

‘It’s one plan that’s already paid off’

Paxton gift helps Paducah, McCracken residents achieve their dreams of going to college.

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Ayesha Wharton didn’t go back to college just to get an education. She also wanted to show her 13-year-old son, Dominique, that nothing should stand in the way of his dreams.

“I wanted to be an example to him,” said Wharton, a single mother who is studying medical office technology at West Kentucky Community & Technical College. “I’m 37 and I want to do it, and I’m going to do it. Without education, you can’t make much of anything. You can’t make money flipping burgers or shaking French fries in a basket.”

Wharton was one of 13 students who received the first educational assistance scholarships from the McCracken County Community Career Endowment during a reception Sunday at Madison Hall. The scholarships were made possible through an endowment established by the late Fred Paxton and his wife, Peggy, in January 2006, to provide educational assistance to black residents of Paducah and McCracken County.

Full-time students attending or planning to attend a post-secondary educational or training institution received individual awards of \$1,000, while part-time students got \$500 awards.

“I think this is an amazing opportunity,” said Wharton, who works in admissions at WKCTC. “For those who didn’t take advantage of it this year, hopefully they will next time.”

Whitney Newell, 17, will put the \$1,000 toward her dream of becoming an elementary school principal. She plans to study early childhood education at the University of Louisville this fall.

“It will help me a lot,” she said. “Really, any extra money is good, especially when you do not come from a rich family. ... It’s such an honor.”

Fredrick Fountain, 19, plans to earn an associate’s degree in music education and vocal performance at WKCTC before completing his bachelor’s degree at Murray State University. He has been playing piano since he was 4 and continues to take lessons.

The \$1,000 “will help me during my classes that I’m going to need. I know I’m going to need a lot of music books,” Fountain said.

He has other scholarships lined up as well, including one for \$2,760 through WKCTC.

Endowment Director Linda Dungey said 24 students applied for assistance. “We had a marvelous response,” she said. “What we’re working on now is being able to give more scholarships and larger amounts. We’ll have fundraisers all year long, and our goal is to give 50 next year.”

Dungey said workshops will be scheduled to help students with the application process and to educate them about other scholarship opportunities.

Like Wharton, LaMiira Askew is also a parent, with a 10-month-old daughter, Alaya Hunter. Both of Askew’s parents are disabled and unable to work, and she also noted her family’s low income as an obstacle to college. She plans to earn an associate’s degree in hospitality management at WKCTC before attending the University of Central Florida to get her bachelor’s degree in event

management. She wants to coordinate weddings, meetings and other functions.

J.W. Cleary, president of the endowment's board of directors as well as the Paducah-McCracken County NAACP, said he is excited to see young people who will be future leaders in the community receive much-needed assistance.

“What Mr. Paxton's goal was is to try to give the African-American community a chance to equal up, in a way of speaking,” Cleary said. “It's a good feeling to do something for these kids. It's one plan that's already paid off.”

The other recipients are:

Kristen Coleman, a psychology major at Clayton State University, wants to earn a master's degree in divinity. Coleman volunteers at Hearts to Nourish Hope, which helps at-risk students earn their GED.

Makinni Holt, an elementary education major, with a minor in special education, at Kentucky State University.

De'Chenea Lovett, an elementary education major at WKCTC. She once had to withdraw from college after being hospitalized with Crohn's disease.

Stephon McEwen, a business management major at Mid-Continent University with a 4.0 GPA. An U.S. Army veteran, he received a certificate in automobile refinishing from WKCTC in 2001.

Keshia Moore, who works two part-time jobs and will graduate from WKCTC this month. She will transfer to Murray State University to major in art.

Melinda Roberson, a health care management major at Southern Illinois University. She is a single mother who works a part-time job and is active at Harrison Street Missionary Baptist Church.

Delbert Shumpert, a sports physical therapy major at Western Kentucky University whose goal is to own a sports physical therapy clinic. He served as president of the Magna Cum Laude Keystone Club at the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club.

Bettina Simmons, a single mother of three who is majoring in business at WKCTC. She has a 4.0 GPA.

Stephanie Tyus, will graduate from MSU in August, then plans to enter graduate school at Tennessee State University in the fall. She works as a recruitment specialist at WKCTC.

Sun staff writer Brian Peach contributed to this report.