Contact: Lynda Helton, 276-759-8927, lhelton@smythccf.org

Smyth County Board of Supervisors and Smyth County Community Foundation Partner for Smyth County Promise

Marion, Va. (March 24, 2023) – The Smyth County Board of Supervisors and the Smyth County Community Foundation Board are excited to announce a new partnership with Virginia Highlands Community College (VHCC) and Wytheville Community College (WCC) that will allow local high school graduates to leave high school and enroll in community college tuition free. Easier access to higher education is so important to developing the future Smyth County workforce. Charles Atkins, Chair, Smyth County Board of Supervisors, said "The Smyth County Board of Supervisors believe our best assets are our youth and we hope this partnership will show our support for investing in our youth. We believe everyone deserves a chance to learn, whether it is for a future doctor or a future welder. This program can support all professions."   Lynda Helton, Executive Director of the Smyth County Community Foundation, added "This scholarship is in direct alignment with the foundation's primary focus areas: Improving Health, Wellness and Education in Smyth County. This is a big win, not only for the students, but for Smyth County as a whole. "

The scholarship, named **Smyth County Promise**, is a "last-dollar" scholarship that bridges the gap in tuition not covered by other federal, state and private scholarships. This scholarship will be available to any high school graduate of any Smyth County public, private or home school.   Students must enroll with VHCC or WCC beginning in the summer or fall, immediately following their graduation from high school, beginning with the class of 2023. "This opportunity for the students of Smyth County will impact generations. These efforts will help to remove the financial barrier for our students to gain post high school graduation skills, certifications, and continue their education," said Dr. Dennis Carter, Smyth County Superintendent of Schools.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for the high school graduates of Smyth County!" said Dr. Dean E. Sprinkle, WCC President. "WCC has seen the benefits of tuition guarantee programs in other portions of our service area. Many students are surprised to learn that they were already eligible for financial aid. The idea of a tuition guarantee is often enough to remove a perceived barrier to becoming a college student. We are excited for the students of Smyth County, and appreciative of the Smyth County Board of Supervisors and the Smyth County Community Foundation for investing in the young people of Smyth County."

To qualify for the scholarship, there is an easy, three-step process. Students will, first, apply for enrollment at either VHCC or WCC. Next, the student will apply for aid via FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). The third step is to complete the Scholarship Applications with the Community College. Once these 3 steps are completed, the community college will contact the student with next steps for Smyth County Promise. The scholarship is available to cover up to five of six consecutive semesters at the community colleges. Students will be required to complete 10 volunteer hours of community service per semester in this program.

Dr. Adam Hutchison, VHCC President, commented "Virginia Highlands is thrilled at the commitment made today by the Smyth County Board of Supervisors and the Smyth County Community Foundation. VHCC shares their vision to develop a strong community through post-secondary education and training, and this investment ensures that every high school graduate in the county has the opportunity to earn a college degree or workforce credential. We look forward to continuing to serve our Smyth County students." VHCC and WCC respectively will manage the program for students who enroll. VHCC and WCC counselors, high school Career Coaches, College Navigators, and other staff will help students take advantage of this scholarship program. More information will be available on each Community Colleges' websites in the coming days at https://www.vhcc.edu/ and https://www.wcc.vccs.edu/.

# # #