

BRCC EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION, INC

COMMUNITY

LINK



Summer 2025



In the 2024-25 academic year, 320 students at Blue Ridge Community College were able to pursue their educational dreams with the help of \$537,580 in scholarships, made possible through the incredible generosity of BRCC Educational Foundation supporters like you.

These students aren't just numbers, they're aspiring nurses, engineers, entrepreneurs, and educators who will live and work in the Shenandoah Valley. At BRCC's annual scholarship luncheon on March 28, many of them (pictured above) had the chance to personally thank the donors who helped open the door to their futures. It was a heartfelt celebration of hope, ambition, and community support.

These high-achieving students aren't just coming to Blue Ridge for affordability, though that's certainly a draw; they're coming because BRCC offers something special: outstanding faculty, small class sizes with personalized support, and challenging coursework that prepares them for the real world. Thanks to your continued support, more students than ever are discovering that they don't have to go far (or spend a fortune) to get an exceptional education.

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Community Link is an official publication of the Blue Ridge Community College Educational Foundation. It is distributed to friends in the Shenandoah Valley, as well as BRCC faculty and staff, and is published quarterly by the Development Office, Blue Ridge Community College, Weyers Cave, VA 24486. If you have any questions or comments regarding this publication, please contact Angie Glenn, Development Services Coordinator, at (540) 453-2307 or glenna@brcc.edu.

Commencement Celebration: Blue Ridge

The Atlantic Union Bank Center, branded in plenty of BRCC blue, was home to the College's 57th annual commencement on May 10.

Fernando Sagastume approached the podium, encouraged by cheers from family, friends, and nearly 300 fellow graduates. "Our community at Blue Ridge Community College is truly one of a kind. Whether it is the friendly faces greeting us every morning...or the guidance of our incredible professors and advisors, Blue Ridge offers a diverse and caring environment that allows us to reach our full potential," explained Fernando, who was the student speaker and received his Associate of Science Degree in Business Administration.

A Harrisonburg resident, Fernando has been engaged with his community since middle school, when he first became involved with On the Road Collaborative. The non-profit organization focuses on empowering the next generation by providing educational opportunities and hands-on career experiences. Fernando currently serves as a member of the On the Road Collaborative Board of Directors.

He is also on the recruitment and retention subcommittee of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), which supports students with college readiness skills. Fernando benefited from their assistance while a student at Harrisonburg High School and enjoys advocating for the program.

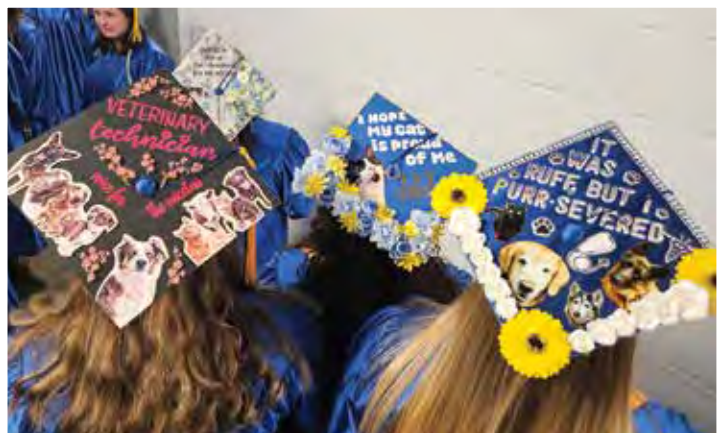
Fernando is the Chief Administrative Officer of his family's business, Highest Roofing, where he manages the day-to-day operations of the company. He is also a member of BRCC's Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society chapter and was recently recognized as a member of the PTK All-Virginia Academic Team.

Keynote speaker, Andy Vanhook, is a well-known community advocate in the Shenandoah Valley and Immediate Past Chair of the Blue Ridge Community College Educational Foundation Board. In his opening remarks Andy told the audience he felt a special connection to those graduating, himself a proud graduate of the Virginia Community College System (Mountain Empire Community College). He added that his wife is also a community college graduate, "And when I was just five years old, I watched my mother walk across a stage much like this one to receive her nursing degree. She did this while working full-time and raising two children. My mother's community college graduation didn't just represent personal achievement – it lifted our entire family's economic status." Andy's mother went on to earn several more degrees, but he thinks her first step of graduating from community college, "was perhaps the most consequential."

For the 2024-25 academic year, Blue Ridge Community College awarded more than 1,100 degrees and certificates.



Community College Class of 2025



BRCC Students Recognized with Phi Theta Kappa's All-Virginia Academic Team Awards



BRCC students Fernando Sagastume and Connor Rhodes, pictured here along with BRCC President Dr. John Downey and VCCS Chancellor Dr. David Doré at the Phi Theta Kappa's All-Virginia Academic Team Awards Program. Fernando spoke at BRCC's Commencement in May, and Connor shared his BRCC story as the student speaker at BRCC's Scholarship Luncheon in March. Both showcased their academic and personal growth while at BRCC, and shared impressive plans for their future.

More than 70 of the best and brightest students at Virginia's Community Colleges came together in Richmond April 16 for Phi Theta Kappa's All-Virginia Academic Team Awards Program. The event showcased the qualities that help these students succeed in academics and much more.

Phi Theta Kappa is the first honor society recognizing the academic achievement of students at associate degree-granting colleges and helping them to grow as scholars and leaders. The Society is made up of more than 4.4 million members and nearly 1,250 chapters in 11 countries, with approximately 220,000 active members in the nation's colleges.

The Phi Theta Kappa Foundation awards \$1.5 million in scholarships to members each year, and four-year college partners now offer \$250 million in transfer scholarships exclusively for Phi Theta Kappa members.

**Watch Connor's inspiring speech from
this year's Scholarship Luncheon here:**



go.brcc.edu/vid001



BRCC Educational Foundation's Casino Royale: A Winning Night for Education!

On April 25 the BRCC Educational Foundation went all in, and came out a winner! Our Casino Royale fundraiser was a resounding success, raising over \$82,000 to directly benefit BRCC students, faculty, and the community we proudly serve.

Thanks to your investment, these funds will support:

- Innovative programs
- Life-changing scholarships for deserving students
- Cutting-edge technology in our classrooms
- And countless other opportunities that open doors for brighter futures



Mark your calendars now—Casino Royale returns on April 17, 2026!

Along with wonderful food, high-energy fun, and a live auction, attendees learned the ropes of casino classics playing with “funny money” to support a great cause. A special thank you to our Signature Sponsor, Graves Light Lenhart Private Wealth Management, and to every generous sponsor and guest who helped make this night unforgettable. When you bet on BRCC, you’re investing in the future of our community!

You Can Make a Difference

Blue Ridge Community College is equipping students with the knowledge and expertise to transform themselves, our community, and the world, and the Foundation is vital to helping make that possible. By investing in the Blue Ridge Fund now, you give the Foundation the flexibility to respond to the College’s needs in a timely and effective manner. To make a gift, please use the enclosed envelope, or scan the QR code to the right (which goes to our new Humanitru donation page). Thank you for your continued support!



Cadence, Inc. Honored with Virginia Chancellor's Award for Leadership in Philanthropy

Staunton-based manufacturer, Cadence, Inc., received the 19th Annual Chancellor's Award for Leadership in Philanthropy. Cadence was nominated for the award by Blue Ridge Community College.



*Front Row – Randy Elliott, Stephanie Swartzel, and Chrissy Cave;
Back Row – Ken Cleveland, Oscar Moreno, Jesse Austin,
Keri Rankin, and Bryan Cave*

The Virginia Foundation for Community College Education (VFCCE) created the Chancellor's Award for Leadership in Philanthropy in 2006 to recognize individuals, families, and businesses for their contributions to the growth and development of Virginia's community colleges and their foundations. This year's honorees were recognized at the annual Leadership in Philanthropy luncheon ceremony in Richmond.

"We are incredibly thankful to be a recipient of the Chancellor's Award for Leadership in Philanthropy and for

our partnership with Blue Ridge Community College," said Cadence's Chief Financial Officer Ken Cleveland. "We are proud to play a role in preparing the next generation of skilled professionals who will drive innovation and success in our community and beyond."

Hosted by the VFCCE, the event honored distinguished philanthropy leaders who collectively contributed \$24 million dollars to Virginia's Community Colleges. VCCS Chancellor Dr. David Doré served as emcee for the event, and Mr. Mark Hourigan, founder and CEO of Hourigan, delivered the keynote address.

BRCC Addresses Shortage of Aviation Mechanics



Did you know the BRCC Aviation Maintenance Technology (AMT) program ranks as the highest performer in the State of Virginia and among the highest performers in the United States? After completing the program, which includes performing scheduled maintenance and troubleshooting on private planes, corporate jets and helicopters, graduates are eligible to take the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) written, oral, and practical exams for a Mechanic's Certificate with Airframe and Powerplant ratings. BRCC's pass rate (for the past three years) is 98.48%! This ranks the program near the top of all Part 147 AMTS schools, including those in Alaska and Hawaii. Not only is BRCC's pass rate exceptional, but the program's graduation to certification rate is also above average,

Community College Chancellor's Award in Philanthropy

“Every time our donors support a scholarship, fund a new program, or an emergency grant, they are not just giving back, they are lifting up,” said Hourigan. “They are invaluable partners whose generosity can and does make the difference between a student dropping out or staying the course and realizing their true potential.”

Since 1990, Cadence, Inc. has had a robust and meaningful relationship with BRCC and the BRCC Educational Foundation. Many of Cadence's employees have served on boards in service to the college, the company has employed numerous BRCC graduates, and the company has made substantial investments in the community college mission.

“We are honored to partner with Cadence, Inc. on many initiatives that impact career and technical education, as well as workforce readiness. Cadence has been a tremendous partner for Blue Ridge Community College, especially in establishing the Cadence, Inc. Technical Education Endowment. Earnings from this endowment allow the Educational Foundation to purchase equipment for BRCC – resulting in our students learning on the most state-of-the-art machines and technology,” said BRCC President Dr. John Downey. Further, the fund supports technical preparation/instruction in a career field, such as engineering technology; applied science; a mechanical, industrial or practical art of trade; agriculture; health occupations; business; or applied economics.



Photographed during the luncheon ceremony: Cadence's Vice President of Human Resources Keri Rankin; Cadence Founder Martin Lightsey; Cadence's Chief Financial Officer Ken Cleveland; VCCS Chancellor Dr. David Doré; BRCC President Dr. John Downey; and Executive Director of the BRCC Educational Foundation Amy Kiger.



which means our students not only graduate, but they also acquire their FAA certification in a timely manner - well within the FAA advised 60-day window.

State lawmakers and gubernatorial advisors, members of the Virginia General Assembly's Aviation Caucus, toured BRCC's AMT Program at the Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport in April. The bi-partisan group was specifically interested in learning more about the program, and is considering using the BRCC program as a template that can be replicated in other parts of the state. It is hoped that, given additional state funding, BRCC's program can be expanded to create a statewide network to address the shortage of aviation maintenance technicians.



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SAVE THE DATE

Coming this fall...

BRCC's Community Breakfast Series!

Mark your calendar now & plan to join us for Breakfast

Coffee and registration begin at 7:30 a.m., and breakfast will be followed by BRCC news and updates from President John Downey.

October 8, 2025, 7:30 a.m., Orchard Creek Clubhouse, Waynesboro

October 10, 2025, 7:30 a.m., Spotswood Country Club, Harrisonburg

October 24, 2025, 7:30 a.m., Hotel 24 South, Staunton