HUGO -- Brenda Needham was the unanimous selection to become the fourth executive director of Little Dixie Community Action Agency, at the agency's board meeting on Tuesday.

Needham had served under all three of her predecessors during her 33 years of service to Little Dixie. She had served as Little Dixie's Interim Executive Director for the past 10 months, and will continue to be one of southeast Oklahoma's most influential leaders as the agency's first female executive director.

"I'm honored to be selected," she said after Tuesday's vote by all 26 board members. "I will continue to put my whole heart into this job and this agency."

Needham, a native of Baton Rouge, La., attended Louisiana State University and Southeastern State College in Durant. She was hired by Little Dixie in 1976 as an administrative assistant to the agency's first director, Fred Tucker.

She was promoted to Personnel Officer in 1988, and became an Associate Director under Bob Yandell in 1993. She served in this capacity until 2008, when she stepped in for Randall Erwin as Interim Executive Director.

Board Chairman Lewis Collins said Needham's unceasing commitment to Little Dixie "shows her love for this agency."

She was among a field of 79 applicants seeking the agency's top job since the position was advertised in January. A hiring committee culled the field to 15 interviewees, and three were invited for final interviews on Tuesday. The meeting lasted four hours, with the board in closed session for the first two hours to interview the candidates.

Little Dixie CAA is a non-profit agency providing a wide variety of social services to people in Choctaw, McCurtain and Pushmataha counties. As director, Needham will be in charge of more than 300 full-time employees with a budget in excess of $25 million.