

THE ENTERPRISE

| | |
|----------------|-------|
| Calendar | 12 |
| Church | 17 |
| Classifieds | 18-20 |
| Correspondents | 9 |
| Crossword/TV | 17 |
| Family Album | 6 |
| Farm | 16 |
| Obituaries | 5 |
| Sports | 14-15 |
| Viewpoints | 4 |

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VOICE OF THE PEOPLE SINCE 1876 — A PART OF PATRICK COUNTY'S HERITAGE

PCEF expects to reach goals five years early

By Nancy Lindsey

At the halfway mark of the Patrick County Education Foundation's 10-year program, assessment data show that Patrick County has already moved into the top five among 44 rural Virginia localities in terms of the program's goals.

If the county's results hold up in comparison to the 43 other localities, former Gov. Gerald Baliles said recently, it will mean that the foundation has achieved its goals in five years rather than 10.

The PCEF, founded in 2001 by Baliles, has focused on three goals: expanding college opportunities for high school students, increasing the number of adults with high school diplomas, and developing workforce training programs.

According to Jerry Hughes, executive director of the PCEF, "preliminary data comparisons indicate that the foundation has made

significant progress in those three goals. Preliminary results show towards moving Patrick County to among the top five Virginia rural counties" the following, Hughes said: (See PCEF page 3)

PCEF

(From page 1)

Patrick County has moved from 44th place to second place in the percentage of high school seniors who plan to attend college. The foundation has provided services to more than 675 students and awarded scholarships in excess of \$513,000.

In 2005, Patrick County moved from 38th place to second place in the number of GEDs awarded each year as a percentage of county population. Despite a drop in the number of graduates this past year, Hughes said, Patrick should remain in the top five in 2006.

The foundation's workforce training programs did not begin until 2003, but the foundation has already provided training to 662 adult residents in eight different training programs.

"All of these preliminary results are extremely encouraging but we know there remains much, much more work to guarantee Patrick's place among the top five rural Virginia counties in educational attainment," Hughes said.

Hughes said the 44 benchmark counties were selected from Virginia counties that meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's criteria for non-urban jurisdictions.

"Our board reviews our progress in Patrick County against the 43 benchmark counties each quarter," Hughes said, "but our fifth year anniversary provided a great opportunity to take an in-depth look at our progress at the halfway point in the initial 10-year period."

The foundation's comparative data is collected from a third party source, such as the Virginia Department of Education or the U.S. Census Bureau, Hughes said, which means that the foundation won't have definitive results until these agencies have collected and published the data for all the benchmark counties later this year.

PCEF board members held a planning retreat July 22 to review and assess the first five years, according to a summary presented by Hughes.

The foundation was conceived in late 2000 when county leaders met at Gov. Baliles' home "to discuss Patrick's future following the decline of the textile, timber and tobacco industries," the summary stated. "Challenges to the county's ability to attract new industries were identified as: Too few high school graduates attend college; many adults do not have a high school diploma; and lack of workforce training programs."

In May 2001, the Patrick County Education Foundation was incorporated and received its IRS 501(c)(3) status. Bylaws were adopted and fundraising began. Initial funds of \$667,000 were raised in cash and pledges. In October 2001, the PCEF employed a college access coordinator.

In August 2002, the first full-time executive director was employed. In April 2003, the GED promotion project was launched, and the workforce training program started in June 2003.

Highlights of 2003 and 2004 included the foundation's first GED recruitment campaign and graduation of the first workforce trainees. The foundation signed agreements with nine private Virginia colleges who offer supplemental scholarships to Patrick students. The board adopted benchmark counties and guidelines.

In 2004-05, the PCEF hired a director of development and finance administrator, and the first annual Giving Campaign was launched. The Education Example program and SAT preparatory programs also got underway.

Financial resources of

over \$2.3 million have been raised since the beginning of the foundation, the summary states.

In 2005-06, the foundation was selected to participate in the University of Virginia's College Guide Program.

According to the summary, milestones in college access have included providing foundation services to more than 670 Patrick students; awarding of 137 scholarships; helping students obtain more than \$3.2 million in financial aid; and expansion of the program to include "early awareness and college retention."

Milestones of the GED promotion program have included the graduation of 127 adults, \$127,000 in incentives awarded and more than \$30,000 in county taxes paid. In addition, more than 48% of GED graduates have continued their education at two-year or four-year colleges.

In the area of workforce training, 662 adult county residents have received training in technology, health care and tourism; more than \$220,000 has been invested; and 37% of the trainees have continued their education at the community college level.