Golden LEAF grant boosts Pathways to Prosperity

COMMUNITY PARTNERS — A check for $960,000 from the Golden LEAF Foundation was presented to RCC on July 13 for county-wide educational projects related to Pathways to Prosperity. From left: RCC Vice President for Instructional Services Suzanne Rohrbough, ACS Superintendent Dr. Terry Worrell, RCC President Dr. Robert Shackleford, Golden LEAF Foundation Executive Vice President Mark Sorrells, County Manager Hal Johnson, RCSS Superintendent Dr. Stephen Gainey, ACS Director of Secondary Education and CTE Dr. Julie Pack and RCSS Director of Career and Technical Education and Innovative School Design Nancy Cross.

By Micki Bare
mbare@courier-tribune.com
@MickiBareCT

ASHBORO — Educational partners Randolph Community College (RCC), Randolph County School System (RCSS) and Asheboro City Schools (ACS) were recently awarded a $960,000 grant from the Golden LEAF Foundation to further advance their collaborative efforts in the Pathways to Prosperity program. “This (project) is the city schools, the county schools and RCC working together to create a seamless pathway for students to go from high school to RCC into great careers here in our community,” RCC President Dr. Robert Shackleford said after welcoming guests to the check presentation event.

Mark Sorrells, executive vice president of the Golden LEAF Foundation, was at RCC’s Martha Luck Comer Conference Center on Thursday, July 13, to present a check to Dr. Robert Shackleford, RCC president; Dr. Stephen Gainey, Randolph County School System superintendent; and Dr. Terry Worrell, Asheboro City Schools superintendent.

The grant request was identified as part of Randolph County’s Strategic Plan approved last year. The project, which required a 20 percent match from the county, will help fund advanced manufacturing training at area high schools and the community college.

The matching funds provided by Randolph County came from revenue generated by the leasing of the regional landfill space.

“Our board of commissioners authorized the Strategic Planning process to look at issues that were going to be impacting all of Randolph County as we journey through the twenty-first century,” County Manager Hal Johnson said. He also stated that in addition to supporting the planning process, the commissioners have the courage to set aside money to support future goals of the strategic plan. It was that forward thinking and courage that made the match for the Golden LEAF grant possible.

This Golden LEAF Community Based Grant specifically addresses Golden LEAF’s

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funding priority of workforce preparedness in economically distressed and rural communities in the areas of advanced manufacturing. It also continues the Pathways to Prosperity partnership between three school systems that was first unveiled in April 2016 to create seamless educational pathways for students to go from local high schools to community college into lucrative advanced manufacturing jobs.

“This community has a plan. And not only do they have a plan, they are mobilizing all the resources to make it happen. That’s critical,” Golden LEAF Foundation Executive Vice President Mark Sorrells said of Randolph County.

“When I look across the nation at some of the innovative work that’s going on, Randolph County is right there in the pack leading the way to some new, innovative ways to prepare all of our citizens, if they choose, to be very competitive in a competitive work environment.”

Funding from the Golden LEAF Foundation will be used to purchase equipment for Asheboro High School’s new advanced manufacturing program, one of 11 in the state, which will offer students machining, welding, robotics and electronics coursework that will articulate into the four advanced manufacturing programs at RCC. Students will also be able to earn certifications while in high school, enabling them to go directly into the workforce, if they choose.

The funding will also provide RCSS the ability to expand its metals manufacturing program at Eastern Randolph High School. In addition to purchasing equipment, a new shop will be built onto an existing classroom. RCSS has operated a metals manufacturing program at Randleman High School since 1999, and with the addition of the new program at Eastern Randolph High School, RCSS will be operating two of only 12 metals programs in the state.

Equipment will also be updated at the existing metals manufacturing program at Randleman High School and at the Computer-Integrated Machining program at RCC. Students will benefit as these new and improved facilities will allow the partners to double high school enrollment from 250 to more than 500 in advanced manufacturing programs. In addition, student access to community college classes, industry-recognized credentials and work-based learning will increase.

RCC will serve as the fiscal agent for the grant, and all three school systems will work together through the existing Pathways structure and collaboration to implement the project to achieve its desired outcomes.

Each educational organization will designate a project manager as part of the in-kind contribution, with RCC designating the lead project manager and providing overall oversight of the project, as well as collecting and reporting data on behalf of all partners.