Picking a president is nothing new to Jerry Howell.

In the last 10 years, the Jackson businessman and former legislator has been involved, one way or another, with the selection of three presidents for Morehead State University.

Round Three gets under way full-scale Tuesday and Wednesday when Howell heads a nine-member group that will sort through 86 applications for the job during a retreat at Natural Bridge State Resort Park in Powell County.

The vacancy this time was created by the June 30 departure under fire of Morehead's ninth president, Herb F. Reinhard Jr.

Four professors and a student are among the nine members of the screening committee. Using a score sheet, argument and simple persuasion, the group is expected to trim the list of applicants to at least five finalists by Wednesday.

"It's a weeding-out process," Howell said. "We will not be interviewing prospective candidates, as such. We will just go over the applications."

The finalists' names will then be turned over to a five-member group of Morehead regents, headed by former Gov. Edward T. Breathitt. Breathitt and former Gov. Louie B. Nunn, the chairman of Morehead's board, will meet with the screening committee for part of the two days.

Sometime during the next weeks, Breathitt's group is expected to interview the finalists and recommend one or more candidates to the full board of regents, which hopes to pick a president by the end of the year.

Breathitt said last week that the new president might not be able to take over until next spring or summer at the earliest because "a lot of these people have commitments through most of the academic year."

He also said he wanted to keep the interviews with the finalists confidential, saying any decision to make public the names would be up to the full board.

Each of the last three presidential searches was conducted differently, said Howell, who was asked by
Nunn to serve on the screening committee as a "citizen at large."

Howell, a former member of the state House and Senate, was a regent in 1976 when Adron Doran retired after 22 years as Morehead's president. No national search was conducted. Morris Norfleet, Doran's successor, had been serving as one of Doran's vice presidents.

When Norfleet quit seven years later, Howell was chairman of the board. Candidates were sought nationwide, and the regents hired Thomas A. Spragens, a former president of Centre College in Danville, as a consultant to steer them on procedure.

Reinhard was hired on July 1, 1984, and promptly began a major reshuffling of Morehead's administrative hierarchy. But his abrasive style divided the campus and the regents, forcing Gov. Martha Layne Collins to seek the resignations of most of the board members.

Reinhard left June 30, and the new board headed by Nunn hired retired educator A.D. Albright, 73, as president until a permanent successor is found.

"This new board, whoever they hire, they're going to have to give their total support before they hire him," Howell said. "They better be sure of the guy they choose. Morehead State University just can't go through too many of these."

Breathitt said that 120 people applied or were nominated for the presidency but that only the 86 who filled out application forms and submitted them by July 1 would be considered this week.

Nine applicants are Kentuckians and three are women.

"We're not under any pressure," Breathitt said. "Dr. Albright has been so well received that we're not in any emergency situation."

Howell said last week that it was too early to tell whether the latest approach, involving a screening committee, a search committee and the full board, would work best.

"If I had my choice, I'd like to have more applicants," Howell said.

More than 200 people applied for the job during the 1984 search. But the prime season for hunting college presidents is in the winter or spring, and Morehead's case - having had three presidents in three years - may also have affected the number of applicants.

"We're trying to be as careful as we can in handling the process," Howell said. Applications have been kept under lock and key, and Howell said he hadn't taken a list of names to his Jackson home.

Asked whether he has been lobbied by candidates or their backers, he said: "Before, I did have a little bit of
that. This time, I've only had one recommendation, if you want to call it that."

In addition to Howell, members of the screening committee are Carlos Cassady, Inez, student regent; G. Ronald Dobler, the chairman of Morehead's English department; John R. Duncan, education professor and faculty regent; and Dan Lacy, Ashland, president of the Morehead State Foundation.

Also, William Phelps, Versailles, Morehead State Alumni Association president; Judy Rogers, English professor and faculty senate chair; Jack Webb, superintendent of Greenup County schools and president of the Kentucky Educational Development Corp.; and Robert Wolfe, associate professor of agriculture.

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CORRECTIONS Morehead State University did conduct a nationwide search before officials decided in 1976 to promote Morris Norfleet from vice president of the school to president, contrary to information in a Herald- Leader story published yesterday.

Memo: SEE CORRECTION BELOW

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