

# \$1M goal for Smyth County HealthTrust scholarship fund is near

Stephanie Porter-Nichols

By year's end, a \$1 million goal set in 2023 may well be achieved. Its impact on Smyth County's health is expected to unfold for generations.

With the nearly \$30,000 raised at this year's annual Smyth County Community Hospital HealthTrust Gala, pledges yet to come in, and a match to all those funds from the Smyth County Community Foundation, Gary Peacock said Thursday, "We'll be at the million-dollar mark by yearend."

Those funds will set up an endowment to fund the Changing Lives Through Healthcare scholarships for the foreseeable future.

The scholarships are designated for Smyth residents who want to pursue clinical health care work. They are open to recent high school graduates and older individuals who will pursue the qualifying education up to a bachelor's degree.

The idea for the legacy program came as area hospitals and other healthcare providers faced a critical shortage of workers. The scholarships were seen as an avenue to address the problem locally.

The first scholarships were awarded in the spring of 2024 and Peacock estimated that more than 20 have already been given to students.

Once the endowment reaches full strength, Peacock said the HealthTrust hopes that about \$40,000 in scholarships will be distributed each year, depending on need.

The deadline for applications this year is quite close. The period is open through April 5. (For more information about the scholarship, visit [smythccf.org/scholarships](https://smythccf.org/scholarships).)

Before the endowment, the non-profit HealthTrust raised nearly \$800,000 to bolster the health and wellness of the community's residents.

The HealthTrust, a subsidiary of Ballad Health Foundation, first raised about \$300,000 to open a local infusion center for cancer patients and others who need the treatment. The trust also was instrumental in bringing urgent care services to the county. Also, it helped buy a variety of diagnostic equipment that were to improve cancer care and eye care.

Then, it shifted its attention to endeavors centered on health and wellness for the community. It sponsored health camps for youngsters, after-school projects, and a playground and other equipment for children with disabilities.

This year's gala, the 13<sup>th</sup> annual fundraising event, brought in \$29,719.

In addition to entertainment, guests also had the opportunity to bid on unique items during a silent auction.

"The HealthTrust Gala continues to showcase the generosity and heart of our community," said Valerie Armbrister, board chair of the HealthTrust, in a news release. "Raising almost \$30,000 through an evening of fun and fellowship speaks to the commitment our neighbors have to investing in the next generation of healthcare professionals. These scholarships truly change lives, and we are grateful to everyone who helped make this event a success."

"Events like the Mardi Gras Gala demonstrate the power of community partnerships," said Jack Simpson, president of Ballad Health Foundation. "Every dollar raised represents an investment in a student's future and in the health of Smyth County. We are proud to support this initiative and grateful to everyone who contributed to a memorable and meaningful evening."

Top sponsors of this year's event include Presenting Sponsor – Old House Life (Michelle Bowers), Platinum Sponsor – Smyth County Family Physicians, and Gold Sponsors – Smyth County Community Hospital, Smyth County Community Foundation and General Dynamics.

Thursday, Peacock expressed his gratitude to everyone who's worked with the HealthTrust and Ballad Health, donors, and the Smyth County Community Foundation.

Of the foundation's matching funds, Peacock said, "We couldn't have done it without them."

The Peacocks also significantly contributed to the balance.

Gary and his wife, Marilyn, owned two houses in Marion. After rehabbing and renovating them, the couple donated the homes to the Community Foundation to be sold with the proceeds going to the endowment. That was in addition to other gifts.