



Betty Huskins

Betty Huskins is vice president-public affairs and corporate development at AdvantageWest-North Carolina, a 23-county regional economic development partnership in Western North Carolina. She and her husband David Huskins also own and operate Linville Falls Lodge and its restaurant, Spear's BBQ & Grill.

Mountain Roots. Growing up in Penland, N.C. was in many ways like reading a wonderful and wholesome novel. My childhood was filled with lots of cousins to play with, acres of woodland to explore, and a mother and father who taught me the importance of love, honesty and responsibility. I can still see my mother picking a pink sweet pea bloom to place in daddy's lapel on Sunday morning on our way to church. I can still feel daddy holding my hand as he walked me down to the creek to pick the first trout lilies in early spring, quietly teaching me how to cherish the simple wonders of where we lived. I would wish for every child to grow up with memories like these because they have always kept me grounded. I have found through the years that if you let them, these wonderful old mountains will wrap their arms around you and protect your soul.

Community. A strong sense of community still exists today in the mountains of North Carolina. You will find it in all the small towns dotted along the Blue Ridge Parkway and those tucked under the shadows of the Great Smoky Mountains. I am fortunate enough through my work to travel through these towns and watch folks come together to discuss river walks, studios, bike trails, museums and even biotechnology! The excitement of change is in the air, but the one thing that hasn't changed is people's love for where they live. We want to build strong economies without losing the things we cherish most. We want broadband Internet access and the advantages of a modern communications and utility infrastructure,

but we don't want to forget or let go of our heritage. Our communities are America's unique and special treasures, and I believe we are beginning to see that fact more clearly than ever. How many people today have the luxury of a quaint one-room post office with

of working together for common good. Our region probably has more quality and successful nonprofit organizations per capita than anywhere in the U.S. Give us a challenge and by golly we will not only find the answer, but we will create a national model for success. I have been personally blessed by being a part of some of those organizations. I have said many times, "we might disagree with each other at home, but when we come out of the hills you better not mess with any of us because we will surely circle the wagons!"

Our Future. I believe we as a people are beginning to understand what is so special about this place. We now spend more time talking about air quality, water quality and downtown revitalization: things our parents probably never thought about. I believe we will work together to protect the things we cherish most while building a strong backbone of economic growth. We can look to the bright, young entrepreneurs to help us chart that course. They will be up for the challenge because they come from good stock.

It is rewarding for me, now a grandmother, to listen to my children talk about the importance of where they grew up. I quietly smile to myself when I hear my three sons – who couldn't wait to leave this "boring" place at the onset of their college years – today speak of how wonderful it is to be back in the mountains. Looking at them and the wonderful men they have become, I know the future is bright. I can almost smell those trout lilies again!



Betty Huskins. "We want to build strong economies without losing the things we cherish most."

breathtaking mountain views across the street from their homes? Where else could I live that my postmaster would check on me if I didn't pick up my mail?

Mountain Leadership. We have always been blessed with men and women of strong will and spirit, and that spirit still runs through our veins today. The mountain people hold on to the independence of their Scots-Irish descent, but they also know the value

JOHN MEERS