



THE HONORABLE
DENNIS WICKER

FORMER NORTH CAROLINA LT. GOVERNOR

The genuine love and dedication to the state of North Carolina – its people and land – is evident as soon as former Lieutenant Governor Dennis Wicker revisits his childhood. “We all felt like one big family down there in Lee County. We had a great thing going,” he states with pride and nostalgia as he reflects on growing up in a family of six in the small town of Sanford, N.C.

Honesty and integrity, “not always getting your own way,” and “ensuring you dedicate part of your time to helping others get ahead,” made the fabric of his family’s values. He fondly recalls putting these values into practice: the comradery and community spirit of lending a hand whenever needed to a neighbor or a friend across town or working hard in the heat of each summer. “One thing that working in tobacco taught me was that I do not want to do that,” he laughs. Cue his passion for higher education.

Wicker expresses deep gratitude to his parents for being “big believers in education” and voices his good fortune for knowing exactly what he wanted to do very early on in life. The defining moment puts him back to 1961, when at the mere age of nine, he accompanied his mother to the North Carolina General Assembly to watch his father, who at that time chaired the finance committee, debate a food tax proposal to help fund public school education. Wicker vividly remembers sitting in the gallery of the old Capitol and witnessing his father’s unwavering composure while his integrity and character came under verbal scrutiny. His father’s words at the dinner table made a lasting impression on Wicker and ultimately became a guiding light

“Dennis Wicker has an incredible record of service to the people of North Carolina – especially his many contributions to our education system. He has also been a valuable member of Coke Consolidated’s Board of Directors for many years. We have benefitted greatly from his wisdom and guidance and have been blessed by his friendship.”

FRANK HARRISON

*Chairman & CEO,
Coca-Cola Consolidated*

in his life mission: “You know, son, I did it for education,” his father told him. “I did it so we could make our children better educated.”

Wicker felt that as a lawyer, he would have the ability to change not only lives but entire communities. He received his undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, joking that his father, an N.C. State graduate, “Wasn’t real happy about that.” Wicker marks his professional start at a small firm after graduating from Wake Forest University School of Law as “... some of the best times of my life. You would come home after helping someone in court, and you’d find a basket of cookies at your front door. It was such a gratifying feeling but more than that, it made you feel like you’d done something substantial and helped someone else make their day go better.”

He highlights a tragic case of a young man “maimed for life” in an accident caused by a drunk driver. As a member of the N.C. House of Representatives from 1981 to 1993, Wicker fought to toughen the drunk-driving laws, which finally paid off and got passed while he was serving as the 31st Lieutenant Governor (1993–2001): “It was very moving for me. I still remember my client’s name and stay in touch with him from time to time. That was one experience that taught me to never give up trying to help people. I couldn’t help him but maybe someone else.”

Despite his renown as a legislator and Lt. Governor, Wicker’s passion lies in enhancing the state’s public education system – an inescapable result, perhaps, of his upbringing.

“It makes me smile,” he remarks as he yet again returns to his roots and praises his father for uniting with local leaders to establish a higher education institution in Lee County. Following his father’s lead, Wicker continued to strengthen the system as the first statewide-elected official to chair the State Board of Community Colleges. “The Community College System has changed the lives

of so many North Carolinians, and to have the opportunity to serve as the Chairman was an honor to me,” he says. “These institutions give our working people the skills necessary to live a decent life. It has had such a humongous impact on their lives and their families to be able to help themselves get better with their hands and their minds.”

Wicker’s devotion to his family is palpable as he describes spending time with his wife, boating at their lake house or taking his boys for a ride in his Shelby Mustangs. “I don’t think my neighbors like them very much when I crank them up at my house,” he chuckles. He speaks with pride

about his three sons – including a set of twins – and their families. “I had a grandbaby just today,” he exclaims with pure joy. And while he might not be sweating in the tobacco fields, he loves to get his hands dirty landscaping and gardening on his original homestead in Sanford.

“It was a blessing to me to grow up in a small town in a rural county. Who knows, Lord, who knows where I’d be today if I hadn’t.”

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