

# Turnaround Is Reviving Southeastern College in Florida

**President Mark Rutland is infusing new life—and capital—into the school**

When Mark Rutland was asked to head up the struggling Assemblies of God-affiliated Southeastern College in Lakeland, Fla., in 1999, the college was in an extreme state of disrepair. Enrollment had dropped, and dormitories and facilities were a shambles. Rutland believed he could turn the failing school around.

Restoration and revival are exactly what Rutland aims to set in motion everywhere he goes. He is founder and president of Global Servants, a missions and evangelism organization started in 1977 (as Trinity Foundation), and was senior pastor at Calvary Assembly of God in Winter Park, Fla., for five years.

In 1999, the call came from Southeastern College. The school was a mess. Would Rutland want to try his hand at getting it back on track?

Rutland believes God had prepared him for the challenge through a series of prayers and dreams for a year before the call. He immediately shook up the campus, dismantling the former administration (only one vice president remains), installing new vice presidents, beefing up enrollment efforts and overhauling the physical structure of the school.

“We had to do multiple things at the same time,” Rutland said.

“The first thing we did was reorganize the admissions department and hire a really aggressive leader there. Numerically, the school made a turn immediately.”

The college numbered fewer than 1,000 students when Rutland came on board. He expects to top 1,500 students for the 2002-03 school year. Classrooms and the chapel have received major renovations, and a \$7.5 million dormitory, Aventura Hall, is now complete.

Future plans include a new dining hall, administration building and bookstore, sports and fitness complex, more dormitories, and overhauls of existing buildings. Rutland also plans to transition the school's name to Southeastern University.

Aventura Hall is a definite improvement—a state-of-the-art dorm with built-in, high-speed Internet access, voice mail and cable television in each room.

“For the foreseeable future, we will be building,” Rutland said.

Rutland travels every weekend for speaking engagements, touting the school everywhere he goes. During the week, he remains as active on campus as possible, teaching one undergraduate and one graduate level course and conducting two-thirds of the biweekly student chapels himself.

A new book that he has written—Nevertheless (Charisma House)—is making a stir nationally. It is the sum of his pragmatic, optimistic and faith-filled outlook on life and summarizes the exact point at which understanding ends and

active faith begins.

“I think it’s the right word in the right way at the right time, not just for that church, but even for the country,” Rutland said. “Post 9/11, people are looking for something that can’t be burned down or blown up. It is a book to give people a courageous response to anything and everything life, the devil, can throw at them, and it is the most encouraging, hope-building, faith-building book I’ve ever written.”

Rutland says one bereaved husband ordered enough copies of Nevertheless to give one to each person who attended his wife’s funeral and that pastor Tommy Barnett of Phoenix (Ariz.) First Assembly told him the word is now a regular response from his staff. After one of Rutland’s recent preaching engagements in Dallas, church members bought more than 1,000 of the books.

“The pastor said he’s never seen anything like it,” Rutland said. “It’s like a one-word revival.”

**Natalie Nichols Gillespie**