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Local government in central Appalachia: a states' comparison

by Van Gravitt

In counties throughout central Appalachia local government plays a role in everything from paving roads to issuing marriage licenses to keeping the peace. The form that local government takes varies from state to state and even from county to county. As we at Brushy Fork Institute recruit for and offer our programs, we make contact at all levels of local government. We thought it would be interesting to see how the central Appalachian states compare. Below is an overview of the most common forms of county-level government in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia, along with a brief description and comparison of some common offices.

Kentucky



The fiscal court is the primary form of government in Kentucky counties. Consisting of a county judge-executive and three to eight magistrates, the fiscal court makes decisions regarding the use of county money. It also enacts laws or regulations, levies taxes, issues bonds, passes resolutions, establishes appointive offices, approves appointments to those offices, buys and sells property and investigates county activity. Members oversee construction and maintenance of county roads, grounds and buildings.

In some Kentucky counties, residents have voted for a commission government, which is made up of a county judge-executive and three commissioners who are elected county-wides. County residents may also vote to merge with a city to form an urban-county government or a charter government.

Tennessee



The primary form of county government in Tennessee consists of a popularly elected board of county commissioners known as the county legislative body. The county legislative body may have from nine to twenty-five members and votes on the county budget, sets the tax rates and deals with various county issues, such as roads and highways, education and county property.

Virginia



There are six possible forms of county government in Virginia: county executive, county manager form, urban county executive, county manager plan, county board and traditional. Regardless of governmental form, all counties are governed by a board of supervisors composed of three to eleven members. The main difference among the six forms involves the role of the board and of the chief administrative officer.

The traditional form of government is the most common. In this form districts elect one to three representatives to the board of supervisors, which handles county affairs.

Based on a plural form of governance, West Virginia's county governmental powers are divided among several independently elected offices. The positions were established by the state constitution to run county government. A county commission serves as the main legislative body, consisting of three to five county commissioners who are popularly elected on a county-wide basis.

West Virginia



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Local government *continued from page 1*

County offices

Elected and appointed offices of county governments vary, often with the same duties being carried out by different officials state to state. Below is a comparison of some common offices and their duties.

Most counties have a presiding official. In Kentucky, the county judge-executive serves for a four-year term as the presiding officer of the fiscal court and is responsible for the day-to-day running of the county. The county judge-executive may appoint a deputy county judge-executive to perform any assigned duties relating to administration of the county. However, the deputy judge-executive cannot preside over the fiscal court.

In Tennessee, the county executive serves as a non-voting, ex officio member of the county legislative body but, unlike in Kentucky, does not always chair that body. If the county executive heads the legislative body, the power to veto decisions is forfeited. During a four-year term, the county executive serves as the chief financial officer for the county and interacts with county officials in almost every area of local administration through committees and task forces.

Unlike Tennessee's county executive who may have the power of veto over the county legislative body, the county administrator in Virginia counties has no identity separate and apart from the board of supervisors and is assigned all responsibilities and power by that board. Counties with the traditional form of government have this office. During a four-year term, the county administrator handles the administrative affairs of the board of supervisors such as keeping records of meetings.

West Virginia differs from the other states in that there is no one popularly elected presiding official in county government. Instead there is a board of county commissioners, who are elected on a county-wide basis and are considered part-time employees. At the first meeting of the year, one commissioner is elected by the others to preside over meetings. Their six-year terms are staggered so that a new commissioner is elected every two years.

Nearly all counties in West Virginia have three commissioners whose primary duties are to establish the annual county budget, submit a balanced budget to the state tax commissioner, set the tax rate on property and serve as the board of equalization and review, which hears appeals concerning appraisal and assessment of real and personal property.

Many counties in Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia form districts from which residents elect representatives to the governing body. In Kentucky, magistrates sit on the fiscal court. Elected to four-year terms, they vote on ordinances, resolutions and orders and represent residents of their districts. Other Kentucky counties have a commission government, in which commissioners are elected by the whole county.

Tennessee counties have county commissioners that represent districts. Elected to four-year terms, they serve on committees to address issues ranging from solid waste to ambulance service to jail facilities. No more than three members can be elected from the same district.

In the traditional form of county government in Virginia, voters elect one to three district representatives to the board of supervisors to run county affairs.

Revenue and taxes in Central Appalachian local government are handled by a variety of offices. In Kentucky, a county treasurer is appointed by the fiscal court to receive revenues, disburse county money and keep detailed financial records.



In Tennessee, an elected trustee is responsible for keeping a detailed account of money transactions. The trustee not only collects county property taxes and keeps records but also invests temporarily idle county funds. This official disburses sales tax revenues and may collect other local taxes.

Virginia's county treasurer collects and disburses county funds while periodically reporting to the governing body or circuit court. The treasurer in Virginia counties also collects money for the state which is reported to the state comptroller.

West Virginia offers an unusual structure for handling money matters. The sheriff serves as the treasurer for both the county government and the local school district. This duty involves receiving, collecting and disbursing funds and maintaining an accurate account of transactions.

As in the other states, the sheriff also enforces the law. Elected to a four-year term, the sheriff is the only West Virginia county official subject to term limitations, with two terms being the limit.



In Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia, the sheriff serves as the chief law enforcement officer and in many cases also operates the county jail. Virginia's county sheriff may serve as bailiff at court sessions and sometimes at meetings of the board of supervisors. The county sheriff in Kentucky serves as security for the fiscal court and collects property and other taxes.

Each county in Central Appalachia has a means of assessing tax rates. The property valuation administrator assesses all taxable property in Kentucky counties. Although elected by county voters, the property valuation administrator actually works for the state.

The assessor of property in Tennessee has basically the same role as Kentucky's property valuation administrator. Tennessee counties also elect a register of deeds who collects transfer and mortgage taxes. The register is also responsible for recording and maintaining deeds, powers of attorney, mortgages, liens, contracts, wills, court orders, military discharges and other types of instruments.

In Virginia, a commissioner of revenue not only prepares real estate and personal property taxes, but also assesses the taxable value of tools and machinery and merchant's capital. In addition to assessing personal and property taxes, West Virginia's county assessor is responsible for assessing and collecting a "head" tax on all dogs in the county (and may hire a deputy to do this).

Every state has a county clerk who serves as a keeper of county records, including birth and death certificates, wills when probated and transfers of property titles and deeds.



In Kentucky, the county clerk oversees elections, prepares tax bills and issues licenses, as well as serving as clerk of the fiscal court. Tennessee's county clerk performs record keeping duties and also collects certain state and local taxes.

With generally the same duties as clerks in the other states, Virginia's clerk of the circuit court has the longest term of any of the counties' elected officials, serving eight years. West Virginia's county clerk, who also has similar duties, serves six years.

The office of county attorney in most states prosecutes criminal violations. In Kentucky the county attorney is required to attend all fiscal court meetings and represents the county in legal actions, including payment of claims against the county. Virginia's commonwealth's attorney serves as the county's legal advisor only in those counties with a small population. In West Virginia, the county attorney may also advise the local school district.

Although roles and structures of local government vary throughout the region, some common truths remain. Citizens who are interested in improving their communities should be aware of their government structures. And even more important, they should participate in the governance process by voting, staying abreast of issues and perhaps even running for office.

Sources

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Beyond Voting, A Citizen's Guide to Participating in Local Government. Harker, Donald F. and Natter, Elizabeth Ungar; Mountain Association for Community and Economic Development: Kentucky Local Governance Project; Berea, KY; 1991.

Virginia County Supervisors' Manual. Mead, Martha Johnson; Virginia Association of Counties and Center for Public Service, University of Virginia; Charlottesville, VA; 1988.

Tennessee County Government Handbook. County Technical Assistance Service; Institute for Public Service, The University of Tennessee; Nashville, TN; 1994.

Benedum funding supports West Virginia programs

In June Brushy Fork received the happy news that the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation had approved a \$40,000 grant to support the Institute's work in West Virginia.

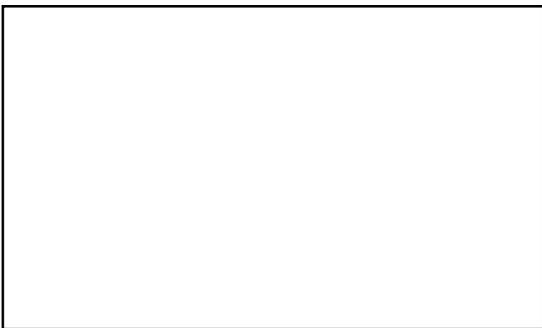
Receipt of the grant insures the inclusion of Fayette and Ritchie Counties in the 1995 Leadership Development Program. A fifteen-member team has been selected from each of these counties. They will travel to Berea for their opening workshop in September, where they will join teams from Kentucky's Clay and Morgan Counties.

The Benedum funding also supports the activities of the West Virginia Associates Network. The network planning committee has been hard at work planning for a fall conference. (See calendar item on back page.)

The grant will allow Brushy Fork to remain active with other West Virginia community groups and projects as well, through facilitation of workshops in the Benedum Community Mini-Grants Program.

The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation was established in 1944 by Michael and Sarah Benedum, both West Virginia natives, as a memorial to their only child, Claude, who died while serving in the first world war. In 1992, the foundation authorized grants totaling \$6,646,012 in areas of education, health and human services, community development and the arts.

Menifee Information Group going strong



The original MIGs pose for a group photo during the 1993 leadership development program.

When the Menifee Information Group (MIGs) came to Brushy Fork in 1993 they wanted to do something to promote their county. Menifee County, Kentucky, lies between Cave Run Lake and Red River Gorge, both active tourist attractions. The team members knew that if they could get the word out people would come see some of the historical and natural attractions in their county.

The team chose to print a brochure with a map and a list of attractions. Two years later they reprinted the brochure with a more detailed map and color pictures and descriptions of attractions. But the group didn't stop there.

This past summer the Menifee Information Group received a \$10,000 grant from the Kentucky Division of Forestry. The funds will be used for a program to promote public awareness and participation in urban and community forestry.

The project will begin with an assessment of the urban forest situation, including an inventory and the formation of a master community forest plan. Once the master plan is approved by the City Commission, the public will be invited to make suggestions for implementation. Prizes will be awarded for the most useful suggestions.

Entrants in the implementation contest will be invited to attend a workshop conducted by forestry personnel. The workshop will include sessions on planting and maintenance, planting plan design and site analysis.

The master plan will be fully implemented before June 30, 1996. The MIGs will work with several other groups—the Menifee County 4-H Club, the Extension Service District and the Board of Education. Way to go, MIGs!

This information was taken from the July 12, 1995, edition of the Menifee County News.

Dates set for Teamwork for Tomorrow workshops

now is the time to register!

Four eastern Kentucky area development districts will join Brushy Fork to co-sponsor leadership and organization development workshops this fall. The Buffalo Trace Area Development District, Gateway Area Development District, Kentucky River Area Development District and Lake Cumberland Area Development District will host the one-day workshops.

The program is open to leaders and community organizations that work in the Appalachian Regional Commission counties of Kentucky. The one-day workshops will feature sessions on effective meetings, recruiting volunteers and maintaining a successful organization.

A two-day follow-up workshop will take place on November 10-11, 1995. The location will be announced at the one-day workshops. This work-

shop will build on the first training, focusing on creating effective organizations, project planning and fundraising.

Organizations that participate in the Teamwork for Tomorrow Program will be eligible to apply for mini-grants from \$500-\$2000 to use for community improvement projects. To apply for a mini-grant, at least three people from the organization must attend one of the one-day workshops and the two-day workshop. Mini-grants must be matched one-to-one with funds from other sources. Other grant criteria will be presented at the workshops.

For registration information, contact Brushy Fork Institute at (606) 986-9341 extension 6838. The Teamwork for Tomorrow Program is funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission through the Office of Governor Brereton C. Jones.

The one-day workshops will be offered four days, as listed below:

October 5	Kentucky River ADD Office in Hazard, 9:30-4:00
October 10	Lake Cumberland ADD Office in Russell Springs, 9:30-4:00
October 18	Clark RECC Building in Frenchburg, 9:30-4:00
October 19	Fleming/Mason RECC Building in Flemingsburg, 9:30-4:00

ARC funding renews Seedling Grants, provides funding for 1996 leadership cycle

The 1996 Brushy Fork Leadership Development Program cycle will include one county from each of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, thanks to a \$75,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. Also, county teams that participate in the 1995 and 1996 Leadership Development Program cycles will be eligible for Seedling Grants for their team projects.

Since the end of the Kellogg-funded Appalachian Civic Leadership Project in 1992, Brushy Fork has had to seek various sources of funding for the Leadership Development Program. While the program has been maintained, the original model of one county from each state had to be modified, with some states being unrepresented in some years due to lack of funding.

The renewal of the Seedling Grants program is good news to those county teams who will start their leadership development cycle in September of this year. These groups and those who participate in the 1996 cycle will have access to these matching funds for their community projects.

The Appalachian Regional Commission has been a long-time supporter of Brushy Fork, having granted initial start-up funding in 1987 and supporting the pilot Leadership Development Program in 1988. More recently, the ARC has funded the original Seedling Grants Program, the original Teamwork for Tomorrow Program, and, most recently, Teamwork for Tomorrow II.

Local Development Districts: an extension of local government

When President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965, he brought into existence a unique approach to planning in local, state and federal government—regional planning through Local Development Districts.

Regional planning provides a way to pool resources and approach regional problems with an effective, unified effort, while maintaining focus on the real needs of communities. By providing this opportunity, Local Development Districts play an

important role in county government and local planning throughout the Appalachian region.

The legislation that determined the structure of Local Development Districts was created at the state level. Each state's districts have a slightly different form as can be seen partially from their

names—Development Districts in Tennessee, Area Development Districts in Kentucky, Planning District Commissions in Virginia and Planning and Development Councils in West Virginia are a few.

Their common trait is the goal to assist local governments with regional planning and with delivery of programs and services to citizens.

Most Local Development Districts are funded from the county, state and federal levels. In Appalachia, sources for funding include grants from federal programs such as the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Department of Commerce, dues from participating local governments and other contributions from the public and private sectors. Again, funding sources may vary from state to state.

The governing body of most Local Development Districts consists of elected officials from participating local governments and citizen representatives from communities. Boards of directors may assign committees and task forces to deal with specific

issues. Each Local Development District has a professional staff to provide analyses, recommendations and technical assistance to local governments.

The issues that Local Development Districts address apply to basic programs of state government, from human resources to transportation to justice to environmental quality. Priorities and activities vary with the needs of the region and local communities.

Brushy Fork Associate Skip Skinner (Wise County, VA) serves as Director of Planning at the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission. He notes, "The basic premise behind our operation is that by each county combining their resources, they can put together a professional staff which each could not assemble individually. We prefer to think of ourselves as an extension of the staffs of the local units of government we serve."

Current programs of LENOWISCO include numerous water and wastewater projects, development of comprehensive plans for area localities and geographic information system mapping development.

A special project currently underway is the development of a small business incubator which would provide entrepreneurs with assistance in business startup during the critical first 24 months of operation.

In Tennessee, the Upper Cumberland Development District is designated as the Area Agency on Aging. Related activities include among others, adult day care, special transportation, legal services, nutrition, and recreation activities.

The Upper Cumberland Development District is also involved in economic and community development through loan funds, housing projects and business incubators.

Throughout Central Appalachia, Local Development Districts play an important role in empowering local governments and communities. Though the methods and activities may be varied, the goals are the same—regional planning and sustainable development.

We prefer to think of ourselves as an extension of the staffs of the local units of government we serve.

Skip Skinner,
LENOWISCO
Planning District
Commission, VA

Special thanks to Skip Skinner of the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission in Virginia, and to Wendy Askins and Henry Bowman of the Upper Cumberland Development District in Tennessee, for assistance in preparing this article.



Road map for public speaking

from the glovebox of Donna Morgan

Public speaking is viewed by many as a difficult road to travel. The directions below may make the journey from thought to spoken word a little more pleasant for all who travel the communication highway.



KNOW YOUR DESTINATION. What do you really want to communicate? Keep your specific objectives in mind as you plan. The main function of a speech is communication not performance. Be sincere and be yourself.

GET TO KNOW YOUR PASSENGERS. Educate yourself about your audience. What are their interests? What is the general age of the group? Are members mainly men, women, boys or girls? Put yourself in your audience's place and speak to them in their terms.

PLAN YOUR ROUTE. Give your speech a sturdy structure. The most frequently used structure has three basic parts:



Opening: contains an attention-getter for the audience; gives them a preview of what is to come; lets them know where you stand on the topic.

Body: usually has three main points with supporting information; makes clear transitions between the main points.

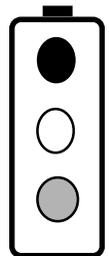
Conclusion: usually begins with "in conclusion"; summarizes speech, particularly the three main points; tells the audience what you want them to do, if you want some action taken; connects with the opening to frame your speech.

TUNE UP YOUR VEHICLE. Give yourself time to practice your speech. Practice out loud in front of a mirror then in front of a friend who can provide advice and criticism. Try tape recording yourself to see if you need to speed up or slow down. Simplify parts of the speech that seem too complex. Focus on what might prevent you from communicating your message clearly.

Above all, don't memorize your entire speech and don't plan to read it. Use notes and an outline to help you stay on track. Memorize only particularly good phrases or examples that you don't want to lose.

WATCH FOR ROAD HAZARDS. Learn all you can about where you will present your speech. Visit the site if possible. Find out if the setting will be formal or informal. Will you be at a table up front? Will you speak from a podium? Will you have a microphone? At what point on the agenda you will speak? Will the audience be ready for a break or lunch?

FOLLOW THE SPEED LIMIT AND OTHER DRIVING RULES. Help the audience absorb your message by speaking slowly and clearly. Use pauses, facial expressions and hand gestures to mark important points. Look at various individuals in the audience and speak in a respectful, conversational tone. Remember you are there to help your audience understand your topic.



A League of their own: 75 years of grassroots involvement in government issues

by Jeanne Gage, President
Kentucky League of Women Voters

In 1995, the League of Women Voters of the United States celebrated its 75th year as “A Voice for Citizens and a Force for Change.” Becky Cain, a native of St. Albans, West Virginia, and a 20-year League member, is the organization’s 14th president. In that capacity, among other things, she has led the fight for passage of the National Voter Registration Act which will put twenty million additional registrants on the voter rolls.

Despite the existence of several dozen local Leagues throughout the Central Appalachian states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia, the League’s presence in Appalachia is minimal compared to other parts of the country. In the communities where Leagues do exist, they have achieved notable success on issues ranging from election laws to reapportionment of legislative districts to water quality and health care.

Because the League is not a single-issue organization, its purpose and mission are often misunderstood. This article describes the League and examines its structure as a model for encouraging citizen participation in the political process. I encourage communities which do not have an organized forum for bringing together civic entrepreneurs to consider the League model as a means to achieving more prosperous communities and a better quality of life.

What is the League?

Formed in 1920, the League is a nonpartisan organization that promotes political responsibility through informed participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

For 75 years, League members have been registering voters and defending voting rights. We have monitored government activities from city councils and school boards to state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. We have educated citizens about their

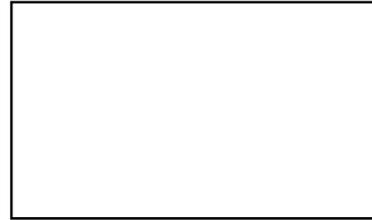


photo: League of Women
Voters Archives

League of Women Voters National President, Becky Cain

rights and responsibilities and sponsored forums on public issues. We have studied issues and taken action by lobbying, testifying and educating legislators.

Although the League opened membership to men in 1974, it is still the most prominent political training ground for women. A 1987 study found that membership in civic organizations, especially women’s groups, is the primary path for women who go into politics. League membership is the most common.¹

League characteristics

The following characteristics are shared by all Leagues.

Nonpartisan stance. The League acts on positions but does not support or oppose any party or candidates. Thus set apart from the major political parties, the League has developed a reputation for being objective. The League also encourages its members to respect differences of opinion and to use nonconfrontational methods to lobby their elected representatives.

Grassroots structure. The League of Women Voters is organized to parallel the three levels of government: local, state and national.

Local Leagues elect delegates to represent them at state and national meetings and on state and national boards. Local Leagues decide what issues the national League will study and act upon.

Each local League establishes an Observer Corps which attends and monitors meetings of local government agencies. The League’s observers generally do not participate in local government meetings but serve as objective “watchdogs.”

¹ Neuman, Nancy M., *The League of Women Voters in Perspective: 1920-1995*, League of Women Voters of the United States, 1994, pp. 38-39.

“. . . no problem of democracy is really solved until it is solved for the average citizen.”

Study before action. Before the League can develop a position or act on any issue, it must first carefully study the issue. Some local Leagues have collaborated on regional studies by establishing Inter-League Organizations. Although the study-before-action protocol tends to make things work slowly, the process typically informs a greater number of League members, thereby building the community's understanding of an issue.

Consensus decision-making. Many League issues are controversial. League leaders have developed a number of ways to deal with conflict through consensus decision-making. For the League, consensus has a broad meaning. Consensus in League parlance means *agreement among a substantial number of a representative group of members*—not just a simple majority—*reached after sustained study and group discussion*.

Consensus is a prerequisite to taking any position or action on national, state or local issues. No action is taken where there is lack of agreement. Although this may be a disappointment at times, it is essential that when a League position is announced, the members are not only informed but in basic agreement.

League accomplishments

During its first decade the League worked on health, education, child education and judicial treatment issues. Over the next 65 years the League tackled a variety of issues from child labor to air and water pollution control to campaign finance. Just a few highlighted programs are:

- “Wartime Service” to educate the public about the importance of American democracy during World War II.
- “Freedom Agenda” which took a visible lead in opposing McCarthyism.
- The women's and civil rights movements.
- Sponsorship of presidential debates.

The current agenda includes a focus on an Initiative to Renew Democracy for the 1996-98 biennium. The goal of this campaign is to revive democracy, restore faith in government, and engage citizens in the work of shaping better communities.

As part of the campaign, the League will design a process through which local Leagues can examine the

health of participatory democracy and develop goals for improvement. The League will highlight those community institutions and patterns that indicate a “healthy” score, then suggest strategies to strengthen those institutions and promote those behaviors.

The League also proposes to become the online source for nonpartisan voter information.

The League model has been used effectively to train grassroots citizen activists in how to effectively participate in government in Appalachia and throughout the country. Maud Wood Park, the League's first president (1920-1924), described the League as a moderate organization within the American political system:

[The League] has chosen to be a middle of the road organization in which persons of widely differing political views might work out together a program of definite advance on which they could agree. It has been willing to go ahead slowly in order to go ahead steadily. It has not sought to lead a few quickly, but rather to lead many. . . a little at a time. It has held to the belief that no problem of democracy is really solved until it is solved for the average citizen.²

For more information

For more information about the League or starting a League in your community, contact one of the following people:

Jeanne Gage, President
LWV of Kentucky; (606) 986-7515,
or LWVKY@ACS.EKU.EDU

Judy Poulson, President
LWV of Tennessee; (615) 297-7134

Lulu K. Meese, President
LWV of Virginia; (703) 942-2428

Helen Gibbins, President
LWV of West Virginia; (304) 736-3287

² Neuman, p. 10.

Running for public office:

advice from the field

Over the past several years, many Brushy Fork Associates have chosen to run for public office in their communities. The positions for which they have run range from county judge-executive to school board member. Some bids for office have been successful and others have not.

What Associates who seek a public office have in common is their reason for running. They all want to do something good for the community and they see the need for change to start with them.

Below, three Associates share a glimpse of their experiences as candidates for public office. They offer their insights and advice to anyone who might be considering this type of public service.

"If I were talking to people again, I would tell them, 'Investigate the candidate yourself—query him about things you're looking for. Write him a letter. If he doesn't answer, then don't vote for him.'"

Neil Ferrell **Roane County, WV**

Neil Ferrell of Roane County, West Virginia, saw the need for some changes in the way things were done in his community. That thought and encouragement from friends sealed his decision to run for the office of sheriff in 1992. Although he was defeated in his bid for that office, Neil used the campaign as a learning experience.

When Neil paid his filing fee and completed his forms at the Roane County circuit court clerk's office, his mind was on improving his community. His decision marked the beginning of a challenging race.

Soon after he filed to be on the ballot, he began to campaign. He bought signs to post in supporters' yards and put ads in the county newspaper. He gave away

pencils and pens embossed with his name and the office for which he was running.

"I also did tape cuts for the local radio station," he recalls. "But mostly I just drove around the county and talked to people. . . . People are a lot more amicable if they can talk with you. You can't expect people to accept someone they really don't know at all."

In a county with a well-established political network, making an impression as a new candidate can be difficult. Neil offers several pointers on running for office.

Communication skills are important for anyone running for public office. Candidates must be able to present themselves favorably and must also be able to listen and learn from the people in their communities.

Neil suggests that the candidate have specific goals in mind when talking with voters. He warns not to make commitments that can't be kept. "[Tell them] this is what I want to change and how I want to change it and I'll work hard to do it."

If you are elected to office you may face situations where you have less con-

trol over some decisions than you thought you would. Not making hasty promises during a campaign can avert an embarrassing situation later.

Neil also suggests that candidates know their areas and know what people are concerned about. Finding some common experience with which you can relate to people is one secret to establishing empathy while remaining sincere. "For instance," says Neil, "since I grew up on a farm, I can talk to farmers about crops and cattle prices."

On the other hand, he warns not to expect to read about a subject and do "a con job" on people. "I have a lot of confidence in American voters," comments Neil. "They can spot a phony."

Another suggestion is to deal in positives. Sometimes during a campaign candidates are presented with the opportunity to defame an opponent. In Neil's opinion, public officials should never lower themselves to mud slinging. He leaves the responsibility of investigating candidates to the voter.

"If I were talking to people again," he says, "I would tell them, 'Investigate the candidate yourself—query him about things you're looking for. Write him a letter. If he doesn't answer, then don't vote for him.'"

Additional advice from Neil regards making assumptions. Candidates should not assume that they will always receive support from members of their political party's county committee.

The county committees exist to assist their party candidates in running for office by managing campaign funds and other assistance. Although the process is often ethically frowned upon, the groups will endorse a slate of candidates whom they will support.

"I made the assumption that the old days of vote buying were over," states Neil. He comments on how he suspected that a trade had been made between the two parties, with some members of Neil's party committee agreeing to back the

other party's candidate for sheriff if they would back his party's candidate for another office.

When Neil confronted a committee member about the situation, the member did not deny the act. "He just shuffled his feet and looked at the floor." Neil notes that if he were to run for office again he would try to get a straight answer regarding support from his party's county committee.

Finally, he would "get people to make a commitment." If voters supported his views and ideas he would ask them to commit to getting out to vote. After all, one person can't do it. It's up to the voters to look at the issues and make some decisions.

Deborah Garrett **Pickett County, TN**

"... everyone goes in thinking 'I can make a difference [immediately]'. . . . the newly elected official often has to adjust to the rules and regulations of the democratic process."

In 1994 Deborah Garrett was elected Mayor of Byrdstown in Pickett County, Tennessee, where she owns a small business. Due to the fact that she lives outside the town limits, her election has been contested by another candidate. The matter is being settled in court. Until an agreement is reached she has been appointed city administrator and maintains most of the responsibility of the mayoral position.

Before Deborah Garrett came to Brushy Fork she had been active in her community—so active that people often asked her why she didn't run for public office. She continued to hear that question after her Brushy Fork experience and one day she decided, "Why not?"
continued on next page

Running for public office

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“Brushy Fork had helped me get organized, and I could see the need,” she states. Thus she started her bid to become the first woman mayor of Byrdstown, Tennessee.

Her first step was to have thirty registered voters sign her qualification form which she returned to the county election commission. “The commission decided I was qualified and put my name on the ballot,” she recalls.

As a qualified candidate, she began campaigning. She used newspaper advertisements as one campaign tool. Election posters did not play a major role in her campaign. She noted that “for the environment’s sake” she only posted one banner during her entire campaign.

Her greatest time investment during the campaign involved door-to-door visits. “I think I saw every voter in Byrdstown, except two of my three opponents. My other opponent and I shook hands and even traded cards!” she laughs.

Although speaking with so many voters took a great deal of time, Deborah sees the personal contact as her most effective campaign technique. She feels it is very important to meet the people you plan to serve. During her visits, she had asked people about their concerns. “I kept a tally of what they were concerned about,” she says.

Deborah has used the information she gathered well beyond her campaign period. The tally now serves as the basis for much of her work. From patching and paving streets to obtaining land for a city park to getting trucks for the water department, Deborah and her staff have been working to address concerns expressed by the voters.

“Elected officials are there to serve,” she notes. “Once you’ve got the position,

you can have the tendency to stop asking, ‘What do you think?’—to stop getting input.” By gathering input from the stakeholders in the election and using it throughout her term in office, Deborah can feel assured she is serving the best interest of the community.

Deborah’s advice to anyone planning to run for public office is “Have a lot of patience.”

“I think everyone goes in thinking ‘I can really make a difference [immediately].’” she says. The fact that many times things seem to go at a snail’s pace can be disheartening. She notes that government checks and balances are there for a reason, but the newly elected official often has to adjust to the rules and regulations of the democratic process.

Deborah cites good communication skills as crucial for someone planning to run for public office. “You have to be able to meet and talk with people on many levels.” From state level officials to the residents in your area, from supporters to people who disagree with a decision you have made, you need to listen diplomatically as well as express yourself clearly.

Organization is another skill that Deborah sees as crucial to running for (and serving in) public office. After organizing volunteers and meetings during a campaign, the election winner faces the task of supervising public employees, effectively using volunteers, running meetings and organizing town events, among other duties.

As is the case with many small-town officials, she relies on volunteers to help support the town’s activities. “I keep a notebook of people to call on,” says Deborah. She is very grateful to the community residents who support her efforts to meet the responsibilities of her office.

Carroll Smith **Letcher County, KY**

“ . . . candidates [should] prepare themselves and their families for an experience that will affect all their lives. . . . the community looks at the family in a whole new way.”

Brushy Fork Associate Carroll Smith was elected county judge-executive of Letcher County, Kentucky, in November 1993. He currently serves in that office.

Carroll Smith announced he would run for county judge-executive three years before the election actually took place. Laughing, he recalls the decision as “a brief moment of insanity.”

Then in a more serious tone he says, “I just felt I wasn’t doing my part to ensure that my children would have a good place to live in the future.”

Carroll announced his decision to run for office so early for several reasons. “My name was not a household word,” he notes. In previous years he had worked in a coal mine, feeling far removed from public life.

Besides that he was determined not to take contributions that would affect how he might serve in office. Without a lot of money to run a campaign, he had to “make up for the short falls with time.”

Carroll offers some advice to people considering running for public office, the first being that they should familiarize themselves with how government works. Know what is required of the elected position.

The Kentucky Department of Local Government provided Carroll with some direction, walking him through what it means to be in office. He suggests that anyone who plans to run for office get information from that department (or its equivalent in their state) or from their local development district.

As far as developing skills, Carroll sees experience as the best teacher. He notes that there are skills you need to develop

and advocates taking classes and trainings to sharpen these skills.

“On December 31, I was working in a coal mine and on January 1, I was in public office,” he recalls. After his election he attended workshops for local elected officials that he says “got me up to about half speed.” He attributes most of his knowledge to on-the-job training. “School is different than real life,” he comments.

Carroll recommends that first-time candidates prepare themselves and their families for an experience that will affect all their lives. When a family member runs for office (especially if that person is elected), the community looks at the family in a whole new way.

“When you live in a glass house, you want to pull the shades but you can’t. It can be quite a shock when you’ve always been an everyday person.”

Families should also prepare for the candidate to be away often, in meetings and on the road. Carroll spent his first several weeks in office dealing with damaging snows and ice storms and power outages. He notes, “Out of my first 110 days in office, I worked 106.” (He was including weekends in that count.)

Carroll does admit that it is flattering to be heard when it comes to county matters. “Someone finally says ‘Oh yeah, I understand’, when you’re saying what you’ve said for ten years,” he laughs. He also notes that you have to be careful what you say because people do listen so well.

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a brief annotated bibliography of
Resources on local government

Below are four resources on local government and citizen involvement that Brushy Fork has used in workshop sessions over the years. By no means is this a comprehensive listing of resources available but these are publications that Brushy Fork staff have found useful.



Beyond Voting: a citizen's guide to participating in local government

by Donald F. Harker and Elizabeth Ungar Natter
Kentucky Local Governance Project
2053 Regency Circle, Suite A
Lexington, KY 40503
(800) 647-0060
1991; 62 pages; no cost.

In a question and answer format explores structure and duties of county and city governments in Kentucky. Contains a section on open meetings and open records laws. Appendices include sample forms and letters that citizens can use to request public information from officials. Currently being revised for reprinting.



Strengthening Local Democracy: a citizen's guide to developing a code of ethics for local government

by Elizabeth Ungar Natter and Donald F. Harker
Kentucky Local Governance Project
2053 Regency Circle, Suite A
Lexington, KY 40503
(800) 647-0060
1994; 27 pages; no cost.

Designed to promote citizen input. Discusses the need for a code of ethics in local government in Kentucky. Covers elements that should be addressed by an ethics code such as bribery, nepotism, conflicts of interest and accountability. Suggests provisions to be included in a code of ethics to address each issue.



Doing Politics: an owner's manual for public life

by Harry C. Boyte and Kathryn Stoff Hogg
Project Public Life
Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota, 301-19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55455
(612) 625-0142
1992; 66 pages; \$10.00.

Designed to be used as a study guide for discussion groups. Contains readings for sessions on democratic traditions and changes and on various types of politics: institutional, protest, service, community and citizen. Each section has questions for discussion. Appendices contain recommended readings and lists of organizations and networks that provide more information.



Survival Guide for Elected Leaders: essential skills and resources for small town officials

by The National Center for Small Communities
National Association of Towns and Townships
1522 K Street, NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005-1202
(202) 737-5200
1994; 78 pages; \$14.95.

Contains practical information for the experienced and newly elected officials, from personnel policies to dealing with the media to local government finances. Includes resource guides, checklists and sample forms for various duties. Also contains a listing of federal assistance programs, infrastructure assistance organizations and foundations.

Report documents community economic development

a new way to do business

No one was surprised when pharmaceutical giant Glaxo recently announced its merger with Burroughs Wellcome, resulting in layoffs of hundreds of North Carolina workers. Today's headlines are full of corporate mergers, jobs heading overseas or being eliminated altogether.

A new report shows that there is another way to do business. *Development with Dignity*, a three-year investigation conducted by the Institute for Southern Studies, documents an alternative path to prosperity for impoverished southern communities: community economic development.

The report analyzes the successes and challenges of the CED movement through interviews with fifty CED organizations serving urban and rural communities throughout the South. The projects range from traditional business development ventures to credit unions and farm and craft cooperatives.

Community economic development is best defined as "development of, by and for the community", according to study author Isaiah Madison. More than just creating jobs, CED aims to develop the educational, social and political capacities of the community. By cultivating their own skills and resources, low-income communities from the Appalachians to the Mississippi Delta can move to self-sufficiency—without relying on outside companies.

The report spotlights policies which state and federal governments can adopt to make CED a viable development strategy. Their goal is to create a regional and national support network providing community development groups with financial, marketing and technical assistance. Despite the

obvious success of CED work, short-sighted governments and a lack of grassroots political organization have stalled the creation of such a partnership.

Successful CED ventures demand the support that the government is reluctant to give. *Development with Dignity* shows that community organizing is an essential and often overlooked aspect of CED work. Forty-three percent of survey participants indicated they overcame challenges to their work

through "electing supportive officials", "becoming politically active" or "organizing the community to fight back". Without political organization, a community cannot expect to confront the

many challenges to development work, such as racism, a lack of resources, and political hostility.

At its heart, CED is as much about political as economic empowerment. "The government needs to be returned to the people," said Lillie Webb of the Center for Community Development in Hancock, Georgia. "We need to take full responsibility for what's happening to us and not just give the responsibility to someone else."

Development with Dignity is available from the Institute for Southern Studies, PO Box 531, Durham, NC 27702; (919) 419-8311. The cost is \$20.00.

. . . community economic development is as much about political as economic empowerment.

Next *Mountain Promise* will address telecommunications

Mountain Promise, the newsletter of the Brushy Fork Institute, is published quarterly. Our next issue will examine telecommunications in community development. We encourage readers to submit articles, reports, photos, lineart or story suggestions. If you have an article or a story idea, contact *Mountain Promise*, attention Donna Morgan, Brushy Fork Institute, CPO 35, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky 40404; or call (606) 986-9341 extension 6838.

for the calendar

October 14-15, 1995

West Virginia State Network Conference

Ripley, WV

West Virginians, come one, come all! Dedicated Brushy Fork Associates from around West Virginia have been planning a conference you will not want to miss. Open to all residents of West Virginia, the conference is based on the theme *Back to Nature—Back in Touch*. Session topics include personality styles and *Odyssey of the Mind*. West Virginia ghost stories by Dr. Virginia Plumley-Gray and music by Surefire highlight the evening activities. Registration for the conference begins Saturday, October 14 at 10:00 am, with workshop sessions beginning at 1:00 pm and running through dinner. The conference ends with lunch at noon on Sunday, October 15. For more information, call Brushy Fork at (606) 986-9341 extension 6838.

October 5, October 10, October 18, October 19, 1995

Teamwork for Tomorrow Workshops

see locations below

Open to leaders and community organizations that work in the Appalachian Regional Commission counties of Kentucky, this program will feature sessions on effective meetings, recruiting volunteers and maintaining a successful organization. Organizations that meet program criteria will be eligible to apply for mini-grants. The workshop will be offered four different days in different locations: October 5 in Hazard, October 10 in Russell Springs, October 18 in Frenchburg and October 19 in Flemingsburg. See related article, page 5. For more information, contact Brushy Fork Institute, CPO 35, Berea College, Berea, KY 40404; or call (606) 986-9341 extension 6838.

October 27-29, 1995

Celebration of Traditional Music

Berea, KY

This year marks the twenty-second of the Annual Celebration of Traditional Music held on the Berea College campus. Festival musicians will include J.P. and Annadeene Fraley, John Hartford, Ginny Hawker and Kay Justice, Walter McNew, the Northern Kentucky Brotherhood, the Rabbit Hash String Band, Carl Rutherford, Kim Treece and Kathy Bullock, and Roberta Voyles and the Marble Mountaineers. Musician John Hartford will also present a symposium on "Legendary Fiddler Ed Haley". For more information or tickets, contact the Appalachian Center, CPO 2336, Berea College, Berea, KY 40404; or call (606) 986-9341 extension 5140.

Brushy Fork Institute
Berea College CPO 35
Berea, KY 40404
606 986-9341 ext. 6838

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