



PRESS RELEASE

Local donor levels the playing field for Indy Bound Rockingham County FFA members

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Each year, hundreds of Virginia FFA Members from across the state make the trip to Indianapolis for the National FFA Convention and Expo. While Convention in 2020 was held virtually, students loaded up on planes, trains and automobiles – bound for Indy just last week to attend in person in 2021. In the case of Rockingham County FFA Members, they chartered a single bus to cut down on exposures for the trip. That's not the only added measure they put in place in order to make this experience of a lifetime happen in the face of Covid. Each FFA Adviser, member and chaperone was required to present a current, negative covid test before leaving. Rockingham County also limited the students who were eligible, just to those who would be competing in Indianapolis, or those who were Seniors. Added security and peace of mind came at a greater cost to those members who have not yet received their Covid Vaccine. Thanks to donors and sponsors, Virginia FFA Foundation provides a travel scholarship for every member in the state who competes at National Convention. This trip, already a struggle for some families became even less affordable with unvaccinated competitors requiring their own room. FFA chapters hold fundraisers to pay for their trips, but they can be difficult to coordinate in the current climate.

Word got out in the community of the difference in cost and it caught the eye of the Showker Family. As a retired teacher, coach and TSA Adviser in Rockingham County, Joe Showker wanted to help get as many eligible kids to National Convention as he could, to level the playing field and do it safely. The result was a gift of \$9,000, given through the Joe and Debbie Showker Foundation, a signature foundation of the Community Foundation of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. This is the largest individual gift given to Virginia FFA Foundation since 2011. This closed the cost gap between vaccinated and unvaccinated members, assisting 18 RCPS students on their journey. *"Deb and I were pleased to offer solutions for our achieving FFA youth to attend their national conference. Their participation and honored attendance without the additional expenses due to their freedom of medical choices was important. Congratulations for making RCPS FFA a winning program," says Mr. Joe Showker.*

Jennifer Armstrong, Executive Director of Virginia FFA said *"We wanted everyone to attend convention safely and healthily and this gift helped us make all of those things possible for Rockingham County members. National Convention is a life-changing event to attend and it's even more meaningful if you won a state contest and get to compete and proudly represent Virginia on a National Stage. Being back in person this year was an incredible experience. I was thrilled when Mr. Showker contacted me. Together with the Showker family and RCPS, we made some doors a little wider for kids in our area to reach their full potential. I'm proud to have been able to help make it happen."*

In addition to members competing from Rockingham County, Dr. Oskar Scheikl – Rockingham County Superintendent, received one of the highest honors in the organization: The Honorary American Degree. Dr. Scheikl was nominated based on his unwavering support of Virginia FFA, particularly during the pandemic. **Dr. Scheikl said** *"The generous support from the Joe and Debbie Showker Foundation, made this trip possible for students who incurred extra cost. Along with the families, I want to personally thank Mr. and Mrs. Showker for their help in this effort. As career educators for RCPS, they understand the value of deeper learning and real-world application opportunities the FFA provides."*

Virginia FFA Foundation, Inc.

P.O. Box 40 – Weyers Cave, VA 24486

Supporting the members who are learning to do, doing to learn, earning to live, and living to serve.

Results from Rockingham County competitors:

Broadway Poultry:

Team – Silver rating

Bethany Gentry – Gold rating

Will & Nate Zerkel – Silver rating

Ethan Foltz – Bronze rating

Broadway Forestry:

3rd Place Nationally

Jessica Showalter - 4th High Individual

Black Payne - 6th High Individual

Grace Fravel & Allen Showalter - Gold Rating

Broadway Meats:

Team – Silver rating

Stephanie Schweigert – Silver rating

Jenna Wolf & Jared Hoover – Silver rating

Creed Combs – Bronze rating

Broadway Conduct of Chapter Meetings:

Team – Silver Rating

Team members: Jackie Diaz, Jessica Dove, Bryson Funk, Julie Haviland, Herschel Hoffeditz, Thomas Lohr and Katie Payne

MTC Farm Business Management:

Rachel Craun placed 16th in the nation and received a gold rating

Spotswood Environmental and Natural Resources:

Team – Bronze rating

Drake Cupp & Richard Marshall – Silver rating

Chole Shepard & William Painter – Bronze rating

CONTACTS:

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