‘A serious loss’: MSU College of Human Medicine dean to depart

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The departure of College of Human Medicine Dean Marsha Rapley is a “serious loss to the Grand Rapids medical community,” said Dr. John Butzer, the former chief medical officer of Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Institute.

“She has been an inspiration and a driving force behind our life-science community,” Butzer said.

He said the announcement came two days before the Thursday groundbreaking for Michigan State University’s new biomedical research building in downtown Grand Rapids.

Butzer is one of several medical executives who spoke of Rapley’s accomplishments and impact in Grand Rapids after her announcement that she is leaving the College of Human Medicine for a key leadership position at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Rapley has served as dean of the College of Human Medicine since 2006 and oversaw the expansion to Grand Rapids.

She played a key role in working with Mary Free Bed to create a new division of rehabilitative medicine at the College of Human Medicine in 2014, said Butzer, who also is the director of the John F. Butzer Center for Research and Innovation at Mary Free Bed.

Through the partnership, Mary Free Bed physicians serve as faculty, teaching physical medicine and rehabilitation. Medical students also have the option of spending a concentrated period at the rehab hospital through a clinical rotation.

Dr. David Baumgartner, the regional service line medical director of Mercy Health Saint Mary’s, praised Rapley as “a visionary.”

“She understood that bringing organizations together in a medical education partnership would have a powerfully positive impact on this community,” he said. “The legacy of her leadership will live on in the talented physicians attracted to MSU and Mercy Health Saint Mary’s, first to train as students, and then remain to practice in West Michigan.”

Richard Breon, CEO of Spectrum Health, said her work helped improve the level of care locally.

“During her tenure, we worked closely with MSU’s School of Human Medicine, significantly raising the quality of medical education in Grand Rapids,” Breon said. “As a result, we have been able to attract some of the world’s leading physicians and researchers to Grand Rapids. In turn, they have raised the quality of care available to our community.

“We will miss her presence,” said David Van Andel, CEO of the Van Andel Institute.

“Dr. Rapley has ably guided MSU College of Human Medicine through exciting times of change, in expanding to a second campus in Grand Rapids and at the same time reshaping important aspects of how medical students are trained,” he said. “She has been a valued colleague and key collaborator in building and sustaining the biomedical community in West Michigan.”

Rapley’s last day at MSU will be Aug. 14. She will leave to become the vice president of health services at Virginia Commonwealth and CEO of VCU Health System.

The new MSU biomedical research building will be at 155 Michigan St. NW, the former site of the Grand Rapids Press.