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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dr. Joe Sertich Receives George Autry Award from Rural Community College Alliance

Dr. Joe Sertich, Jr., President Emeritus of the Northeast Higher Education District, was honored for his role in promoting community and economic development in northeast Minnesota by the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) at its Eleventh Annual Conference in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Sertich was presented the RCCA's annual George Autry award, an honor given to recognize exemplary rural community college leaders who have made significant contributions to community development, advancing the lives of rural citizens and engaging in workforce and educational programming that brings competitive advantage to rural and remote communities.

Recipients of the award -- named after George Autry, an outstanding community college advocate -- join a select group of leaders who have changed the face of higher education in rural America.

RCCA Board member, Dr. Bruce Ayers, President of Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (Cumberland, Ky.) said about Sertich, "Joe Sertich has provided outstanding leadership for RCCA from its inception. Moreover, he has been an articulate spokesperson on behalf of rural America for many years. He is most deserving of the Autry Award."

As one of the founders of RCCA, Sertich was instrumental in organizing and designing the Alliance and promoting the value of an organization devoted to sharing best practices in rural development and celebrating the "sense of place" that pervades rural communities and colleges. Sertich served as president of the Alliance for over two years and remains an active Board member today.

"It's humbling to be in such great company with past recipients of this prestigious national award," said Sertich. "I credit the many stakeholders in northeast Minnesota for giving me the insights and perception of rural life and strategies to lead the important initiatives that enabled community development that leads to economic growth. For those of us choosing to live in Rural America, we strive for opportunity for our children, communities and the industries that give us hope for our future. I thank the Rural Community College Alliance for this recognition of my efforts."

Dr. Randy Smith, President of RCCA, added, "Dr. Sertich is, without question, one of the most influential rural community college leaders not only nationally, but internationally as well. His vision and leadership for rural community colleges has made, and continues to make, our colleges more effective for both students and the communities they serve." Smith continued, "He is highly deserving of this prestigious award to recognize his many years of outstanding leadership. His vision and leadership produced the Rural Community College Alliance and the Alliance for Rural Colleges. Our organizations would not be what we are today if it were not for his outstanding contributions."

Current President of the Northeast Higher Education District, Dr. Sue Collins, concurred. "President Emeritus Sertich lives the mission and values of RCCA. He continues to put heart and soul in service to rural communities in our region and across the nation. The Autry Award is a most fitting tribute to his passion and commitment for community development and for people in general."

The RCCA is an alliance of rural community colleges working to improve educational and economic prospects for their communities. The Autry Award is the only award given out each year by the RCCA and its members as a true recognition of a person who has gone above and beyond in promoting and supporting rural America.

Rural community colleges are deeply connected to the people and places they serve. Often acting as the hub of the community by offering higher education opportunities, job training, and cultural and sports activities, these colleges are critical to the local economy. About 20 percent of the American Association of Community Colleges' 1,202 member colleges are classified as rural colleges by the U.S. Department of Education.



Photo cutline:

Dr. Joe Sertich, Jr. received the George Autry Award at the Rural Community College Alliance conference in Oklahoma City, Okla. September 28. Left to right: Randy Smith, Ph.D, President of RCCA; Dr. Joe Sertich, Jr.; Phil Sutphin, RCCA Board Chair and President of East Central Community College, Decatur, Miss.

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