

28-year old grassroots social justice organization

Kentuckians For The Commonwealth

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) is a membership-run organization that believes in the power of citizens, working together, to challenge injustices, right wrongs and improve the quality of life for all Kentuckians.

2009 Annual Report



Working for a Vision...

We are Kentuckians For The Commonwealth, a group of people standing together for justice. We have 6,000 members in 100 of Kentucky's 120 counties.

Our organizing strategy is like a river. It begins at the head of the "watershed," where local leaders build their personal and collective power in "tributaries." These tributaries feed into and create the River, which is KFTC's grassroots leadership and the source of the organization's power.

We have a vision. We are working for a day when Kentuckians—and all people—enjoy a better quality of life. When the lives of people and communities matter before profits. When our communities have good jobs that support our families without doing damage to the water, air, and land. When companies and the wealthy pay their share of taxes and can't buy elections. When all people have health care, shelter, food, education, and other basic needs. When children are listened to and valued. When discrimination is wiped out of our laws, habits, and hearts. And when the voices of ordinary people are heard and respected in our democracy.

We work on multiple issues, in response to our members' needs. We start by analyzing the problems and landscape. Then, with our vision in mind, we achieve change through nine goals of organizing:

- Help people participate
- Empower individuals
- Overcome racism and other forms of discrimination
- Foster democratic values
- Challenge and change unjust institutions
- Build organizations
- Communicate a message of what is possible
- Win issues that affect the common welfare
- Have fun

KFTC has a broad and deep program of work, multiple campaigns, a growing number of chapters, and an emphasis on building our capacity through leadership development and communications. On the following pages you'll find an overview of our progress in 2009 on each of our campaigns and a glimpse of what we hope to accomplish in 2010.



KENTUCKIANS FOR THE COMMONWEALTH

www.kftc.org

Action for Justice

Dear Friends,



When the KFTC family came together in October for the 2009 annual meeting, we were in the midst of one of our country's worst economic times in recent memory. Thousands had lost jobs, and our political leaders kept throwing temporary solutions at longstanding problems. Yet the atmosphere at the meeting was unmistakably hopeful. We all came because we knew that together we are our best hope for change.

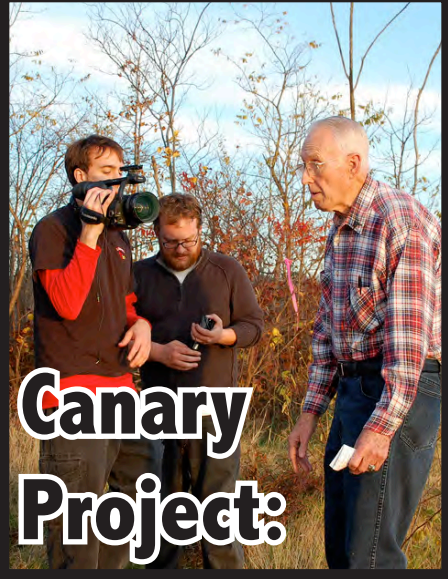
Organizing and hope go together. Across Kentucky, more than 6,500 KFTC members are actively pursuing change. We believe that affected people are the best qualified to lead their own fight, so we start at the heart of the problem – in our communities. We know change doesn't come quickly. It takes years of conversations, building relationships, making phone calls, attending meetings, writing letters and speaking truth to political leaders. Sometimes it means marching in the cold or even getting arrested for your beliefs. In 28 years, we've proven again and again that our way works.

Another reason we came together in October was to celebrate an exciting year and strengthen our spirits for the next one. In 2009 we moved ahead on each of our issue campaigns:

- Ending mountaintop removal and building a better future beyond coal
- Pursuing clean energy solutions
- Preventing new coal-burning power plants
- Building a new post-coal economy for Appalachia
- Restoring voting rights to former felons
- Achieving progressive tax reform

In these pages, we provide a few highlights from 2009. This booklet is both a report on a great year and a big thanks to those who helped make our work possible.

K.A. Owens
KFTC Chairperson



“Before I die I would love to see that mountaintop removal is completely stopped, not only in Eastern Kentucky but everywhere else.”

McKinley Sumner,
KFTC member, Perry County
(at left, McKinley Sumner shares his story on a mountain witness tour)

We launched the Canary Project in 2003 to build a better future – beyond coal – for Kentucky and the nation. The primary focus of the campaign has been ending mountaintop removal, a destructive and uniquely Appalachian form of coal mining. In the first six years of the 10-year campaign, we and our allies have raised the profile of coal issues to the state, regional and national levels.

In 2009, the debate around coal heated up nationwide, and nowhere was it hotter than in the coalfields. While the coal industry incited panic among its workers about the future of their jobs, residents living with the realities of coal spoke out about the need for new laws and new ideas – from their home communities all the way to Frankfort and Washington D.C.

Nine hundred KFTC members and friends gathered in Frankfort in February for I Love Mountains Day, marching from the Kentucky River to the capitol steps and sharing the podium with Congressman John Yarmuth and actress Ashley Judd. Less than a month later, members traveled to Washington D.C. for the Power Shift youth conference on climate change and participated in the Capitol Climate Action, the largest mass demonstration on climate change ever. Through the Alliance for Appalachia, less than a week after the Capitol Climate Action, more KFTC leaders were back in D.C. to join with more than 100 fellow coalfield residents and supporters from across the country lobbying

to pass the Clean Water Protection Act.

Back home, coalfield residents led numerous tours of mountaintop removal sites and shared their stories of polluted water, dust, mud, blasting and more with religious leaders, students, and Congressman Yarmuth, who took a flyover tour of mountaintop removal sites in November. At a mine permit hearing in October in Pikeville, a group of KFTC members endured heckling from some members of the crowd of thousands of miners and their families. However, KFTC folks moved beyond the heckling and had important conversations with some of the miners about transition.

In 2010, we’ll launch a major media campaign on mountaintop removal and take more citizen lobbyists to Frankfort and Washington D.C. while continuing to pressure coal companies and regulatory agencies at the local level.

Canary Leadership Network:

The Canary Leadership Network is a group of “super spokespersons” on coal who take the message to audiences across the country and provide a vocal and visible presence in their own communities. In 2009, Canary Leaders criss-crossed the country to expose the true cost of coal. Their work was featured in four books, three documentary films, and countless newspaper articles, radio spots and television newscasts.



Local New Power:

KFTC members in Benham and Berea took the lead in exploring alternative energy sources and encouraging their communities to conserve energy.

For the past few years, the Benham community has worked with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Community Innovators Lab to explore energy alternatives to coal for Benham's municipal utility. Early in 2009, the local KFTC chapter worked with the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development to offer a community energy workshop focused on residential energy audits and how to save money through energy conservation.

In Berea, the Madison County chapter's Energy Workteam pressured the local electric co-op to abandon plans for a new coal-burning power plant. The chapter also hosted a national energy expert, who talked about "Making the Business and Ethical Case for Energy Efficiency."



Energy Work

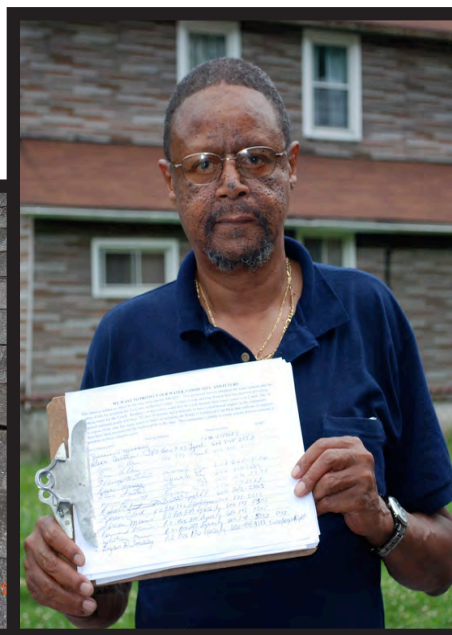
The goal of KFTC's energy work is to support the development of clean energy sources, especially those that create stable local jobs.

In 2009, we spearheaded the formation of the Kentucky Sustainable Energy Alliance, www.kysea.org, a group of more than 20 organizations from the, farming, nursing, environmental, energy, faith, small business and housing sectors, all with an interest in clean, affordable energy. KySEA adopted these principles for shaping Kentucky's energy policy:

- Make improving energy efficiency Kentucky's top energy priority
- Promote the development of clean, renewable energy from solar, wind, hydro and low-impact biomass, and increase the share of our overall energy mix that comes from renewable sources

- Create new jobs and opportunities for Kentuckians, including a just transition for coal producing communities and workers
- Enable all Kentucky residents and businesses to take advantage of energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions

With its diversity, KySEA brings to the table a full range of energy perspectives and expertise, as well as political influence. For the 2010 Kentucky General Assembly, the group is working to introduce comprehensive legislation to support energy efficiency and renewable energy.



Efficiency and conservation measures can save our energy dollar, provide jobs and eliminate the need for new power plants as proven around the country. Don't believe the coal industry when they say that coal is good for Kentucky jobs.

- From a letter to the editor by KFTC member Christine Missik, published in The (Danville) Advocate-Messenger

EKPC Campaign: Stop Smith



KFTC has worked for three years with allies the Kentucky Environmental Foundation and the Sierra Club to prevent construction of a coal-burning power plant in Central Kentucky. The plant would increase pollution in local communities, increase greenhouse gases, and increase costs for customers.

We stepped up the campaign in April by hiring a full-time campaign organizer to mobilize customers of East Kentucky Power Cooperative's 16 rural electric co-ops.

One such customer was KFTC member Randy Wilson, who decided to run for the board of Jackson Energy co-op in June. The first person to challenge a sitting board member since the co-op was founded in 1938, Randy ran on a platform of affordable energy, better energy choices, and good local jobs. Although he didn't win, he set a powerful example for other co-op members and engaged hundreds of consumers around energy and economic justice issues.

Other co-op customers also got involved in the fight, hosting house parties, writing letters to their newspapers and talking to neighbors about the need for renewable energy and energy efficiency instead of another polluting power plant.

In October, the three ally organizations and three KFTC members filed a formal complaint to the Public Service Commission, which ordered East Kentucky Power Cooperative to

respond to our complaints and justify building the plant.

We commissioned three studies in 2009 on alternatives to coal-burning power for EKPC, financial implications of the proposed new plant, and ways ratepayers would benefit if plans to build the plant are canceled.





Appalachian Transition:

“I have eight grandchildren who depend on coal for their survival. Coal is so much a part of my past and my present. But, if we are to survive here in eastern Kentucky, we’ve got to create a different future for eastern Kentucky and Central Appalachia.”

— Carl Shoupe, a KFTC member and former miner who has a son and son-in-law working in the coal industry. (pictured below)

The Appalachian Transition Initiative is meant to foster and support an economic, community, and workforce transition in Central Appalachia that moves the region from an economy of coal and poverty to a more just, sustainable and prosperous future. A partnership between KFTC and the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development, ATI is in its infancy, but it continues and expands the work begun with the High Road Initiative in 2006, with deep roots in KFTC’s Canary Project.

Coal has dominated Central Appalachia’s economy for 100 years and has brought persistent poverty, environmental destruction, poor health, and limited opportunities. The number of coal jobs has declined dramatically, and we may have as little as 20 years’ worth of recoverable coal left.

In 2009, KFTC and MACED launched an initiative to promote a conversation about a transition for Appalachia that could take 20 years. It begins with conversations, new ideas, and recognition that we can and should move beyond our dependence on coal. We created the ATI website to serve as a clearinghouse for those ideas. The site (<http://www.appalachiantransition.net>) contains information about Appalachia’s history, culture and resources,

as well as links to organizations that can be a part of the transition conversation. Some of these organizations have projects that serve as models for the region.

A major piece of the ATI work in 2010 is leadership development: encouraging and supporting local leaders in their efforts to spark conversations about transition and to gather the ideas that folks are already talking about.





“186,000 Kentuckians do not have the right to vote. That is a shame – due to a mistake that they made years ago.”

— Tayna Fogle, KFTC member and former felon (pictured below)

Voter empowerment has always been an integral part of KFTC’s work – to achieve a better Kentucky, we need a healthy democracy. In the last few years, as we’ve talked with voters across the state, we’ve learned that a huge group — estimates as large as 186,000 Kentuckians — is locked out of the voting process because of a past felony conviction.

Kentucky is one of only two states that permanently bar former felons from voting unless they obtain a pardon from the governor. KFTC members are working for a constitutional amendment that would automatically restore voting rights once a felon has completed a sentence. Our bill has gained momentum in the Kentucky General Assembly over the past few years, passing the House with more than 80 yes votes in 2009.

After the General Assembly, members focused on local conversations to prepare for the 2010 session. A vibrant group of new KFTC members in Georgetown organized to pressure their senator, Damon Thayer, to allow a vote in the State and Local Government Committee, which he chairs. They visited churches, circulated petitions, presented to local groups, participated in community festivals, and registered voters at Georgetown College. When Sen. Thayer published an op-ed in the Georgetown newspaper opposing the voting rights amendment, KFTC member Homer White published a thoughtful response.

The campaign ended the year on an inspirational note as 500 people gathered in December in Lexington for a Singing for Democracy Gospel Fest in support of voting rights.





"I want businesses to be attracted to Kentucky, not because my son is cheap, but because he is skilled and well-educated. If we don't invest in public structures, I don't know what kind of Kentucky is going to be left for him."

— KFTC member Dana Beasley Brown, appearing on Kentucky Educational Television's *Kentucky Tonight* program in June speaking about her 2 year old son Stockton

The earliest KFTC members organized around tax reform back in 1981, and today's members are still working for a tax structure that's fair for everyone and generates the revenue our state needs.

The national recession exacerbated the shortcomings of Kentucky's already inadequate tax structure. 2009 was one of the bleakest years in recent memory for the Kentucky state coffers. Predictions of budget deficits just got more and more dire throughout the year, and the state ended 2009 expecting a deficit of nearly \$1.5 billion over the next two years.

KFTC members called for comprehensive tax reform. We organized a meeting with the Governor's office to encourage him to support progressive tax reform over a rumored regressive tax increase, worked with national policy groups to offer accessible analyses of the proposals being put forth by various factions, and organized a meeting with statewide reporters to share those analyses and encourage productive framing and messaging. But instead of rising to the call, the governor and state legislature continued to avoid long-term solutions and chose more and more budget cuts.

KFTC and allies in the Kentucky Forward Coalition again worked with Rep. Jim Wayne to introduce the Kentucky Forward Bill in the 2009 General Assembly. The bill

called for an earned income tax credit to assist the working poor, sales taxes on some luxury services, a more fair income tax, and a restoration of the estate tax. 2009 wasn't a budget year, but the bill still earned significant attention in the legislature. KFTC has joined our sponsor in meetings with House leadership, continuing to point them to these fair and sustainable solutions. Several legislators, once reluctant, are beginning to see the necessity of real reform.

KFTC member Dana Beasley Brown appeared on Kentucky Educational Television's *Kentucky Tonight*

program in June to discuss the need for tax reform. As a volunteer grassroots leader, Dana held her ground with two guests from anti-government, anti-tax organizations, challenging them on their assertions that government has no role in creating a better Kentucky.



Statewide Voter Empowerment

Building a base of motivated and informed voters works hand-in-hand with KFTC's goals for a better Kentucky. Voter empowerment has always been a theme of our organizing work, and since 2004 it has been a priority.

2009 was not a major election year, but we spent the year evaluating and analyzing the lessons of the watershed 2008 elections and preparing for the significant elections of 2010, which include a U.S. Senate race in Kentucky. As part of our goal to develop stronger voters and encourage better candidates, we offered a candidate training in Eastern Kentucky in August. A partnership between KFTC and Wellstone Action, the workshop focused on planning a campaign, fundraising, developing a winning message and more. We plan to replicate the training in other locations this year.

In 2010, we'll also add several full-time voter empowerment organizers and upgrade our database to handle voter data.



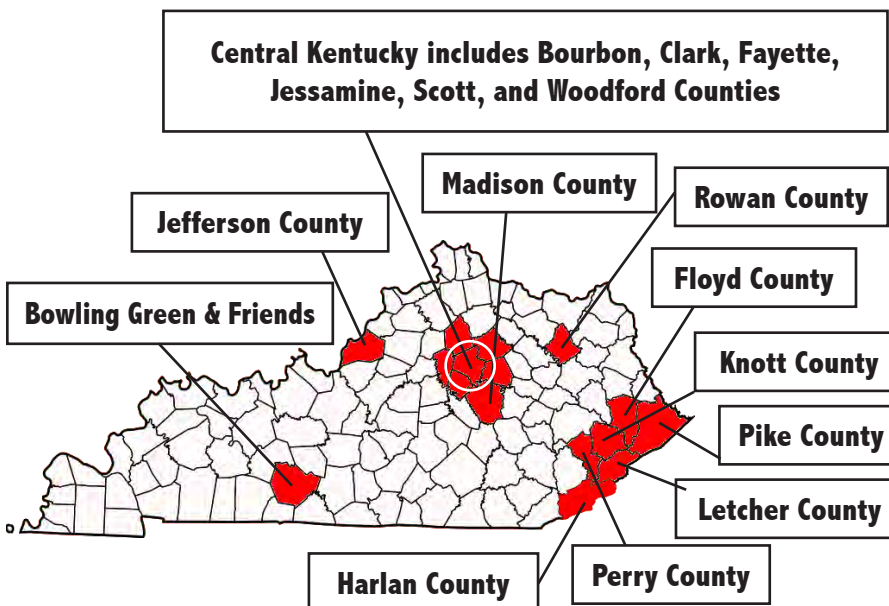
Chapter Organizing:

All of our statewide campaigns grow from local issues and the experiences of members. Chapters provide a space where affected people can discuss issues, develop strategies and draw strength from the support of others. KFTC currently has 11 chapters, including six in Eastern Kentucky, two in the urban centers of Lexington and Louisville, and three in smaller cities in central and western Kentucky. We may soon have new chapters in Northern Kentucky, Scott County, and North-eastern Kentucky.

Across Kentucky in 2009, chapters took action. As the Harlan County chapter pushed back against proposed mining on Black Mountain in the far southeastern corner of the state, the urban Jefferson County chapter contin-

ued to build a vocal movement against mountaintop removal, sponsoring high-profile events and even traveling to Eastern Kentucky to speak out at a contentious hearing in October.

New members in Georgetown organized around voting rights for former felons and planted the seeds of a new chapter. A growing Floyd County chapter reached out to new communities facing flooding from abandoned mines and coal truck traffic, while the new Bowling Green chapter continued to gain momentum on housing and economic justice issues. Students in the Central Kentucky chapter took the University of Kentucky to task for naming its athletic dorm "Wildcat Coal Lodge" to please a group of coal industry donors.





Building Power for the Long Haul:

KFTC continued to build grassroots power in 2009, preparing ourselves for a new level of membership, leadership and success in the next five years. In 2008 we launched the New Power Initiative to better weave our campaigns, elevate our skills and strategies, and grow the organization. In 2009 we refined the initiative by introducing the New Power Leaders program.

To build a movement powerful enough to bring about real change, KFTC leaders recognized that we needed to grow the organization to 25,000 members within five years. To achieve this ambitious goal, we needed new organizing strategies, advanced leadership development and a sophisticated communications strategy. The New Power Leaders program will achieve all three by developing a network of 1,000 community leaders (and eventually more) who will be active members while leading clusters of members in their communities.

Leadership development

Leadership development is the first among equals of KFTC's primary strategies and has always been the key to our success. We asked more of our leaders in 2009, as we began to envision a larger and more powerful organization. The KFTC Steering Committee, composed of leaders from all of our local chapters, voted in November to adopt the New Power Leaders program. In taking this step, they commit-

ted to a much higher level of leadership development that will use the best of our skills, ideas, history, and lessons to deepen our grassroots organizing while we expand the scope, scale, and impact of our work. Many Steering Committee members will become New Power Leaders themselves.

Grassroots Fundraising and Membership Recruitment

In 2009, we exceeded our grassroots fundraising goal of \$240,000 by rais-

ing just under \$260,000. We recruited 1,000 new members and 100 new sustaining givers who pledged to support KFTC monthly or quarterly. We tried something new with member videos, but also kept our old strategy of talking with thousands of members one-on-one about why they love and support KFTC. This success laid the groundwork for our New Power goal of becoming more self-sustaining in the next five years. New Power Leaders will play an integral role by fundraising in their communities and recruiting members to become sustaining givers.

Communications

The goal of KFTC communications is to enable, support and enhance our organizing work and goals. To prepare for major growth and a more integrated program, in 2009 we began a strategic planning process for communications. Working with the Progressive Technology Project, we surveyed KFTC members on their communications needs and began analyzing all of our tools, from our website to our newspaper, balancing the scales. Top priorities for 2010 include developing materials for New Power Leaders and launching a major media campaign around mountaintop removal.





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