

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

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## Patrick education foundation aids economic development

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Officials say the Patrick County Education Foundation is, after only four years, fulfilling its 10-year mission to improve economic development through education.

"We think its been extremely successful," said Mike Burnette, assistant county administrator and director of economic development in Patrick County, of the economic development initiative project that began in 2001.

While there is no mechanism in place to pinpoint exactly what attracts a business to the county, Burnette said "the Patrick County Education Foundation has brought us prospects in the past and kept us in the running for a number of companies that have tried and are trying to locate to the county."

In an annual report released in 2005, economic development officials stated "Patrick County ends the Fiscal Year 2005 with incredible momentum and an economy well on its way to recovery.

"Diversification of the economic base ... is progressing nicely and new businesses are calling the community (and) trying to move in," the report states, adding that unemployment rates "stand at nearly half what they were at the end of 2003."

Between January 2004 and June 2005, job creation announcements stood at 575, including 253 industrial positions and 322 retail/commercial posts, according to the report, and capital investments totaled more than \$20 million and included \$11.6 million in industrial and \$8.7 million retail/commercial, with new tax revenues estimated at \$475,000.

State economic development officials said

they have no way to track or measure the success, or impact, of the Patrick County Education Foundation or similar programs.

However, "the state does support the Education Foundation," said Christie Collins of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership

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‘ The Patrick County Education Foundation has brought us (business) prospects in the past and kept us in the running for a number of companies ... ’

**Mike Burnette**

*Patrick County assistant administrator*

# Patrick

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communications and promotions office. "This is exactly the type of strategy communities need to engage in" to promote and encourage economic development "because education is key to economic success."

Burnette said the foundation is a valuable tool to entice companies considering locating in Patrick County.

"We always send out information about the education foundation. It's always impressive to a company to see a small community like this being that innovative and pro-

gressive related to workforce development," Burnette said.

Jerry Hughes, executive director of the foundation, said the agency reviews its services and adds or subtracts particular services as the need arises.

"We are constantly and consistently bench-marking ourselves" in a number of areas aimed at measuring success, he adds.

For instance, Hughes said the foundation's GED promotion program propelled the county to second place in 2005 "in a ranking of the number of GEDs awarded by counties ... Patrick County moved

from 43rd place in the state (in 2001) to second place in a core group of 44 counties," considered "our benchmark group."

Those counties are listed as non-urban counties in Virginia, he said, adding the 2005 data is the most recent data available.

Workforce training programs also are popular, with the foundation forming partnerships with other agencies to provide a workforce adequately trained to meet the needs of changing work environment, Hughes said.

That is not unnoticed by economic development officials.

"When we are meeting with a perspective business, one of the main points we make is the education foundation and how they can be of assistance to getting the workforce trained" in the manner needed by a perspective business, Burnette said, adding that the foundation's role in economic development is expected to increase.

"With the hundreds of jobs announced over the last two years, we are expecting the labor market to get extremely tight. Along with that tightening, the skills of the available workforce will determine whether we will get the types of industries we hope to attract," Burnette said.

Those businesses are described as "smaller, more specialized businesses that do everything from customer service to specialty manufacturing and retail type," he said.

And while there are "so many pieces that have to come together in economic development," with respect to the education foundation's role, Burnette said "we have gotten very good response" from businesses considering a move to Patrick County.