

Thank you all so much for being here tonight. I want to explain why I was so shamelessly happy with the prospect of this party. It gives me a chance to tell you what I really think about you.

When I first joined the board, I was already passionate about the mission, and fully committed to what I understood that mission to be - protecting and conserving farmland, creeks and streams, and all our beautiful natural resources.

But over the past few years, my concept of our mission has grown, and I realize now that that happened because I got to know each of you. I now understand that by protecting the land, we are also defending something just as important - maybe more so. By conserving the land, we are also conserving the values that farming represents. Hard work. Service, Appreciation. Sharing. Honesty. Kindness and fairness. Resilience. And the faith and determination to keep going when things get tough. Values that each of you express so clearly and quietly in your own lives. You are like the human expressions of the land, and the forests and the creeks and rivers, and you are the voice for all the farmers and conservationists who came before you.

Barbara - my 8 years on the board pale in comparison to the 13 years you sat through every board meeting, even as a non-member, to fulfill your commitment as a representative of Boydville. When I saw what you were willing to do, it made me want to match it. You may be our resident city mouse, but your strength, conviction, generosity of spirit, volunteerism and ethics are the best parts of your country roots AND your city ones, and of our board's. And you have a song for every occasion. I will miss your warbling.

Squirt - you manage a nearly 800 acre operation with Robbie, a Herculean task in itself, yet I am constantly learning ANOTHER new example of your many many acts of kindness and generosity in our community. You never broadcast how generously you give to others, or how richly you support events - not only with your hard-won farm produce, but with your personal time and with your kindness. You just quietly share and never seek any credit. And you make each person feel remembered and important. You are a CEO who is not above delivering a gallon of milk on her way to an important meeting. You are something.

Dan - your gentle, kind, caring spirit, like Carla's, never seeks attention. Your service to this board has continued without complaint or murmur even while you were snatched out of your well-deserved-retirement time and time again because you and your talents were so needed. You are the definition of the kind of man about whom they say "still waters run deep" and I so admire your quiet strength and dedication. It was a privilege to serve with you.

Sandy - we all know that your service to our board is "greatness thrust upon you." Yet despite your exacting workload with the Development Authority, you

contribute to our board with full attention, focus and imagination, and moreover with great good cheer. I will never forget interviewing you for the newspaper article on board members - how outspoken you were on behalf of protecting farm land, and, when I asked if I could quote you, you responded: "absolutely." You were still an interim director, not yet selected for your current post, and I remember clearly admiring how brave I thought that was of you.

Elaine - like Sandy, your membership on the board is compulsory, yet you serve with great enthusiasm, and bring a special perspective to the table - the importance of the history of our region. You also provide vital context for us in understanding the directions that policies in the County are headed, and how they may affect our program. Despite your demanding meeting schedule, running a business, and holding a public office, you manage to make our meetings a priority. I remember what it was like to be the only woman on this board, and while someday I hope you will add the pink hat to your vast collection, I admire your many accomplishments.

Brad, I am so delighted that my calls to Mary Ruth somehow resulted in your joining our board, and I know I speak for all of us when I say how grateful we are to have you, and how much you have impressed each of us with your approach to serving - attention to detail, extreme care to observe ethics, and your wonderful way of listening intently to board discussion and then striking just the right note in distilling the input through a well crafted motion. I can only imagine how much you are missed at the VA. Thank you for your latitude and longitude.

Laura - my shoes will not be hard for you to fill, and I can already see what special qualities you will bring to the board by the love you expressed so eloquently for your own beautiful farm, and by the energy and dedication you demonstrate serving the school board by day, and nurturing the lives of your calves and your farm and your family by night. I also know you and your husband are real innovators, and your experience and passion will be such an asset to the team. Welcome.

Floyd and Mike - I have already shared this - it bears repeating - you are both unstinting in your service to every organization to which you belong, and to every person lucky enough to know you. You are the shining example of the end of every grace said at my family's table - "let us always be mindful of the needs of others."

Mark - as Carla says, you are a blessing. You are so much more than your outstanding credentials and degrees, your unparalleled capacity for organization, your wizardry with programming, your fierce work ethic, and your spectacular beard. You are compassionate, and you are funny. You turn problems into opportunities. You have the essential ingredients of a brilliant mind and a wonderful human being - you are curious and you love to learn. And you are willing to share all you know with others. You are cut from a mold of integrity on

which our board can always rely as it navigates the coming years.

Mike, you left Key West, and a career that gave such beautiful expression to your many talents, so that we could live on a farm. With winter. Once we were here, you found meaningful and important work, and new ways to make a difference. You allow homeless animals to invade our home routinely. Thank you for supporting my own efforts to find purpose, and for your love and respect for all living beings.

I feel like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz right before she clicks her heels and heads home to Kansas. I will miss all of you. I would like to think that I was half the board member you thought I was, but I know for certain that I am better for knowing all of you. And blessed to know you as friends. Thank you.

Torri - your ascent from a volunteer intern to a valued employee not just of Berkeley county but of Jefferson as well has been a joy to witness and you have earned every bit of it by your talent and insight and aptitude. I am so proud of you and wish you continuing success. No I predict it.