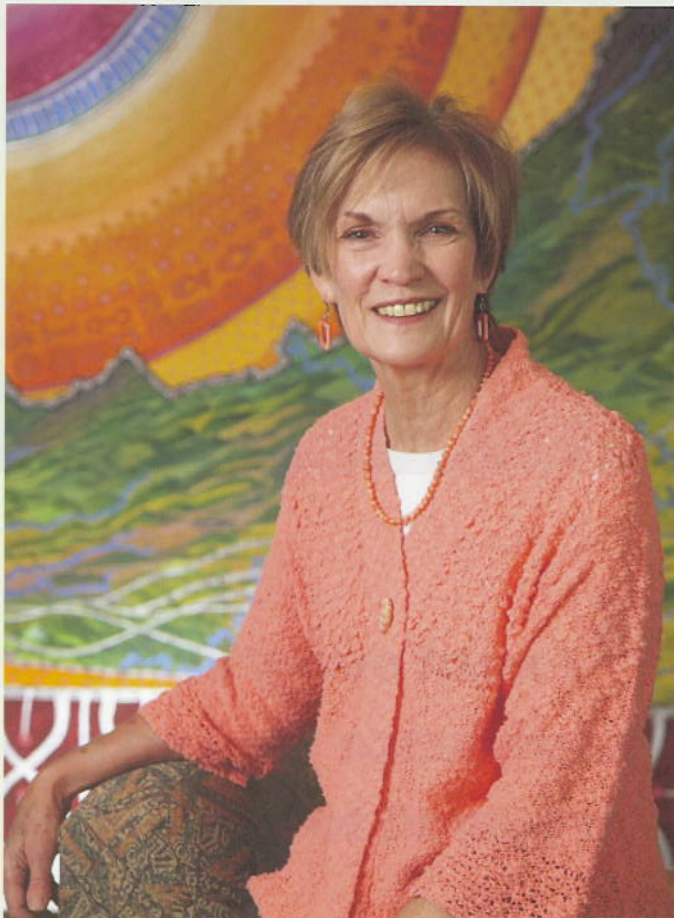


Rachel Fowlkes: In the Beginning

IN THE HISTORY OF the Curry School's outreach to southwest Virginia, the beginning of the story is Rachel Fowlkes (Ed.D. '84, Admin & Supv), says professor emeritus Robert Pate.

He makes that claim because the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon was Fowlkes's brainchild—an idea that came to her while she served as director of the University of Virginia's Continuing Education Southwest Regional Center.

"Many of our high school graduates go to the community colleges in the region," Fowlkes explains, "but only 10 percent of the region's residents hold bachelor's degrees. It's not that they don't value education, but they need it to be available at a time and place that fits their circumstances."



Seeing the need for bachelor's degree completion programs and opportunities for graduate degrees, she envisioned a center bringing to the region a broader range of programs than a single university could provide.

With the help of Del. Ford Quillen, who served the 1st District from 1970 to 1993, the center was signed into existence by the Virginia General Assembly in 1991. Fowlkes has served as its executive director ever since.

Fowlkes began tapping the Curry School for degree programs and courses even before the SVHEC was established. "She is relentless in pursuing faculty from Curry to teach for her center," says Dan Hallahan, Charles S. Robb Professor of Education. Hallahan co-chaired her dissertation committee with Lynn Canady when Fowlkes was in the doctoral program at Curry.

Fowlkes oversaw construction of an 89,000-square-foot SVHEC education and conference complex, which was completed in 1998. The facility is a showplace of outreach to the Commonwealth, where courses not only are taught face to face but are also broadcast to remote sites.

"Rachel's single focus has been providing opportunities for a better life to those in southwest Virginia through education and economic development," says Leonard Sandridge, U.Va. executive vice president and chief operating officer. "No task is too big for Rachel."

Fowlkes is always looking ahead to ways the center can better serve the region's residents, and sees the Curry School as an integral contributor to the region's progress. "The center's successful model demonstrates the efficacy of multiple partners working collaboratively to solve mutual challenges," she says. "There is so much we can accomplish together."

The Curry School Foundation recognized Fowlkes's achievements with its Outstanding Alumni Award in 2002. ■