

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 24, 2023

## GRADD Honors Life of First Executive Director



The Green River Area Development District's first Executive Director, George Russell, passed away on December 30, 2022. Mr. Russell led the Green River Area District from 1969 through 1980, leading twenty-six Board members to organize GRADD. In 1970, GRADD received federal funding to hire staff and officially implement a regional program.

"GRADD was very fortunate to have had George as its first director," said GRADD's second Executive Director Russell Sights. "He had a unique ability to bring people together from different areas of the community in order to do what was best for the region. For me, he was an excellent director and he taught me so many things to use in the future and I value my time spent with George."

During his eleven-year tenure, Mr. Russell improved GRADD and the regional approach to governance in Kentucky and the nation. Mr. Russell went on to work for then-U.S. Senator Wendell Ford in Washington, D.C. and Governor Martha Layne Collins during her administration. Following her term, he joined the Kentucky Secretary of State's office in 1989.

"George was an early pioneer and leader in the regional council movement not only in Kentucky, but in the south and the nation," said GRADD's third Executive Director Jim Youngquist. "He had a unique ability to disarm local government egos, whether they were from a large jurisdiction or a small jurisdiction, to get them to understand that working together would benefit everyone regardless of size. He set the standard for GRADD's executive directors going forward. GRADD has always been seen as a leader in the state and southeast because of George's vision."

He oversaw the implementation of the state's first publicly financed gubernatorial election and beyond, with his service as president of the National Association of State Election Directors. He later became an international elections monitor and oversaw 19 foreign elections.

“George Russell was a pioneer of the regional movement in the Commonwealth of Kentucky,” said GRADD’s fourth Executive Director Jiten Shah. “He was proud to be GRADD’s first Executive Director, starting with no staff in the basement of the Daviess County Courthouse. I am so lucky that he took a chance on me to begin my lifelong career at GRADD. He was a true collaborator across political and urban/rural boundaries. He laid the foundation for GRADD to succeed at all levels and be a true partner for all seven counties and its municipalities. He will be missed not only in GRADD and the ADD world, but also in Frankfort and Washington. He was a great friend and mentor, and I will truly miss his smiling face and kind friendship.”

In 2002, he was nominated and selected by his former colleagues across the country to receive the Freedom Award from the National Association of Secretaries of State as the person who did the most to improve the election system in the United States.

“George set GRADD on the trajectory to become what we are today,” said GRADD’s fifth and current Executive Director Joanna Shake. “His leadership and heart for service brought people together for the good of the community. I am grateful to have known him and send my condolences to his loved ones.”

For more information, contact:

Jessie Howard

Public Information Officer

300 GRADD Way, Owensboro, KY 42301

(270) 926-4433

[jessiehoward@gradd.com](mailto:jessiehoward@gradd.com)

---

*The Green River Area Development District (GRADD) is a regional planning agency and council of governments serving the communities of Daviess, Hancock, Henderson, McLean, Ohio, Union, and Webster counties. GRADD offers assistance in the fields of aging, health, and social services; community and economic development; transportation planning; and workforce development. Our mission is to afford local governments and citizens a regional forum to identify issues and opportunities, and to provide leadership in planning and implementing programs to improve the quality of life in our district.*

300 GRADD Way, Owensboro, KY 42301 | [www.GRADD.com](http://www.GRADD.com) | 270.926.4433