



# Champions of Rural Arkansas

Champion: An ardent defender or supporter of a cause or another person ; a warrior

~

“If you’re a champion, you have it in your heart.” Chris Evert

**A special thank you to the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas for helping sponsor this event.**

The Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas are proud to serve about 490,000 people in Arkansas and surrounding states by providing them with reliable and affordable electricity to power their homes, businesses, and farms. In addition to providing our members with electricity, we work hard in our communities to enhance the quality of life, to bring new industry to the state, and to improve rural water systems, fire departments, and highways.



# Program

**5:45 Registration ~ Greet friends old and new**  
**6:00 Welcome and Presentations Begin**



## **Central Arkansas Honoree Ron Crawford.**

Just about anyone who has followed basketball in Arkansas over the last 30 years has heard of “Coach” Ron Crawford. Ron has served as a volunteer coach all of his adult life, including high school, junior high, middle school, and elementary school. He views his coaching as a way to impact young people in a positive way through education. Ron is currently national Treasurer of the Amateur Athletic Union. He was inducted into the AAU Volunteer Hall of Fame in 2005. Radio listeners will recognize him as a frequent contributor to the popular show “Drive Time Sports.” Ron and Linda, his wife of 45 years, were born and raised in the Boot Heel of Missouri, where farming was the major source of income. “I have lived the value of education in rural America and am totally committed to the truth that bigger is not better when it

comes to education.” Accordingly, Ron has contributed in many ways to protecting small and rural schools in Arkansas, giving generously of his time, resources, and personal skills to Rural Community Alliance, the Arkansas Rural Education Association, and communities that have fought to keep their schools. Ron was born in Kennett, Missouri, and after high school became a Graduate Journeyman Tool and Die Maker, International Association of Machinists apprentice program. With a forty-year career in sales and marketing, he is the Chairman and CEO of Southland Metals, Inc., in Maumelle, Arkansas, a family-owned company which he founded in 1974. He and his wife, Linda, have two children, Keith Crawford and Ronda Maxwell. They have eight grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. He and Linda attend Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock.



## **Southwest Arkansas Honoree Cyndi Moorman.**

Many small rural Arkansas communities can thank Delight teacher Cyndi Moorman for much of the successful advocacy for rural schools around the historic 2003-04 legislative session. Cyndi started Arkansas Citizens United for Results in Education, an Internet-based advocacy group of rural citizens around the state. She later merged this group with Save Our Schools to help form Advocates for Community and Rural Education, which eventually became Rural Community Alliance. She was a founding board member of ACRE and for several years managed the ACRE website. In 2004 Cyndi produced a White Paper, *From Punishment to Partnership*, which analyzed the education reforms of 2003 and 2004 and suggested that the Department of Education should be more supportive of local education efforts. “I joke to people that my life changed ‘when Huckabee spoke,’” Cyndi says, referring to former Governor Mike Huckabee’s proposal to consolidate all school districts with

fewer than 1,500 students. Having been through one consolidation and being in a great school in an economically viable community, Cyndi says, “It made zero sense to close [schools when] closure would throw the rural residents and their economy into a tailspin.” Cyndi believes preserving communities “is a necessary long-term goal, but it’s an elusive one that cannot be achieved if schools in those communities close.” Her challenge to people who wonder about the value of advocating for the preservation of rural schools is to name one economically viable community that doesn’t have a school. Cyndi has a master’s degree with dual certification in English and social studies, and she recently completed the rigorous national certification process. She has taught for 30 years. Cyndi and her husband, Stan, have one daughter, Rachel.

**6:30-6:50 Break**

**Enjoy our hospitality and bid on silent auction items.**

## **Southeast Arkansas Honoree Juanita Weston**

**Burton.** Juanita Burton has a long history of volunteerism in her community and in Chicot County. She helped to found the non-profit organization Southeast Arkansas Human Development Associates (serving as board chair) and was instrumental in establishing many of its programs, such as the summer nutrition program and the after school tutoring program. She is a member of the Eudora Environmental Focus Group of the Rural Community Alliance Community Revitalization Project. She is a member of the Chicot County Single Parents Scholarship Fund and has also served as a 4-H Leader, Cub Scouts Den Mother, Voter Registration Project member, Eudora PTA Save Our School Committee, the Women's Project board, Southeast Arkansas Regional Development Council Committee, and NAACP member. She has worked as a caseworker, volunteer services coordinator and county administrator for the Arkansas Department of Human Services, State Coordinator for the Voter Education Project, coordinator for the SAY Y.E.S. (Youth Educated and Self-motivated) teen pregnancy prevention program and data entry operator for the 21st Century CLC after school program. She currently teaches Computerized Business Applications and Computerized Accounting I at Lakeside High School, where she is also a member of the ACIP committee, co-sponsor of FBLA, and a member of both Lakeside High School Education Association and the Arkansas Education Association. A native of Eudora, where she still lives, Juanita graduated cum laude from Philander Smith College. She is the widow of Artice Burton and has four grown children and 15 grandchildren. She attends St. Peter Missionary Baptist Church, where she serves as an usher.



## **Northeast Arkansas Honoree Dana Kelley.**

Very few are the voices in the establishment media that stand up for rural schools and rural places, so his championing of both makes journalist Dana Kelley both remarkable and especially appreciated by rural people across the state. Dana is the President, Creative Director, and owner of TRUE Visionary Marketing in Jonesboro, Arkansas, the oldest and largest marketing communications firm in northeast Arkansas. He is also an op-ed columnist for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, where he has written a weekly Voices page column since May 2000.

“Presumably nobody associated with Arkansas public education policy wants to see a well performing school closed, especially one with good test scores and enthusiastic parental and community support. Yet that’s happened over and over again as a result of the state’s minimum student requirement,” Dana wrote in January of 2010. When Delight and Weiner were turned down by the State Board of Education for their innovative Arcadia proposal in February, Dana observed, “I remember when Arkansas license plates carried ‘The Land of Opportunity’ at the top. The sad thing is that here in the sweeping, surging new millennium so ripe for innovative ideas, our state education board is content with being the Land of Missed Opportunities.” A recurring theme of his weekly column is the notion that, rather than seeking to urbanize our rural areas, our state should embrace its rural nature and innovatively develop policies that result in a “best rural practices” model for other similarly populated states. Dana has an Associate’s Degree from Williams Baptist College and a Bachelor’s degree from ASU. He and his wife, Kelly, have five children, Mary Kate (20), Maggie (18), Franklin (16), Lee Thomas (15), and Susannah (14).



7:10-7:30 Break

Last chance to bid on silent auction items.



### Northwest Arkansas Honoree Talitha Hardin.

“It’s hard to talk about myself,” Talitha Hardin maintains. Fortunately for the people of Leslie and Searcy County, Talitha has no problem speaking up for others and goes to great lengths to make her community a better place for everyone. As Project Leader for the Leslie Community Revitalization Project she has done a superb job of organizing her community to look at its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and take positive steps to bring more opportunity to the town of Leslie and its surrounding communities. Talitha has served on the Leslie City Council since 2006 and on the Searcy County School District school board since 2007. She has received the Outstanding Board Member award and the Master Board Member award from the Arkansas School Boards Association. She also serves on the Leslie Homecoming Committee. Talitha attended North Arkansas Community College and the University of Central Arkansas. For the past 10 years she has worked as

a home-based associate for an advertising and consulting firm based in Little Rock, which gives her the flexibility she needs to serve her family and her community. She has two children, Ashlyn, age 14, and Matthew, age 11. Talitha says, “My greatest influence is always first and foremost my Heavenly Father, who has blessed me tremendously with a loving, hardworking family five generations deep in Leslie soil.” She also credits her grandfather for teaching all of her family to try, work hard, and not quit. All of the things she does have given Talitha the opportunity and responsibility to listen and work directly with the people of Leslie, something she says she does not take lightly. She looks forward to serving even more in the future, hopefully as Leslie’s next mayor.

### Lifetime Achievement Award: Representative

**Don House.** Don House had a successful career in the ministry and Christian education before he moved back to his native northeast Arkansas to become a small business owner. In 1998 he successfully ran for the Arkansas House of Representatives. His record as a legislator clearly shows his compassionate and caring heart. Acts that bear his name deal with health and welfare, veterans’ affairs, and the preservation of life for the unborn. He sponsored a bill to establish a “Choose Life” license plate to support adoption programs in Arkansas and another to require school districts to adopt anti-bullying policies. He strongly supported rural schools and passed a law to establish the state’s model distance learning program as well as the appropriations measure to fund it. He also introduced and saw passed an act to fund isolated school districts. But one of Don’s greatest accomplishments as a legislator occurred behind the scenes when he, along with then House Majority Leader Harmon Seawell, pulled together a coalition of rural advocates that later became the grass-roots movement Save Our Schools, and his influence and assistance **cannot** be overrated. Don advised and mentored coalition leaders as they learned to navigate the unfamiliar waters of Capitol politics. He lobbied other legislators on behalf of the coalition and lent his presence to numerous regional and state-wide grass roots meetings and rallies. This coalition’s platform was the basis of many of the educational equity measures that resulted from the contentious 2003 legislative sessions. Without Don’s willingness to take an unpopular stand and do the right thing, it is probable that the proposal to consolidate all school districts with fewer than 1,500 students would have succeeded. In 2004, he was one of an advisory group that helped set up Advocates for Community and Rural Education to give supporters of small rural schools a permanent voice. Thank you, Don, for everything you have done for rural schools and communities. We **truly** couldn’t have done it without you.

