

RURAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

HELPING RURAL SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES SURVIVE AND THRIVE

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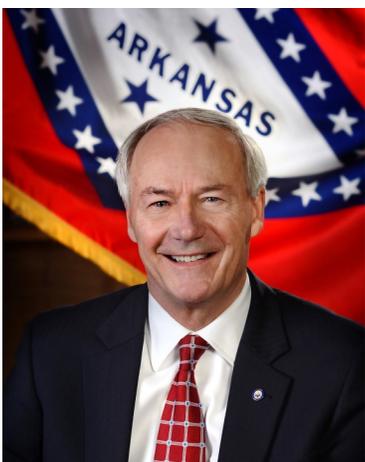
Rural Community Alliance celebrates Champions of Rural Arkansas



From left, Dr. David Raney, Robert Morey (accepting for the governor), Rep. Bruce Cozart, Rep. Mary Bentley, Rep. Charlotte Douglas, Colonel (Retired) Darryl Treat, Jack Crumbly, and Mayor Harry Brown

On April 22 Rural Community Alliance board, staff, and members honored eight men and women whose contributions have positively impacted life in rural Arkansas.

The biennial Champions of Rural Arkansas reception was held at the Hilton Garden Inn in west Little Rock and attended by RCA board, staff, members, honorees, and their family and friends.



Governor Asa Hutchinson was honored for his support for rural schools and communities. Before being elected, Governor Hutchinson expressed his support for rural schools and for children and families affected by school consolidation. In March 2015, he kept a campaign promise by signing into law a waiver from Act 60 consolidation for qualifying districts.

Dumas native **Dr. David Raney** has

spent a lifetime working to improve K-12 education, serving as a leader for several regional school improvement and student achievement initiatives. Most recently, Dr. Raney served on the ForwARd steering committee and is chair of the Forward Implementation Working Group.

Rep. Bruce Cozart was involved with public education before becoming chair of the House Education Committee; he served on his local Lake Hamilton School Board. In the 2015 legislative session, he sponsored HB1263, which became Act 377, to provide a waiver from school consolidation. Throughout the process, Rep. Cozart was collaborative about working with rural school advocates until a proposal was reached that all could support.

Rep. Mary Bentley, from Perryville, participated in the Interim Study to repeal Act 60 even before becoming elected to the Legislature. As a legislator she strongly supported the Act 60 waiver and also was the House sponsor of another key piece of legislation to establish pilot schools of agriculture so that K-12 school districts can develop an emphasis on preparing students for agriculture-related careers.

Rep. Charlotte Douglas has championed repeal of Arkansas' school consolidation law for several years. She participated in the Act 60 Interim Study and wrote the consolidation relief bill that came out of that committee. She eventually merged her efforts with Representative Cozart's and tirelessly advo-

cated for small schools to have relief from consolidation based on a minimum enrollment.

Colonel (Retired) Darryl Treat is the president of the Greater Searcy County Chamber of Commerce. During his tenure the Chamber has developed promotional and economic development activities that are models for small-budget rural counties. His leadership efforts have led to the Greater Searcy County Chamber of Commerce's Facebook page being the most "friended" of any Chamber of Commerce page in the state, and led to the Chamber's winning the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism's Bootstrap Award in 2016.

Former **Senator Jack Crumbly** is a lifelong educator who also served for a time in the Arkansas Senate. He developed an award-winning tutorial program and is working on economic development for the Delta and a vocational training program for adjudicated youth.

Mayor Harry Brown of Stephens both leads his small community and also serves as a mentor and model for other mayors as president of the Municipal League and vice-president of the Arkansas Black Mayors Association. He is a member of the Tri-State Coordinating Development Council and a deacon at St. Stephen's Baptist Church. Mayor Brown believes in having a strong connection to your community. As mayor he has brought many improvements to Stephens' city services and opportunities for young people.



Come to beautiful Camp Paron for the RCA Summer Conference!

RCA's annual member conference will be held **July 15 & 16** at Camp Paron in rural Saline County. **Any RCA member or friend of RCA** is welcome to be part of a family-friendly event of good food, entertainment, strategizing for our rural schools and communities, and learning about the cool things that are going on in rural Arkansas. RCA's intergenerational model of organizing means the event is one which your whole family can enjoy. There will be a BBQ and live music, swimming, and lawn games on Friday night and a day of interactive learning and planning on Saturday.

Your registration fee of \$15 per individual or \$25 per family covers lodging, meals, and conference participation. For a registration form, go to thenewrural.org/conference-registration, or call 870-714-0881 for information.

Parents in Dollarway S.D. take up the fight against charter encroachment



Dollarway School District alumna Annie Bryant is leading the charge to remove their school from state control and to oppose the encroachment of charter schools on the district's 1,192

students and four campuses.

The Dollarway School District is currently under state control, and the state-appointed superintendent has closed the high school campus, dispersing the students throughout other facilities. Parents fear that this will leave the district vulnerable to usurpation by charter schools of both the student population and the district facilities.

With no school board in place, the charter-friendly State Board of Education is in charge of all assets and operations of the district.

The district already competes for students and funding with the Pine Bluff Lighthouse Charter School and the Quest

Charter School of Pine Bluff, both of which show F ratings on the state's school rating system.

Now Celerity Global Charter School has applied for a K-12 open enrollment charter school and set up shop at 4809 Dollarway Road, less than one-tenth of a mile from the empty high school campus. Parents can't help being concerned.

Celerity Global Charter School is a Los Angeles based charter company, a division of Celerity Global Development. Celerity currently operates schools in Florida, Louisiana, California, and Ohio.

Charter school applications are considered by the state board of education's charter authorizing panel in August. The state education board will have a final review and make a decision in September.

Bryant is working with local elected officials as well as parents in the Dollarway district to bring forward concerns that additional charter schools will further erode students and resources from a district that has already struggled through five years of alternating academ-

ic and fiscal distress designations by the Arkansas Department of Education. The state took over the district again and dismissed its school board in December 2015.

Bryant says that parents overall feel that it is not in the district's best interest to have another charter operate within its borders. "The two charter schools that we currently have simply give parents the options to move from one failed school system to another."

"We are working on our curriculum. We are working on the school climate and culture. We haven't had a chance," says Bryant. Losing students would be destabilizing both to the program and the finances just as the district is struggling to get back on its feet.

Annie Bryant is a veteran and an alumna of Dollarway School District. She says she is committed to the fight to save her school: "We, the parents, alumni and other patrons of the Dollarway School District will not be SILENT...give up or give in."

Doddridge area chapter members build community through local organizations



Rural Community Alliance members in the Southwest Arkansas community of Doddridge are working through a variety of local organizations to preserve their history and create a sense of community.

Few funding sources exist for small rural groups doing community development, so they must "make do" with fundraisers and sweat equity for the most part, and the people in the Doddridge and Kiblah communities are doing some amazing things. (above, CHC chili supper fundraiser)

The Extension Homemakers Club has created a museum of fascinating memorabilia in the old general store.

Another project has been acquiring the Springbank Ferry, a project of the Doddridge Community Development Council, and setting it up as a historical monument near the Red River where it once provided crossings.

The CDC is currently restoring Doddridge's post office, which closed decades ago and exists in its historic state.

Nearby Kiblah celebrates its history by preserving its Rosenwald school as a community center and beautifying the grounds.

Penny Harris is the RCA Southwest Regional Director and actively assists in all of these projects.

First Lady Susan Hutchinson reads, donates books to Lead Hill students



In May First Lady Susan Hutchinson partnered with Scholastic Books to donate 100 books to Lead Hill Elementary School.

To make it even more special, Mrs. Hutchinson came herself to present the books and read aloud to Lead Hill elementary students.

Lead Hill, one of the smallest school districts in the state, was one of five that benefited from the partnership between the book company and the First Lady.

Rural Community Alliance was happy to be part of the presentation event, as two of our most active chapters, Lead Hill and Diamond City, are within the school district's boundaries.

Rural Community Alliance advocates for rural Arkansas schools and students and helps with community revitalization projects. Our theme for 2016 is

Leave No Arkansas Community Behind!