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AWARDS

Gardner-Webb President Dr. William Downs Named One of Charlotte's 2022 Most Admired CEOs

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JUNE 6, 2022



Downs Selected by Charlotte Business Journal as One of Only Three Honorees in Education Category

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb University President Dr. William Downs has been chosen to receive an elite honor. The Charlotte Business Journal (CBJ) selected him as one of Charlotte's 2022 Most Admired CEOs. The awards recognize leaders who have a strong vision for their companies, have shown commitment to culture in the workplace and made significant contributions to the Charlotte community.

Downs was among 40 honorees handpicked from more than 140 nominations made by members of the business community. Further, he was one of only three selected from the education category. Nominations for the award are limited to CEOs who have been an executive leader in their businesses or organizations for at least three years. A CBJ data team led by Amy Shapiro researches the nominations and presents the information, which is meticulously studied by CBJ Editor-in-Chief Robert Morris, and the other senior members of the editorial team, including Jen Wilson and Erik Spanberg.

"I am excited to see Dr. Downs was selected by our newsroom as a Most Admired CEO for 2022," praised CBJ Market President and Publisher TJ McCullough. "Since he has arrived at Gardner Webb, he has moved the needle and continues to do so. I am proud to be an alumnus."

Downs began his term as Gardner-Webb University's 13th president on July 1, 2019. He was selected unanimously by the Gardner-Webb Board of Trustees after a highly competitive one-year national search.



- ▲ Dr. William Downs poses with his family at the small inauguration ceremony held during the early days of COVID-19.
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“It is very fitting that Dr. Downs was chosen for this award,” commended Board of Trustee Chair Gary Smith. “Since Dr. Downs arrived at Gardner-Webb University three years ago, he has worked tirelessly to promote our great university. Under Dr. Downs’ guidance, we have experienced a significant upgrade in our social media presence as well as the marketing of our university. He has visited numerous high school principals, community college officials, and others to spread the good news about a Gardner-Webb education. Dr. Downs has vigorously promoted the Gardner-Webb campus in Charlotte to the community as an opportunity for us to serve that area more effectively. The Board of Trustees is proud of Dr. Downs’ hard work and being selected as one of Charlotte’s Most Admired CEOs.”

Since his arrival on the GWU campus, Downs has championed significant improvements in every area and has remained firmly committed to Gardner-Webb’s Christian mission and purpose. “We have a strong team and a distinctive mission,” affirmed Downs. “Like everybody else, Gardner-Webb had to navigate its share of unanticipated challenges over the past three years; perhaps better than many, however, we have seized upon new opportunities to reinforce the quality of our educational products, to extend our brand recognition, and to sharpen our plans for serving the region. I couldn’t be prouder to work alongside the professionals at GWU.”

Some of the accomplishments include streamlining the core curriculum, increasing enrollment with record numbers of new undergraduates, hiring new leadership in advancement, business and academics, leading the first athletics brand update in over 35 years, expanding grant and research work on campus, reorganizing the academic units and securing funds for a new amphitheater complex.



▲ Dr. William Downs speaks during the University's first annual Memorial Day Prayer Service in 2021.



▲ Dr. Downs meets new mascot, Bo.

Downs' career spans over two decades of service in higher education. Before GWU, he was dean of the Thomas Harriot College of Arts & Sciences at East Carolina University (ECU) in Greenville, N.C. He had been at ECU since 2014 and was also the W. Keats Sparrow Distinguished Chair in the Liberal Arts and a professor of political science. He's also held positions at Georgia State University and was a research fellow at Harvard University's Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies.

A Raleigh native, Downs earned his Bachelor of Arts in political science (with a minor in journalism) from North Carolina State University (Raleigh) in 1988, and his Master of Arts ('90) and Doctoral ('94) degrees in political science from Emory University (Atlanta). Downs is married to Kimberly Harwood Downs and has two children, Rachel and Bradley.

Downs and the other winners will be recognized for their achievements at The Most Admired CEO Awards dinner on June 16 in Charlotte.



Dr. Downs joins a panel discussion on higher education at and event hosted by the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance.



▲ Dr. Downs speaks at the Veteran's Day Service.

About the Charlotte Business Journal

The Charlotte Business Journal (<https://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/>) features comprehensive business news about Charlotte and provides tools to help businesses grow, network and hire. Providing more than just in-depth coverage, the Charlotte Business Journal also delivers industry trends, tips and strategies, plus award-winning critical analysis.

About Gardner-Webb

Gardner-Webb University (<https://gardner-webb.edu/>) is North Carolina's recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to six professional schools, 14 academic departments, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.