Pikeville picks Patton as president

Pikeville College has begun its 121st year of educating eastern Kentucky students with a new leader. Former Kentucky Gov. Paul Patton has taken the reins as the school's 18th president after serving nearly three decades as a member of the board of trustees.

In his eight years as the Commonwealth's governor, Patton made a name for himself in higher education policy. In fact, he was known as the "higher education governor."

He proposed and championed the successful passage of Kentucky's Higher Education Reform Act in 1997, an effort that has been recognized as a model of progressive higher education policy. He also made substantial improvements in Kentucky's preschool and adult education programs, as well as successfully maintaining the momentum and funding for the Kentucky Education Reform Act. In February 2009, Patton was named chairman of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.

Both Patton and former first lady Judi Patton, a Pikeville College alumna, have established offices at the college, re-creating the governor's office as a historical exhibit for students, historians and other visitors to campus.

Patton was born in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, the son of a teacher and school cafeteria worker. A 1959 graduate of the University of Kentucky with a degree in mechanical engineering, he spent 20 years building a successful coal business before turning to public service. He has served as chairman of the National Governors Association, the Southern Governors Association, and Kentucky's co-chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission, as well as deputy transportation secretary, leader of the state Democratic Party and three terms as Pike County judge-executive.

Patton served as Kentucky's lieutenant governor while also heading the state's Economic Development Cabinet.

—Jackie Hollenkamp Bentley