

For Campbell law school, Raleigh is classroom in itself.

News Date: 10/15/2007

Outlet: North Carolina Lawyers Weekly

Campbell University's announcement that it would move its law school from Buies Creek to Raleigh by the fall of 2009 was in keeping with the urbanization of the state's law schools.

Elon Law School in Greensboro and the **Charlotte School of Law** both opened in downtown buildings in recent years, where they have discovered that their locations offer advantages to school and city alike.

Being either in or close to the city center was a prime factor in the placement of our school, said **Charlotte dean Eugene Clark**, whose school, like Elon, is working towards full ABA accreditation. As in real estate, location is everything.

In a press conference Oct. 4 on Capitol Square, Campbell said it would relocate from its rural main campus in Harnett County to 107,000-square-foot Hillsborough Place in downtown Raleigh -- just a gavel's throw away from the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, General Assembly, federal and state courts and a host of law offices.

The building will need to be almost completely renovated for its library, classrooms, study areas and office facilities, said Melissa A. Essary, who is in her second year as dean of the Norman Adrian Wiggins Law School.

School officials said the cost of the move could range between \$20 and \$25 million.

For the school's sake, the price should be worth it. By moving to a downtown, she said, the school will open itself to a much wider classroom.

Tony Gurley, chair of the Wake County Board of Commissioners, said the city would work with Campbell to provide students and faculty with access to the city's legal facilities for moot court programs, internships and other partnership opportunities.

We believe the move to Raleigh will create alliances that we have yet to even imagine, Essary said.

Some of the advantages Campbell could enjoy in its new setting can already be seen at either Elon or Charlotte.

Elon's 84,000-square-foot facility, which opened in 2006, is located within blocks of federal district and bankruptcy courts, county courthouses, law firms and the American Judicature Society's Institute on Forensic Science and Public Policy. The school's building also houses the N.C. Business Court.

Our students and faculty are in a hub for what's happening in the legal profession, said the school's founding dean, Leary Davis.

The location also has facilitated the school's mission of giving students hands-on legal training through its preceptor program, in which students are paired with practicing attorneys as mentors.

We are able to bring in lawyers who come to class and provide feedback, and they can bring students into the office and see them in action, Davis said. They get an understanding of what kind of lawyers they will be, and that helps with placement.

Charlotte, the state's first for-profit law school, currently operates out of three buildings. It will move into a new 102,000-square-foot building in the city's Bryant Park area by the fall of 2008.

The city benefits from the law school as much as the school does from the city, Clark said.

For instance, the school's law library offers the largest collection of legal resources in Charlotte, drawing students from a nearby community college's paralegal program as well as attorneys and judges.

The school also provides legal clinics and other services in areas such as domestic violence, immigration and the environment.

It would be harder to do in a rural setting, Clark said. It's a huge component of our program: Our students provide a great service and learn lawyering by lawyering.

Raleigh previously was the country's largest state capital without a law school within its city limits. Clark said it was surprising that it had gone so long without one.

Capital cities and law schools go well together, he said. There's a natural synergy there.

That Campbell is the school that will settle into Raleigh is no surprise to Davis, who was Campbell's law dean from 1976-1986.

We had heard of other schools locating in urban areas, and that was part of our strategic planning, said Davis, who said the school considered making the move in a 1984 self-study.

The implication was that if Campbell didn't go to Raleigh, someone else would, he said.

An urban setting could present drawbacks, such as pricier housing for students and parking problems. However, Essary said those issues were all considered in a feasibility study provided to Campbell's board of trustees before they approved the move Oct. 3.

Essary said about one-third of the school's students already live in Raleigh, and she does not foresee housing difficulties for its relatively small, 340-member student body. The building also will feature 200 parking spaces.

A benefit of the location will be the availability of more career choices for the spouses of students and faculty, she said, making the school a more attractive location.

An urban setting opens many doors and offers more extensive options, she said.

Campbell has achieved significant success at its rural campus, with graduates posting the highest overall state bar passage rate among the state's law schools for the last 16 years.

Some of the success can be attributed to studying in a remote, tight-knit setting in Buies Creek, said third-year student Jake Gehran.

There could be more distractions and obstacles with the school being in Raleigh, but there are always those obstacles in life and the practice of law, he said. I think the faculty and curriculum will still be demanding.

Philip Brown, also a third-year student, said the exposure that Campbell's new location will bring it outweighs any possible drawbacks to leaving its former home.

Buies Creek is a great place to study law, but like one of our professors said, you don't really find that out until you get there, Brown said. The program's not going to change, and the heritage is not going to change, either.

Copyright © 2007 Dolan Media Company