Carson new leader of research center

Search for LITE CEO to start in new year

BY MARSHA SILLS
msills@theadvocate.com

LAFAYETTE — The chairwoman of the Louisiana Immersive Technologies Enterprise Center commission, Paula Carson, has stepped into the role of the research center's chief executive officer following the resignation of Kam Ng.

Ng stepped down as CEO effective July 31 to move to Boston where he was offered a job as a consultant in his field of expertise — acoustics — and an opportunity to live closer to his grandchildren, said Skyra Rideaux, LITE Center’s public relations and events manager.

The LITE Center, which opened in 2006, was developed as a partnership of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and local and state economic development agencies to stimulate economic development through innovative technologies.

Carson assumes duties overseeing the LITE Center in addition to her work as an assistant vice president of institutional planning and development at the UL-Lafayette.

The last interim CEO — another UL-Lafayette administrator — served more than a year and a half in that role before Ng’s selection. Ng began his work as the center’s CEO in June 2012 following his retirement as deputy research director for the Office of Naval Research.

Carson said the commission opted to wait on a new CEO search until the end of the year to ensure continuity of the center’s strategic plan. The plan was put in place about 18 months ago to transition into a self-sustaining operation.

“We looked at naming an interim CEO, but the learning curve would be so steep,” Carson said.

The center’s proposed budget for 2014-15 is nearly $2.1 million.

Carson said UL-Lafayette has supported the center’s mission financially in the past, but this is the final year of that financial boost. The university’s support has ranged from as high as $2.8 million in the past to $755,000 in the current 2014-15 fiscal year that began July 1.

The LITE Center is located >See LITE, page 2B
in the UL-Lafayette’s research park.

Carson said the center is on track to fulfill its goal of self-sufficiency this year due to its development of such projects as “immersive training solutions” — virtual training programs that place workers on a job site or in different scenarios.

“Our goal is to retain our capacity to innovate and continue to fulfill our research and development and economic development missions,” Carson said.

Before Ng’s appointment, the center had three prior leaders: Carolina Cruz-Neira, who acted as its first director and chief research scientist; Henry Florsheim, it’s first CEO who resigned in late 2010 for an out-of-state job; and Robert Twilley, UL-Lafayette’s then-vice president of research who served as interim CEO from November 2010 until Ng’s arrival in June 2012. Twilley is now director of the Louisiana Sea Grant program based at LSU.

Carson and six others serve on the LITE Center commission: Mark Zappi, dean of UL-Lafayette’s College of Engineering; Tom Cox, president and CEO of golfballs.com; Douglas Menefee, a technology consultant; Don Briggs, president of the Louisiana Oil & Gas Association; Azmy Ackleh, dean of UL-Lafayette’s College of Science; and Jason El Koubi, president and CEO of Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce.

Follow Marsha Sills on Twitter, @Marsha_Sills.