove Middle School in Lamar County, a post he held for 10 years.

During that time, he was president of the Mississippi Association of Middle Level Education and was chosen as Mississippi's Middle School Principal of the Year.

In August 2007, Burnett was elected superintendent of the Lamar County School District and re-elected in 2011. During his tenure, Lamar County Schools was elevated to an "A" school district by the Mississippi Department of Education.

Burnett retired from public education in June 2014 and accepted the position of dean of the WCU School of Education, which has an enrollment of 1,800 undergraduate and graduate-level education majors. In April 2020, he was named WCU executive vice president.

Burnett has served as president of Mississippi Bandmasters and received the A.E. McClain Outstanding Young Band Director award. In 2013, he was inducted to the Southeast Mississippi Band Directors' Association Hall of Fame.

He has been married to Denice Burnett, a retired special education director and WCU graduate, for 30 years. They have one son, Lane, who is recent WCU graduate.

Ben Burnett is an active member of Willow Pointe Church in Hattiesburg, where he serves as an elder, small group facilitator, and drummer for the praise band.

Burnett succeeds Tommy King, who became WCU president in 2007. King's total service to WCU as a faculty member and administrator goes back six decades. He is the first WCU to serve as president of the university. Before ascending to the presidency, he served as a WCU trustee, adjunct professor, department chair, and executive vice president.

During his tenure as president, King oversaw unprecedented growth in enrollment. The number of students has more than doubled, from 2,500 to more than 5,200. During the same time, the number of residential students in Hattiesburg has increased four-fold and six new dorms have been opened.

"We are elated to be making this announcement," said Odean Busby, chairman of the Presidential Search Committee. "After a

seven-month search and interview process, we are very pleased to find our new president right here on campus. Dr. Burnett has an exciting vision for William Carey and a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing higher education,”

A public reception honoring King and his wife Sandra, also a WCU graduate, will be held in the King Student Center on the Hattiesburg campus on July 28, from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. Inauguration ceremonies for Burnett are being planned for later this fall.