

January 2013

Ask A Leader

### **Kris Sparks**

*Kris Sparks is the director of the Washington State Office of Community and Rural Health. Sparks is set to retire in February 2013, after dedicating over 30 years of service to the state's rural communities. She has managed the Rural Health Program in the Department of Health since 1990 and was named director of the WA SORH in 1999. She also served as the President of NRHA and the President of NOSORH.*

### **Looking back at your career, what are the greatest lessons you have learned?**

Don't live in the past or be afraid to venture into new territory. Success can come from seeing a need and taking a risk. In 1991, at a meeting in Chicago, when we discussed creating what would become NOSORH, some feared it would dilute the membership or effectiveness of NRHA, and questioned whether we really needed another organization. But the lesson we learned was that with NOSORH we helped to strengthen rural health. So listen to the visionaries. When a group of people with a similar interest and mission come together to address a need – it will succeed. It's been a real pleasure to see the growth of NOSORH over the years, from an all-volunteer organization with no funds to one with multiple staff, funded by a cooperative agreement. It's not often in your career that you have the pleasure to be part of an organization that has grown and matured during your tenure. And NOSORH continues to look for ways to meet the needs of SORHs and rural people. I think one of its successes is that it has been a mix of visionaries and those folks that can put the vision into action.

*Please send your questions or suggestions for rural leaders to [bethb@nosorh.org](mailto:bethb@nosorh.org).*