

Kentucky Philanthropy Initiative presents Commonwealth Award to three public officials

Three public officials who provided exemplary leadership in “building Kentucky through philanthropy” were awarded the first Commonwealth Awards by the Kentucky Philanthropy Initiative at its annual Summit on Philanthropy.

Senator Brandon Smith (R-Hazard) and Representative Fitz Steele (D-District 84) were cited for their extraordinary service in sponsoring and shepherding through the 2011 legislative session the “Endow Kentucky” legislation which provides a tax credit for new contributions to endowed community funds .

The legislation passed unanimously through both the Senate and House. And since it was launched in April, it has generated \$2.5 million in new contributions to community foundations. In addition nearly 40 counties in Kentucky are now in the process of establishing new philanthropic endowments.

Department for Local Government Commissioner, Tony Wilder, was cited for his lead in launching the Endow Kentucky program, taking an extraordinary interest in helping achieve its early success and promoting establishment of new funds. The department was charged with implementing the Endow Kentucky program.

Sen. Smith is a lifelong resident of Hazard. He graduated from the University of Kentucky, owns his own small businesses in Hazard, and served seven years in the House of Representatives before being elected to the Senate in 2008.

Rep. Steele has served in the House since 2009, representing the 84th district which includes his home Perry County.

“Fitz and I may be of different parties,” said Sen. Smith in accepting the award, “but unlike what is happening on the national scene, we are Kentuckians first, and we put Kentucky first. The Endow Kentucky legislation was “feel good” legislation in every way. It is important to our state and will make a big, positive impact for years to come.”

Both Sen. Smith and Rep. Steele represent the region served by Kentucky’s newest community foundation, the Hazard-Perry County Community Foundation.

Commissioner Wilder was appointed by Governor Steve Beshear to the Department for Local Government in 2008. He had served as judge executive of Boyle County for over 14 years. He helped establish the Wilderness Trace Community Foundation there. He is a graduate of Eastern Kentucky University.

The awards were presented by KPI's executive director, Michael J. Hammons.

The Kentucky Philanthropy Initiative (www.kyphilanthropy.com) was established in 2007. It is an advocacy group for increased philanthropy in Kentucky and has issued major reports, the Transfer of Wealth Kentucky report in 2010 and the “Power of Philanthropy: Forging Partnerships for Kentucky’s Children,” about the importance of strategic philanthropic investment in early childhood education, in 2009.

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