



ADVOCATING HIGHER EDUCATION

ALTHOUGH THE EDUCATION REFORM effort in Kentucky has focused mainly on primary and secondary education, one organization is working to keep higher education in the spotlight as well.

The Kentucky Advocates for Higher Education was formed in 1985 by founding chairman Robert D. Bell '49 of Lexington. The organization is dedicated to improving higher education opportunities for Kentuckians by speaking out for sufficient funding of colleges and universities and adequate financial aid opportunities for students.

Bell says the group was founded when he and other lay leaders in higher education in the state perceived a need for an advocacy group for higher education.

The group consists of 30 directors and a chairman. The directors loosely represent the state's public and private colleges and universities and do not hold official appointments with either the Kentucky Council on Higher Education or the institutions. Most directors are affiliated with major industries, businesses, financial institutions or professional firms that are representative of Kentucky's economy and geography.

The non-profit organization has no staff or office. Funding for its programs and projects comes from the business sector.

In its beginning, the Advocates formed to address three main goals:

- public funding of higher education comparable to and competitive with surrounding states;
- the highest quality higher education system, including support for the

Centers for Excellence in their embryonic stage and greater financial support of endowed chairs;

- enough student financial assistance to ensure every young Kentuckian otherwise eligible could attend college.

The group's first project involved raising the visibility of the state's higher education system and, at the same time, making state legislators more conscious of its needs, Bell said.

In January 1986, the Advocates

mascots, and we gave away basketball tickets and a van. Each school organized motorcades to Frankfort. We wanted to attract television news coverage, and we did."

In the budget she presented to the legislature during the 1986 session, Gov. Martha Layne Collins recommended a 20 percent increase for higher education, which the General Assembly approved. Some of that gain was later lost because of budget shortfalls.

Two years later, the Advocates sponsored another event, this time a march down Capital Avenue to the Capitol and a rally at the Dudgeon Civic Center Arena in February 1988.

• AWARDS OF ACHIEVEMENT •

The Advocates then turned to what action the group could pursue in years between sessions. The OAK Awards are one result. An acronym for "Outstanding Alumnus/Alumna of Kentucky," the OAK awards are given to alumni who have achieved national stature and reputation in their careers. Recipients also must have exhibited a lifelong affection for and attachment to their alma mater. Since its inception, 18 people have been recognized. UK alumni honored thus far include Joseph A. Boyd, Bert T. Combs, Elvis J. Stahr Jr., T. Marshall Hahn Jr. and William T. Young Jr.

The Acorn Award, which also consists of a hand-carved plaque in addition to a \$5,000 honorarium, was added later as an outgrowth of the OAK Award. It recognizes the role of the teaching professor in laying the foundation that made such achieve-



FROM LEFT: ROBERT BELL '49(founding chairperson), DAVID ATKINS, JIM WISEMAN, DAN LACY (current chairperson).

organized eight concurrent rallies around the state in support of higher education. Attendance statewide exceeded expectations, reaching 4,000, or 5,000 per site. Bell said the timing of the event on the eve of the General Assembly session was deliberate. "We had overflow crowds statewide in support of higher education the night before the legislature convened," Bell said.

After the legislative session began, the Advocates planned an event in Frankfort to further demonstrate public support for higher education. "We took a page from what draws attention to athletic events," Bell said.

"We had pep bands, cheerleaders,