



## Opening Remarks From 25th Annual East Kentucky Leadership Conference

Tonight is a special occasion for the East Kentucky Leadership Foundation— it marks the 25th anniversary of our founding. Over that quarter century many important initiatives have emerged from these conferences — this awards banquet, the issues and answers program at WYMT, leadership East Kentucky, UK's center for excellence in rural health care, the Appalachian student fund East Kentucky Women in Leadership, the East Kentucky Corporation, our youth visioning sessions, the 2008 Eastern Kentucky issues platform, the establishment of both a psychiatric hospital and a college of osteopathic medicine in Eastern Kentucky, a full-time development officer in the Governor's office, located in Pikeville, and most recently, the foundation for Appalachian Kentucky, and the Central Appalachian institute for research and development (CAIRD).

During that time we saw the election of one of our founding members, Paul Patton, to two terms as Kentucky's governor while another of our founding members, Greg Stumbo, serves as speaker of the Kentucky House of Representatives. A third founding member, Lois Combs Weinberg, became in 2002, in her first run for any political office, only the third woman in Kentucky political history to win nomination by a major political party for the United States Senate.

The creation of CAIRD represents the accomplishment of the number one priority in our 2008 issues platform. CAIRD is hosting a two-day resource network conference on May 14-15 at the University of Pikeville, bringing together representatives from post-secondary institutions throughout Central Appalachia, as well as the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky. CAIRD's executive director, Jason Belcher, will be moderating a session tomorrow involving CAIRD, if you want to learn more about this exciting new institute.

Other sessions tomorrow will discuss drug rehab programs, community foundations, K-12 education, energy futures, health care and the need for a research university in the coal producing counties.

Take full advantage during these two days of this unparalleled opportunity to network with other leaders in Eastern Kentucky. I urge all of you to return to the community college for tomorrow's sessions. As Grady said at our 20th conference, "the East Kentucky Leadership Foundation is about creating a vision for a vibrant and stimulating place called Eastern Kentucky. It was about each of us looking out not only for our own interest, but for the interest of others."

Now, just a moment of reflection. For twenty-five years we have met together for the common good to discuss how we can help make Eastern Kentucky a better place to live. As democrats and republicans, tea party members and independents, we have looked beyond county boundaries and have put partisan politics on the back burner. We have had successes and we have had failures, but we have been unyielding in our desire and commitment to honor our region's unsung heroes and to work to improve its quality of life. We are united in our belief that true progress must come from within the leadership fabric of Eastern Kentucky itself.

Is there much work still to be done? Of course. There is much work in the world to be done. But I would be remiss towards those of our leadership who have gone on – to Gov. Bert T. Combs, to Cong. Carl D. Perkins, to Ann Latta, who had the vision to help create this beautiful facility, to Mayor Bill Gorman, to Mike Mullins — if I did not say that we have done the best we knew how, with no thought of personal gain. as we prepare to turn the leadership of the EKLF over to a new generation, we believe we leave a social network of leadership that is much more attuned to the critical importance of working together on a regional basis. My fervent hope is that this will prove to be a catalyst for meaningful economic and political change in the years to come. As I have said several times before, a diamond is just a piece of coal that stuck to the job.

I am pleased to announce that the EKLF board has selected Middlesboro as host for our 2013 conference, Somerset for our 2014 conference and Pikeville for our 2015 conference. Congratulations to those cities.