

**By SAM HATCHER**

Many in our community today are mourning the passing of Dr. Ray C. Phillips, a lifelong educator and native of Wilson County.

Among his many achievements, perhaps his most formidable, was his term of service as president of Cumberland University. He was Cumberland's president from 1991-1994. Dr. Phillips served as vice president of the school during former U.S. Rep. Bob Clement's era as Cumberland's president.

Dr. Phillips was a classroom teacher, school principal and was elected superintendent of Wilson County Schools in 1957. Following his stint with public education in Wilson County, he served in key administrative positions in the department of education at Auburn University for some 20 years. He returned to Lebanon to work with Cumberland as the academic vice president.

It was a challenging time for Cumberland. The school was still in the process of transitioning from a junior college back to a fully accredited four-year university. There was a serious need for funding and much to do to get academic programs in line so that accreditation could be continued.

Dr. Phillips and Rep. Clement formed an inseparable partnership. They worked together for the good of Cumberland and they were successful albeit with the help of two very good women, their wives, Mary Clement and Dr. Phyllis Phillips.

Even after his tour as Cumberland president, Dr. Phillips continued to serve the school in the capacity of a member of the Board of Trust.

In 1994 Dr. Phillips told Cumberland students, "Every year, Cumberland University passes milestones and creates new levels of achievement to surpass."

His statement, true then some 18 years ago, is still true even today.

When he said this in 1994, he was referring to several important accomplishments that had transpired that year including a new record-breaking enrollment; the inclusion of Cumberland students in the 1994 edition of "Who's Who Among American Colleges and Universities" for the first time since 1984; Sigma Sigma Sigma National Sorority's installation of the Zeta Xi chapter on Cumberland's campus; the Cumberland football team played in its first NAIA playoff game after ending the regular season with a 9-1 record; and the 1994 graduating class of 170 was the largest in the history of the University and included the first students to complete the Bachelor of Science Nursing degree program.

Surpassing this was his next statement to students.

"Cumberland University is poised and has within its grasp the potential of becoming, not only one of the best, but the best educational opportunity and choice for students."

Was Dr. Phillips a prognosticator?

No.

He was a visionary who was dedicated and committed to Cumberland University.

Since 1842 there have been many gracious, competent and qualified servants at Cumberland's lead, but surely none greater than Dr. Ray C. Phillips.