

Jarrett Mull, Catawba County
Interviewed Kitty Barnes, Catawba County Commissioner
June 26, 2015

Although Kitty Barnes didn't start her career in politics. She is still a very effective County Commissioner because of her ability to see all sides of a problem. She doesn't accept what is given to her. She sees issues of the citizens of her area in a different way.

Kitty first ran for school board in 1986. She saw that the arts programs weren't getting as much funding as usual in the local high school. She wanted to revive that program because she had been a supporter of the program. She accomplished her goals during the 3 terms she served on the Catawba County School Board. Four years of her three terms were served as chair of the Board.

Her connections she made on the school board helped her make a successful race for a Chair on the Board of Commissioners. Her goal? To remind the returning commissioners about the implications of their decisions. She knew that she didn't know everything about government but she promised that she would look into every issue and treat it the same. She saw first-hand the implications that decisions made by the commissions had her life, as a citizen and as a school board member.

She has now served on the Board of Commissioners for 16 years. In those 16 years she has chaired the board for 12 years. She stepped down from chair this year. On a day to day basis she deals with a lot with of things, such as animal control. As you can guess there are a lot of people that get pretty upset about random dogs or other animals wandering about.

Her job as a Commissioner is to oversee how county government provides services, regulate capitol and current expenses, and they are also responsible for maintenance of the schools. Catawba County is a special situation. They support 3 school systems with multiple high schools unlike some counties who only support 1 high school. We are one of only 3 counties in the state in this situation.

In her years on the board, she has tried to work harder to establish connections on a state and national level. She has successfully increased Medicaid 9-11% for the citizens of her county. Even though the economy hasn't exactly been kind to our state, Kitty and the board continue to bring jobs into our county by working with incentive programs and providing services to bring companies into the county. One major company they brought in was Apple. They promised to bring at least 125 jobs and actually brought over 250 jobs.

In the last 15 years Catawba County has grown and modernized. This all hasn't come from Kitty's ideas. The board as a whole has come together along with a large group of other people to significantly improve our county in more ways than I can tell you in 500 words.