

## INTERVIEW WITH KITTY BARNES

Initially when planning to speak with my local county commissioner, I had a list of questions ready to ask in a progressive order. I quickly realized from the paths our conversations seemed to lead, that I seemed to form questions in my head as Ms. Barnes was talking. I began the interview session by asking a few questions about her personal life such as the schools she attended and where she is originally from. I learned that Ms. Barnes is originally from NC but moved to West Virginia where her father was a miner. She attended Ohio University where she met her husband and they later moved to NYC for 4 years.

As I began to ask her about her job as a county commissioner, she was quick to mention her work on the Catawba County School Board, where she served for 12 years. She informed me that the reason she considered running for school board initially was due to the cutbacks in art programs in the county. Kitty Barnes took the knowledge that she gained through her time on the school board and applied it to her work as a county commissioner. Here she was able to better communicate with schools and have a little control over what money they were able to receive. She made it a point to mention that the relationship between the schools and the Board of County Commissioners was very important and mentioned other counties across the state that do not have so good of a relationship.

This conversation led me in to my next question for Ms. Barnes, regarding the budget in Catawba County. I asked her what most of Catawba County's budget went to; her answer was that schools got the majority of the money, followed by the sheriff's department, animal control, animal shelter, and the department of social services, as well as the landfill. This topic then led us into a lengthy discussion about the landfills in Catawba County. I was able to learn that the landfills in the county operate like their own separate business, that tries to at least break even when operating. Ms. Barnes was proud to mention that Catawba County was the first county in the State of North Carolina to enact county-wide recycling. I then asked her why our county does not offer free trash disposal, while other counties, such as Lincoln and Cleveland, do. Her answer was that the county prefers to operate on a "throw as you pay" system. Meaning that each citizen will pay each time they would like to dispose of their garbage.

Environmental factors within North Carolina were our next topic of discussion as we continued our discussion about landfills. I learned from Ms Barnes that Catawba County was one of the first counties to convert the landfill to methane, in which duke purchases to produce electricity. There are private companies that are repairing old pallets to reuse in the future, thus protecting trees. Also, green houses will be built on old and full landfills, as nothing else is permitted to stand on the property.

My next question for Ms. Barnes was her plans to run for re-election. She informed me that she really enjoys her job as a County Commissioner as well as the citizens of the county, and does, in fact, plan on running for re-election. She did inform me, however, that she does not plan on seeking a higher office.

Our topic of discussion then seemed to transition toward education and the discussion of new libraries and schools being built as well as the further integration of technology into the classroom. Kitty Barnes was very excited about the new library that is being constructed in Sherrills Ford, although she is not sure what the county is planning on doing with the old building. Also, South Newton Elementary School is adding on and tearing down parts of its school to better suit the children that attend. She informed that the money for this extensive building project began to get acquired in 2006/2007 when they added a half-cent sales tax within the county.

Toward the end of our discussion, I began to ask more basic questions such as her plans for attending the North Carolina County Commissioners Association Meeting, in which she told me that she would not be able to attend this year due to her traveling over seas. My last question, I thought would be very interesting: When I asked Ms. Barnes, "What is the main concern of citizens within the county," her answer was simply, "dogs."

I think this summed everything up and could not have been said any better. I really enjoyed my time speaking with Kitty Barnes. She was extremely nice and, of course, very helpful in helping me learn a little more about county government as well as her specific role as County Commissioner.