

A Chat with Chancellor Nancy Cable

by Judy LaMée

A chat with Chancellor Nancy Cable opens with a broad smile that reaches her lively eyes and a firm handshake that extends the feeling of a warm welcome. Named the eighth chancellor of the University of North Carolina Asheville in August 2018, she brings to this campus an impressive resumé through academic ranks of colleges and universities and, most recently, a strong record of achievement as president of the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations in Florida.

Noting she was attracted to UNC Asheville by the strength of its faculty, its small but leaderly academic program, the presence of OLLI, as well as the university's location in a city of entrepreneurs and brilliant, successful retirees. "What a neat combination," she enthused. "I was so honored to be chosen. I immediately said 'yes'."

Early in her career, Nancy Cable determined she wanted to be a leader in higher education. A staunch believer in the foundational value of liberal arts education, she was drawn here by the university's mission as not only a public liberal arts college but also its reputation at delivering on that mission.

She continues, "We're a gem in the University of North Carolina system as well as nationally. We're a leading institution in public liberal arts, as well as the national headquarters for the Journal of Undergraduate Research. Our students, as early as their sophomore years, are doing original research alongside our faculty. Institutions with more elite names don't always allow their undergraduates to be engaged in this kind of research until they are in graduate school." In fact, UNC Asheville pioneered undergraduate research, founding the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) more than 30 years ago.

Learning there was an OLLI presence on this campus was a strong factor in her consideration to come here. While at Bates College, she had hosted Bernard Osher, founder of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, on a daylong visit there. As well, she and Mary Bitterman, then President of the Bernard Osher Foundation, enjoyed working together on public television issues. Impressed by the OLLI reputation and commitment to lifelong learning led to her appreciation of its value at UNC Asheville.

A thoughtful listener, eager to deepen her understanding of the priorities and passions of UNC Asheville's faculty and staff, as well as perceived needs campuswide, Nancy Cable held a series of 11 listening sessions in the fall. Of the 10-11 people in each session, the Chancellor says, "I learned so much about the visions and aspirations of the faculty in those sessions. They gave me real insight."

Enthusiastically, the Chancellor continues, stating she is undaunted by the level of work here, because she feels it is such a privilege. "Not every day is easy, but every day is a privilege. The staff knows how to manage the tremendous load, balancing audiences, faculty, leaders, students, alumni, city leaders. The joy," she says, "is making sure we do a very good job executing on details. I see as many people as I can in a day, dealing with various constituencies. I use weekends to recharge, go to games and such."

Beyond campus, Nancy Cable sits on three national boards: Ken Burns' Better Angels Society, National Trust for the Humanities and the National Council for Family Philanthropy. She is delighted that the Ken Burns documentary series *Country Music* will debut in Asheville on April 2.

She speaks proudly as the mother of two grown daughters, Katie Wells, a history teacher, and Gretchen Wells, a *New York Times* video editor. Both daughters have Asheville ties; as young girls they attended a summer program at the Asheville School, which their mom describes as part camp, part study.

In closing, the Chancellor shared that, “Working with young people is one of the great joys of my career. It is a true privilege to work with the hearts and minds of young adults, as they are the future.”