

Alicia Williams
Rockingham County

On May 7, 2014, I was pleased to interview Mark Richardson, one of the county commissioners of Rockingham County. Richardson has served as county commissioner for two terms. Before he ran for election, Richardson noticed that he did not approve of the way that the county's money was being spent. In order to do something about the issue, Richardson ran for county commissioner. While serving as county commissioner, he has faced many issues. These issues include the budget, county money, and zoning - the placing of farms. Richardson says that all of the issues he has faced are challenging.

Among some of Richardson's responsibilities as county commissioner are voting and economic development. Richardson is also involved in HeadStart, Partnership for Children, and Rockingham County Schools; he serves as principal of an alternative school. Despite his busy schedule, he enjoys raising alfalfa on his farm in his spare time.

One of his biggest concerns about Rockingham County is health. According to Richardson, not only does Rockingham County have the most unhealthy county rate, but teen pregnancy, cancer, and heart illnesses are on the rise. Richardson mentioned his concerns about unemployment, the dropout rate, litter, and the citizens' character. He is also concerned about Rockingham County's overall pride. When asked if he feels that our county is as involved in politics as it should be, he says that they are well involved and very representative.

Economically speaking, Richardson hopes to see the county at tier 2 in ten years. He believes that Rockingham County is capable of reaching the goal in as little as five years. He also wishes to see an improvement in the county's pride, along with higher employment. He says that if the county would take vocational opportunities with more seriousness, then employment would improve.

Back in February, Rockingham County suffered a spill of coal ash in the Dan River. Citizens were upset, fearing the toxic chemicals and the possible decrease of the tourism industry. When asked about the recent coal ash spill, Richardson says that it was not as serious as previously thought. He ensures that the coal ash is being cleaned up and preventative measures are being put in place.

One of the highlights of his term is meeting people. He greatly enjoys being informed, and helping citizens, who he says are the main priorities of his job. When his term is finished, he wishes for citizens to not remember him individually, but for what was done while he served as county commissioner.

During his time of serving, Richardson has had many learning experiences. He has thoroughly enjoyed serving as county commissioner, admitting that he will miss his job when it is over. However, Richardson does not plan to run for reelection,

“If you plan to run for reelection, it affects what you do today...,” said Richardson. In his opinion, “People who are focused on reelection do not do as great of a job as those who do not plan. People need to live in the present but also focus on the future.”

