

Charles Hodel



Charles Hodel, a longtime newspaper editor and publisher in Beckley for 40-years, supported the cause of agriculture, soil and water conservation and community development.

Mr. Hodel used his newspaper to strongly support state and federal agricultural agencies at a time when support was needed and employed a full-time farm reporter and printed a “Farm Page” twice weekly. He was widely known for his concern and activities in initiating projects and developments to improve Southern West Virginia.

Although not an official member of the Southern Soil Conservation District, or of other agricultural boards, Mr. Hodel was widely acclaimed as “father “ of the Southern Soil Conservation District. His constant reporting of soil conservation programs and needs led many coal miners in Southern West Virginia to build some of the best farms in the area. Mr. Hodel was responsible for the Rural Development Council which in turn brought the Farmers’ Market to Beckley.

For many years he opposed ‘big dam foolishness’ and advocated small upstream structures to control flooding. Personally and editorially he encouraged the establishment of a forestry research center at Princeton. Mr. Hodel attended many local, state and national meetings each year and had a thorough knowledge of the purposes of each meeting he attended. He used his newspaper to inform the public of the pertinent business conducted at each of these meetings.

He was a member of the Friends of the Land for 30-years and served on the organization’s national board. He was named an honorary life member of the West Virginia Soil Conservation District Supervisor’s Association in 1957. The Charleston Gazette-Mail named Mr. Hodel to West Virginia Press Association’s Hall of Fame in 1963 and was named “Man of the Century” by the West Virginia News Digest Board of Publishers. He served as chairman of the West Virginia Centennial Commission.

In addition to his lifetime interest in soil and water conservation, he spearheaded many local activities, including the establishment of the West Virginia Historical Dramas Association, the Raleigh County Memorial Airport, the New River Park, the Beckley municipal parking lot and the Beckley Chamber of Commerce and received an honorary doctor of laws degree from Concord College in 1962.

His love for all men, his continued optimism and his foresight enabled him to contribute more to his community than most men. Louis Bromfield once said, “All West Virginia needs for conservation is a Charlie Hodel in every town.”