

Press Release

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Patrick County Education Foundation Nominated for Southern Regional Innovator Award

The Patrick County Education Foundation has been nominated for the 2005 Regional Innovator Award given each year by the Southern Growth Policies Board, according to Jerry Hughes, Foundation Executive Director. The Foundation was nominated by Mark Musick, President of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). In his nomination, Mr. Musick stated that the “Patrick County Education Foundation is not only an innovator; it is already a successful innovator. Its success and potential for other counties, states and indeed the southern region make this an ideal Innovator Award winner.”

The Innovator Awards are given annually by the Southern Growth Policies Board to honor innovative Southern initiatives that are improving the quality of life in the region. The Awards are presented to one organization in each of Southern Growth’s member states—Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Winners represent initiatives from the public, private and nonprofit sectors that fit both the criteria for innovation and relevance to the theme of Southern Growth’s annual conference, where the awards are presented.

The focus of this year's Innovator Awards is rural development. Nominated initiatives must be unusual or unique in their content or approach. Those that include components for reaching traditionally underserved groups are of particular interest. Nominated initiatives can be from the local, state or regional level and relate to workforce development, technology and innovation, community development or responses to globalization. An outside evaluation panel will choose one Innovator Award recipient from each Southern Growth member state for this special recognition. Alabama Governor Bob Riley will present the 2005 Regional Innovator Awards at the Southern Growth Policies Board's annual conference *Summit on the Rural South* in Point Clear, Alabama on June 12 – 14, 2005.

The Southern Growth Policies Board is a non-partisan public policy think tank based in Research Triangle Park, NC. Formed by the region's governors in 1971, Southern Growth Policies Board develops and advances visionary economic development policies by providing a forum for partnership and dialog among a diverse cross-section of the region's governors, legislators, business and academic leaders and the economic- and community-development sectors. This unique public-private partnership is devoted to strengthening the South's economy and creating the highest possible quality of life.

Hughes expressed excitement at the Foundation's nomination. "While we hope to be selected for the 2005 Regional Innovator Award, just being nominated for it, particularly by the Southern Regional Education Board, is a significant accomplishment. Our nomination for the Innovator Award provides important validation of the Foundation's approach to overcoming the economic barriers facing many rural communities."

The organization nominating the Patrick County Education Foundation, the Southern Regional Education Board, is the nation's first interstate compact for education and was created in 1948 by Southern states. It helps government and education leaders work cooperatively to advance education and, in doing so, improve the social and economic life of the region. Membership includes 16 states—Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland,

Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

The Honorable Gerald L. Baliles, Chairman of the Patrick County Education Foundation Board, expressed his appreciation for the nomination. “To be recognized by the SREB as an organization with effective strategies for insuring a brighter economic future for rural communities is quite an honor. To be nominated by this organization as an Innovator in rural development bodes well not only for the Foundation, but for the public schools, local governments and citizens of Patrick County as well.”

The Patrick County Education Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization begun in 2001 as an economic development initiative serving the people of Patrick County. The Foundation was established as a response to the region’s catastrophic loss of industries and jobs in the furniture, textile and agriculture-related sectors. Its purpose is to raise Patrick County education attainment levels to among the top five rural counties in Virginia in order to attract new businesses and jobs to this rural mountain county. Its goals are to increase the percentage of high school seniors who attend college, cut in half the number of adults over 25 without a high school diploma and provide effective workforce training programs to prepare adult workers for jobs in the information-based industries of today and tomorrow. The Foundation is working to accomplish these goals through its three program initiatives: the College Access Program, the GED Promotion Project and the Workforce Training Program. Since 2001, the Foundation has committed \$258,750 to Last Dollar Scholarships for County high school seniors and assisted students with securing over \$2 million in financial aid for college. It has committed over \$49,000 in incentives to GED graduates and more than \$145,000 to fund innovative workforce training programs for County adults. The Patrick County Education Foundation is solely supported through the generous contributions of individuals, organizations and corporations and through private and public grants. Persons wishing to learn more about the Foundation’s programs or to make a donation may call (276) 694-7233.

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