

Foundation has active programs

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An overview of the services offered by the Patrick County Education Foundation includes three key areas: College Access, GED Promotion and Workforce Training.

"This is an economic development initiative geared towards improving the economic infrastructure," said Jerry Hughes, executive director of the foundation.

The brainchild of former governor and Patrick County native Gerald Baliles, the foundation is gaining ground in its 10-year mission of changing lives while creating a bright economic future.

Services provided are designed to address the number of adults lacking a high school diploma; graduates not pursuing secondary education; and/or a lack of adequate training in certain job areas, according to Hughes and Diane Edwards, director of development.

College Access, the first operational service, which started in 2001, "is geared towards increasing the number of Patrick County students going to college" or other secondary institutions by helping students and parents secure financial aid, Hughes said.

To that end, the foundation placed a staff member in the high school to work with students directly, Edwards said, to "assist them with filing financial aid forms, selection of colleges and identifying financial aid" sources.

In the past three years, "we

have seen the amount of financial aid more than double," she said.

An early awareness program also is in place to let students in fourth through sixth grades know that "indeed, college is a possibility," Edwards said. The key goal of this service "is setting an expectation. What people don't understand is between scholarships and loans, there's no reason for any child not to go to college. Every year, it becomes more and more important for a student to continue beyond high school."

Counselors also work to help parents navigate what may be unfamiliar territory by reviewing financial aid, course selection and other relevant information.

"We try and help prepare parents and students for making that big step," Hughes said of sending a child to college.

A program designed to prepare students for SATs also is new — necessary because "the primary (college) admissions criteria for rural kids are their SAT scores," Hughes said.

Classes may be held on weekends or after school.

Another service, the Last Dollar Award Scholarship, helps fill any gap that may occur in providing funding for students.

"After taking all of the other financial aid available, if there's still a gap, we provide a \$3,750 scholarship over a four-year period," Hughes said, with the funds used for books, tuition or other expenses.

Between 2002 and 2005, 107 students received this type scholarship, he said.

The Workforce Training Program began in the spring of '04 and offers a four-week basic computer class and a certificate of competency to successful students.

"Employers in the county asked for a computer program that would certify skills," Hughes said of the TekAdvantage service.

There are also plans to begin TekAdvantage II classes to concentrate on advanced computer skills, Hughes said.

The foundation also has worked with Patrick Henry Community College to develop a Career Readiness Certification program, Hughes said. Participants entering this service are initially tested, then receive seven weeks of training before retaking the test to measure learning.

Team Nurse also is partnering with the foundation to provide an intensive one-week course that trains personal care assistants in areas such as grooming, cooking and feeding.

The foundation is working with the R.J. Reynolds Patrick County Community Hospital as well to develop two new programs, including one in medical terminology and another program that is pending state approval.

This winter, a Tourism Ambassador program is planned for the Meadows of Dan area to help employees near the Blue Ridge Parkway "increase the county's ability to attract tourists and tourist dollars."