Dr. Sharon Gaber, Chancellor, UNC Charlotte

Charlotte is a great city and it richly deserves a great university, the recently installed chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte told Rotarians.

UNC Charlotte and the city of Charlotte have a shared history and common destiny, said Dr. Sharon Gaber, and the school will help ensure Charlotte remains a great city.

"We will continue to push this university forward to be even stronger," she promised.

Gaber took the reins of UNC Charlotte on July 1, 2020. She is the school's fifth chancellor, succeeding Dean Colvard, E.K. Fretwell, Jim Woodward and Phil Dubois. Previously, she was president of the University of Toledo.

Before accepting her new position, Gaber learned about Charlotte ranking last out of the country's 50 largest cities in upward mobility. That didn't scare her off.

"I was inspired by how the city has responded," she said. "And I became incredibly excited by the potential for UNC Charlotte to play an even more significant role in changing that narrative."

The university eight miles northeast of The Square is committed to providing accessible, affordable, quality higher education, she said. Fall enrollment exceeded 30,000 for the first time. Incoming freshmen compiled an average GPA of 3.9.

Many of those 4,000 freshmen were drawn by strong academic programs. Gaber said the university is the state's top producer of computing degrees, is among its top three in producing secondary school teachers and graduates more than 250 nurses annually.

More offerings are mushrooming. UNC Charlotte opened North Carolina's first School of Data Science last year and this month announced it will offer the state's initial degree in that discipline. Collaboration between UNC Charlotte and business leaders made that possible, Gaber said. Other recent offerings include a master's in computer engineering and a bachelor's in writing, rhetoric and digital studies.

"Our part-time MBA program is nationally ranked and we are the region's main source of continuing education in technology, business, healthcare and education," she added.

Value looms large, with average in-state tuition and fees at $7,300. Three in four students receive financial aid.

First generation college students make up more than a third of enrollment and about the same proportion identify as racial or ethnic minorities. About 11,000 come from underserved or underrepresented backgrounds. Around 2,000 are international students but 90 percent of enrollment hails from North Carolina.

More than 70 percent of recent graduates remained in the Charlotte area.

Gaber strongly promoted the University's robust research. She highlighted a research team sampling campus wastewater for early signs of potential COVID-19 outbreaks. Featured in The New York Times, the work is sponsored by a $9 million state appropriation.

UNC Charlotte seeks research partners, Gaber said, adding that there is untapped potential for investment to dramatically impact the Charlotte region.

UNC Charlotte will be a great university, Gaber said, and she summed up what these institutions do: "We explore. We discover. We teach. We share and we engage."

By Elly Clary

*A recording of the program is available here:
https://zoom.us/rec/share/uPUnyBTn8WPTspZ4TOJSLuyp5YJzjVTkYc9-THPFH8_hd2R_xNbweCnksq1c6gkO.nOMfSkRZn4k5SZkF?startTime=1611683505000
(The password option has been removed.)
*This link will only be available for one month from the recording date.