

Paul Fisher: A Champion of People, Clean Air Initiative

Paul Fisher is a champion of the Clean Air Initiative. He's a champion of the Center for the Environment and of Catawba College. In fact, Paul Fisher is a champion of Rowan County.

He is not only willing to support causes that promote the common good; he also encourages others to join him. "Paul Fisher is an amazing man," says John Wear, director of the Center for the Environment. "Once he decides that a particular effort is going to better the education or the quality of medical care or community development or the quality of life in this county, he gets behind it 100 percent and uses his considerable influence to bring others into the fold.

"Paul's granite integrity and his willingness to lead by example have a galvanizing effect on those around him," Wear says. "When he speaks, people listen."

A perfect example is the support the Clean Air Initiative has garnered as a result of Fisher's actions. At a luncheon for bank representatives at the Center for the Environment, he pledged that F&M Bank, the financial institution he heads as chairman and chief executive officer, would contribute \$10,000 to the air quality effort. Then he challenged the other officers in the room to follow suit. To date, five banks have committed \$45,000 to the initiative.

Air pollution is a quality of life issue, Fisher says. "It deals with health and with economics. If we're not doing well health-wise, we're not going to do well economically. The county won't attract favorable business. Good people are not going to come to the worst air quality in North Carolina."

He explains why he wanted the banks to sup-

port the Clean Air Initiative. "It was our time to do something," he says. "We were on the hot seat. We didn't cause all of the air pollution, but I'm sure we contributed to it in small ways, and those small ways add up."

Fisher believes that Catawba may have been destined

to assume a leadership role in the fight against air pollution. The Winston-Salem and Charlotte areas also suffer from poor air quality. "But there wasn't a catalyst," he says. "We had two things: 1) We had some of the worst air in the country, and 2) we had one of the finest small environmental programs in the state."

The Center has assumed the role of catalyst in the effort to clean up the air in this region. The fact that Salisbury is not the largest city in the region or that the Center is not the largest environmental organization may even be an advantage, in Fisher's opinion. "Another fellow 2000 years ago came from a small town, too," he says. "You don't have to be big time for people to recognize the importance of what you're doing. To be honest, it's probably an advantage."

He and his wife, Sue, have two children, Paula and Steven, and 10 grandchildren. ■

