# FMU fires president

Contributed by TSITSI D. WAKHISI
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For the second time in three years, a Florida Memorial University president has been dismissed by the Board of Trustees without public explanation.

Henry Lewis III, 62, who was officially installed in the post in February amid much local fanfare and national praise as the university's 12th president, was released Nov. 8. His predecessor, Karl S. Wright, abruptly left the historically black university in 2009 after serving as president for two years.

The board has named Mary A. O'Banner, a senior academic administrator and chief of staff at FMU, as acting president.

It was not clear why Lewis had fallen out of favor with the 31-member board. In a confusing chronology of events, the university released an announcement last week that Lewis had sent a resignation letter to board chairman Charles George. According to the letter, the resignation was to become effective in June.

But the university's news release stated that George had sent a letter to Lewis informing him that he was being terminated effective Nov. 8. Neither letter explained why Lewis wanted to leave or why the board wanted him gone.

The board also was tight-lipped in 2009 when Wright departed from the university. In a prepared statement then, George said that FMU trustees "felt there were differences" between Wright and the board regarding the university's focus and direction.

In 2011, the board recruited Lewis, then dean of the College of Pharmacy at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee. He was at FMU for a year before he was formally inaugurated. During that time, Lewis crafted his "Vision 2020" plan, which called for increasing student enrollment, retention and matriculation. He also launched an ambitious fundraising effort to pay for the improvements.

Not only are Lewis and the board chairman noncommittal, so are other board members, university administrators, faculty and students, who declined to be interviewed or return phone calls for this story.

The Student Government Association posted on its website that it would hold an emergency meeting Nov. 8 but students who answered phone calls from the South Florida Times would not comment about student sentiment regarding the Lewis' dismissal.

Unofficially, Lewis' firing has been a topic of discussion by some students and alumni on Twitter.

Some posted the announcement about Lewis, while others aked "why" or circulated their own versions of what happened. In a Nov. 11 Tallahassee.com article by Brian Dobson, Lewis' name is mentioned as a possible contender for the job of president at FAMU, a post which appeared on another social media website, Whazzup.com.

The speculation about Lewis' departure is causing a lot of email chatter, said Jimmy Phinazee, a Richmond Heights resident and a 1975 FMU alumnus. "My mailbox is full," he said, adding that he would prefer to hear something official from the school.

"The school sent an email to the alumni," Phinazee said. "They told us that he had been released. They have yet to say why. What gets me is that the school is moving in the right direction under Lewis. The man was raising more money than has ever been raised. To let him go without any explanation, it does not make sense."

Another alumnus who asked not to be identified said he supports Lewis and the board.

"Dr. Lewis renewed hope at Florida Memorial," the alumnus said. "I know people want to read negative things but I am not going to second-guess the board."

Kareem Coney, a board member and the university's coordinator for Community Outreach and Retention and president of the alumni association, was among those who did not want to comment about the Lewis issue. "All I can say is that Florida Memorial University will continue to soar," Coney said, adding that the school has been functioning normally.