

The place  
to begin.



ANNUAL REPORT 2024



**Mountain Empire**  
*Community College Foundation*



**Mountain Empire**  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE



## Ways to Give

An investment in the MECC Educational Foundation Inc. is an investment in the community. There are many ways to give to the MECC Foundation.

### Cash, Check, or ACH

You may visit the MECC Foundation office, located in Room 219 of Dalton Cantrell Hall on the MECC campus, or send a gift by check to:

MECC Foundation  
3441 Mountain Empire Road  
Big Stone Gap, VA 24219

If you would like to designate your gift for a special purpose, please enclose a note or make a notation on the memo line of your check. Please call the MECC Foundation Office at 276-523-7466 for information on ACH automatic debits.

### Donate Online

Visit [www.meccfoundation.org/give](http://www.meccfoundation.org/give).

#### Other Ways to Give

- Corporate and Matching Gifts
- Stock
- Planned Giving
- Retirement Savings
- Charitable Gift Annuities



**Mountain Empire**  
*Community College Foundation*



**Mountain Empire**  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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**This year has been marked by progress and innovation, from rebranding efforts to infrastructure enhancements designed to enhance the MECC experience and expand our impact.**

Dear Friends and Supporters of Mountain Empire Community College,

As we reflect on another year of growth and transformation at Mountain Empire Community College (MECC), we are excited to share the highlights of our successes, each bringing us closer to fulfilling our mission of empowering students and strengthening our community. This year has been marked by progress and innovation, from rebranding efforts to infrastructure enhancements designed to enhance the MECC experience and expand our impact.

In May 2024, we proudly unveiled MECC's new branding and logo, a fresh look that reflects our vision and commitment to the future. This rebranding aligns with our goal of creating an inviting and dynamic presence in our region, embodying the college's spirit of resilience, growth, and progress.

Leadership also saw exciting additions, with Dr. Clint Pinion stepping into the role of Vice President of Academic Affairs and Workforce Solutions and Ms. Kristy Hall as Vice President of Financial and Administrative Services. Their dedication and vision are already paving the way for enhanced academic excellence and operational efficiency.

Thanks to initiatives like the Promise Program, MECC's enrollment has consistently grown: a 10% increase in Fall 2023, 7% in Spring 2024, and 3% in Fall 2024. We are thrilled that more students are choosing MECC as their gateway to education and career opportunities.

In 2024, MECC also announced the planned installation of a 777kW rooftop solar array, coupled with a 20-year roof resurfacing project on campus buildings. This project supports our commitment to renewable energy and offers students hands-on learning opportunities through the Solar Installer Apprenticeship program.

An economic impact study commissioned in 2023 highlighted MECC's pivotal role in regional development. Our activities and alumni contribute approximately \$77.5 million annually to the local economy, supporting over 1,158 jobs. These findings affirm the substantial return on investment MECC offers to students, taxpayers, and society, helping to enhance regional prosperity. Foundation support has been essential in advancing college initiatives, from scholarships to capital projects. This year, we are conducting a study to identify the best location for an amphitheater that will serve as a cultural hub for our community. Additionally, the MECC Foundation extended vital assistance to students and employees impacted by Hurricane Helene, thanks to the generosity of the Virginia Community College Foundation.

Lastly, Project WELD, our two-year grant initiative to provide welding credentials to justice-impacted individuals, has had tremendous success. Offered at Wise Correctional Unit 18, Project WELD offered welding instruction and credentialing to 42 individuals who earned 48 industry-recognized credentials. Eight of those individuals reached gainful employment upon release and are contributing to society in meaningful ways. This program provides individuals with valuable knowledge and skills while helping them forge new paths to contribute positively to our community.

Our gratitude extends to each donor, partner, and community member who makes our work possible. Together, we are building a brighter future for Southwest Virginia.

With warm regards,  
Kristen Westover



MECC President Dr. Kristen Westover, MECC Foundation Vice Chair Keith Wilson, and MECC Foundation Executive Director Dr. Amy Greear present their work to increase educational attainment at the National Council for Advancement and Support of Education Conference in Baltimore, MD.

## MECC's Promise Program Results in Enrollment Growth, Credentials Earned

Big Stone Gap – Mountain Empire Community College's efforts to launch a tuition coverage program for all high school graduates in the college's service region have resulted in an increase in enrollment for three consecutive semesters.

An estimated 145 students were served by the program in 2023, with 65 credentials, including certificates and associate degrees, earned. Since implementing the program in 2023, MECC has experienced a 10% enrollment growth in the fall of 2023, followed by a 9% enrollment growth in spring 2024, and an additional 3% enrollment growth in fall 2024.

MECC launched the MECC Promise Program in 2023 as an economic development effort to increase educational attainment and skilled training in the region. The MECC Foundation was able to fund the program thanks to the many donors that had already established private scholarships, funding from Lee, Scott, and Wise Counties, the City of Norton, and the Columbus Phipps Foundation. The Anne & Gene Worrell Foundation provided a \$750,000 gift to endow the program permanently.

MECC President Dr. Kristen Westover, MECC Vice President for Institutional Advancement Dr. Amy Greear, and MECC Foundation Vice Chair and MECC Advisory Board Member Keith Wilson presented "A Promise to Our Community: Launching a Free College Program in Rural Appalachia" at CASE's annual conference in Baltimore, MD, on October 16. The presentation featured information on Mr. Wilson's involvement in developing a Promise Program in Sullivan County that was ultimately adopted by the state of Tennessee, and how MECC developed, funded, and implemented the program in Virginia's Southwest region.

Through data analysis, MECC also found that students enrolling in the Promise Program may need additional support services to include assistance with the scholarship and federal financial aid application, as well as other academic interventions to help grow retention year-to-year. An estimated 145 students were served by the program in 2023, with 65 credentials, including certificates and associate degrees, earned.

"MECC's Promise Program is more than a pathway to college—it's a commitment to our region's future. By making college accessible and achievable for every high school graduate in our region, we're building a stronger, more resilient community. This program represents the promise of opportunity and the power of education to transform lives in Southwest Virginia," said Dr. Westover.

Keith Wilson noted that today's students require more than a high school diploma to be successful. That requirement should extend to an expectation of students completing a K-14 education. Promise Programs break down financial barriers to students reaching their educational and career goals. "Kids rise to expectations," said Wilson. "The most important thing this program communicates is that college is part of your future."



# MECC UNVEILS NEW LOGO, BRANDING



# Mountain Empire

## COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) proudly transitioned to a new logo in 2024, adopting a symbol of the institution's dedication to innovation, community engagement, and academic excellence.**

The new logo combines traditional elements with a modern aesthetic, embodying MECC's commitment to providing cutting-edge educational opportunities while honoring the institution's rich heritage and the natural beauty of the Southwest Virginia region.

"MECC's new logo embodies our continuing mission to provide accessible, quality higher education, workforce training, and community programs to ensure an educated population and globally competitive workforce," said President Kristen Westover.

The rebranding initiative signifies not only growth but also resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing educational landscape. MECC remains steadfast in its commitment to students, the community, and its core values of honesty, integrity, and trust.

"Our vision at Mountain Empire Community College is to be recognized by our community as the leader in preparing our region's educated workforce," added Westover. "Together, with the support and engagement of our community, we are making MECC a beacon of opportunity and success."

Located in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, MECC continues to shape the future of education in Southwest Virginia and beyond. The institution's dedication to teaching, learning, and shared values has made it a cornerstone of the community for over five decades.

[CLICK TO WATCH THE LOGO REVEAL](#)



# Economic Impact

## The Economic Value of Mountain Empire Community College

### About MECC



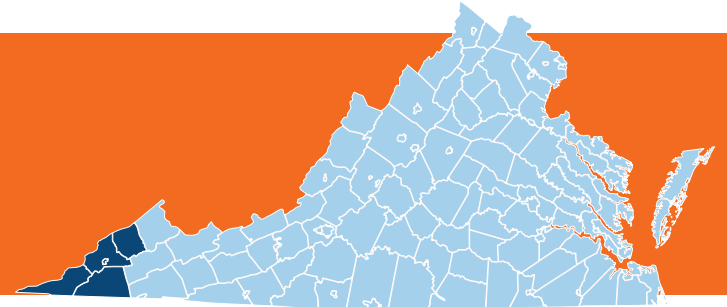
**2,888**  
Credit Students



**378**  
Non-credit Students



**286**  
Employees



### THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS



#### Alumni Impact

Impact of the increased earnings of MECC alumni and the businesses they work for

**\$63.2M**

Added income



An economic boost similar to hosting the World Series **10 times**

OR **849** jobs supported



#### Operations Spending Impact

Impact of annual payroll and other spending

**\$13.8M**

Added income



Enough to buy **293** new cars

OR **299** jobs supported



#### Student Spending Impact

Impact of the daily spending of MECC students retained in the region

**\$0.5M**

Added income



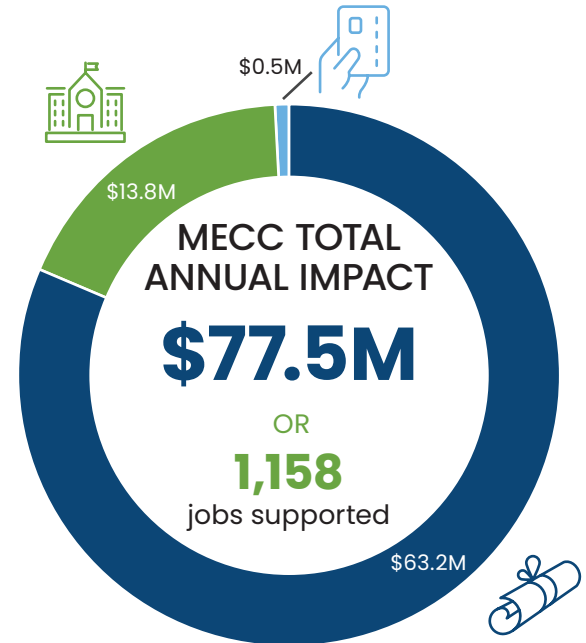
Enough to buy **43** families\* a year's worth of groceries

OR **11** jobs supported

● = 25 jobs \* = family of four

### The MECC Service Area, Virginia

**1** out of every **32** jobs in the MECC Service Area is supported by the activities of MECC and its students





# INVESTMENT ANALYSIS

For every \$1.00...



**Students** gain **\$5.30**  
in lifetime earnings  
\$ \$ \$ \$ \$

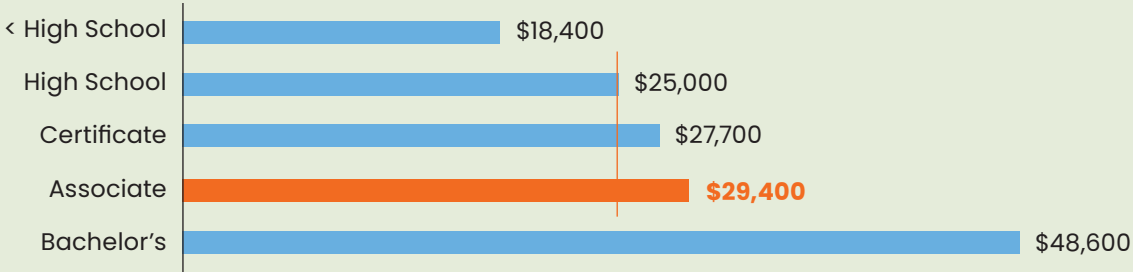
The average associate degree graduate from MECC will see an increase in earnings of **\$4,100** each year compared to someone with a high school diploma working in Virginia.



**Taxpayers** gain **\$1.20**  
in added tax revenue and public  
sector savings  
\$



**Society** gains **\$4.60**  
in added income and  
social savings  
\$ \$ \$ \$ \$





THE ANNE & GENE WORRELL FOUNDATION IS COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING INITIATIVES AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT ALIGN WITH OUR MISSION TO CULTIVATE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND ECOSYSTEMS IN THE PLACES THE WORRELLS CALLED HOME.

## Anne & Gene Worrell Foundation Receives 2024 Chancellor's Leadership in Philanthropy Award

The MECC Foundation nominated the Anne & Gene Worrell Foundation of Charlottesville, Virginia, to receive the 18th Annual Virginia Community College System Chancellor's Award for Leadership in Philanthropy for their support of the Mountain Empire Community College Promise Program.

Hosted by the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education, the 2024 Chancellor's Award for Leadership in Philanthropy has been awarded to more than two dozen individuals, families, and organizations. The awards were presented at a luncheon ceremony in Richmond on Tuesday, April 16, 2024. VCCS Chancellor Dr. David Doré served as emcee, and The Honorable Maurice Jones was featured as the keynote speaker.

"Virginia's growth, prosperity, and well-being depend on the success of our community college system and the success of our students," said Jones. "From childcare and housing assistance to reducing food insecurity, we must care and invest in the whole student for students and the Commonwealth to be successful."

This year's class of distinguished philanthropy leaders has collectively contributed \$17 million to Virginia's Community Colleges. The Anne & Gene Worrell Foundation is committed to supporting initiatives and organizations that align with our mission to cultivate resilient communities and ecosystems in the places the Worrells called home. The Foundation provided a \$750,000 endowed gift that will support tuition coverage for all eligible high school students that graduate within the service region.



## MECC, Radford Launch Tartan Transfer Program

MECC and Radford University are excited to announce the launch of the Tartan Transfer program, a new initiative designed to streamline the transfer process for students from eight Virginia Community College System (VCCS) schools.

The program will create an accessible pathway for community college students seeking to continue their education and earn a bachelor's degree at Radford. Through this partnership, students will benefit from a range of features aimed at making higher education easier to navigate and more affordable and career focused. Key benefits of the Tartan Transfer Program include affordability, maximized transfer credits, personalized advising, early campus integration and events, and career preparation.

"Mountain Empire Community College is dedicated to creating seamless pathways for our students to reach their educational and career goals. The Tartan Transfer Program with Radford University provides an invaluable opportunity for our students to transition confidently to a four-year degree. The program not only saves our students time and money but also supports them with the resources and support they need to thrive at Radford and beyond. It's a commitment to their success and an investment in the future of our region," said MECC President Kristen Westover.

For more information about the Tartan Transfer program, please visit [www.radford.edu/tartan-transfer](http://www.radford.edu/tartan-transfer) or call MECC's Advising Office at 276-523-2400 ext. 649106.





Booth



Hall



Jones



Pinion

# New Appointments

**DR. TED BOOTH**, a member of our history faculty, was appointed to the position of Dean of the Division of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Booth has served as an Associate Professor of History and Religion at MECC since 2022. Prior to joining MECC, Dr. Booth taught and was Director of Academic Support at Lincoln Memorial University for ten years. He also taught at Milligan University. Dr. Booth earned his Bachelor of Arts in History from Milligan University, a Master of Science of Social Work from the University of Tennessee, a Master of Religion in Historical Theology from Emmanuel Christian Seminary, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Late Medieval Religious History from the University of Tennessee. He has published one book and several articles and reviews, and he is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Great Britain.

**MRS. KRISTY HALL** was appointed Vice President of Finance and Administration for Mountain Empire Community College. Before her appointment, Ms. Hall was Dean of Enrollment Services and Financial Aid at Mountain Empire Community College since 2007. Her areas of responsibility include business and finance, administrative services, facilities, campus safety, Title IX and emergency management. Ms. Hall has more than 20 years of experience in college enrollment and

K-12 human resource management. Before joining MECC, she was the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources for Kershaw County Schools in South Carolina and a Senior HR Generalist and Compensation Analyst. Ms. Hall is currently completing courses toward a doctoral degree from Liberty University. She holds an M.S. in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the University of Nebraska — Omaha and a B.S. in Psychology from Radford University.

**MRS. JANE JONES**, a long-time faculty member at MECC, was appointed to the position of Dean of the Business and Information Technology Division. Mrs. Jones has served as an Associate Professor of Administrative Support Technology at MECC since 2000. Prior to joining MECC, Mrs. Jones served as the Marketing Coordinator for Lee County (VA) Public Schools for nine years (1991–2000). Mrs. Jones earned an Associate of Arts & Sciences degree in General Studies from Mountain Empire, a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Tusculum College (Greeneville, TN), a Master of Arts in Teaching (Secondary Education), and a Graduate Certificate in Health Care Management from East Tennessee State University (Johnson City, TN), and a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Certificate from Cornell University (Ithaca, NY).

**DR. CLINT PINION** has been appointed as MECC's Vice President of Academic Affairs & Workforce Solutions. Dr. Clint Pinion served as the Dean of Health Technologies at Southwest Virginia Community College in Cedar Bluff, VA. Prior to working at SWCC, Dr. Pinion served as the Director of the Master of Public Health Program, an Associate Professor of Environmental Health Science, Co-Director of the Center for Total Worker Health, and Co-Advisor of the Environmental/Occupational Health & Sustainability graduation concentration at Eastern Kentucky University. He also served as the Director of the Industrial Hygiene Training Core that is housed in the NIOSH funded Central Appalachian Regional Education and Research Center. Dr. Pinion earned his Doctor of Public Health degree in Environmental and Occupational Health Science from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth), School of Public Health. He also earned a Doctor of Education degree with a focus in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Eastern Kentucky University. Dr. Pinion earned a Master of Public Health Degree focused on Environmental Health Science and a Master of Arts Degree focused on Student Personnel Service in Higher education from Eastern Kentucky University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology from Berea College.



## MECC Leads Effort to Install Solar Panels on Campus

Mountain Empire Community College will be the first community college in the Commonwealth to install more than 1,600 solar panels on its classroom building through a power purchase agreement.

Students enrolled in MECC's solar apprenticeship training program will be participating in the project, earning valuable workforce credentials while transforming the future energy source for the college.

"We are making sure that our students and our region have good-paying jobs that are relevant and that can allow them to go where they want to go, to stay home if they want to stay home, and still be able to make a good living," Mountain Empire Community College President Kristen Westover said of solar-industry workforce training.

In 2022, the MECC Foundation applied for and received a grant from the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority to train

students in solar installation in partnership with the nonprofit Appalachian Voices organization. The grant paid students' hourly wages while they earned their solar installation credential. The project was supported by the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia, a coalition of nonprofits, schools, government agencies, and businesses that seeks to help grow a locally rooted solar industry in seven Southwest Virginia coalfield counties, including those served by Mountain Empire. More than 20 students have completed the apprenticeship program in the last two years.

A 777-kilowatt solar power system utilizing 1,679 solar panels will be connected to the electrical grid. The power generated by Mountain Empire's system will be credited to the college, with the option to sell extra energy back to the grid. Dr. Westover noted the College will experience a net savings of \$500,000 over 25 years and \$2.3 million over 35 years.

## MECC's Project Weld Prepares Incarcerated Students for Life After

MECC and the MECC Foundation's innovative efforts to train incarcerated individuals for careers after release will serve as a pilot for other college's across the Commonwealth.

MECC launched Project Weld at the Camp 18 Wise County Correctional Facility in 2022. The program, supported by funds from Go Virginia, provided welding training for minimum security incarcerated individuals to increase their skills and provided a pipeline of qualified workers upon release.

Since the program's launch, 48 students have been trained in four cohorts, with all 48 completing the NCCER Core credential and Construction Site Safety and 41 students completing the Welding I certification.

**Project Weld provides more than just training in welding. The program provides an opportunity to break the cycle of incarceration for students and allows them to make lasting positive impacts on their communities and families upon release.**

– Matt Rose, Dean of Industrial Technologies







## Foundation Grant Launches Heavy Equipment Operator Training, Fiber Optic Installation Programs

Students can now train to enter careers in Heavy Equipment Operations thanks to funding provided by the MECC Foundation, Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority, and the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission.

The MECC Foundation has received more than \$200,000 in grant funding to support the launch of short-term, non-credit workforce training in Heavy Equipment Operator I, II, and Fiber Optic Installation. The programs are expected to launch in 2024 and 2025.

The HEO and Fiber Optic training programs were identified as high-need areas in MECC's service region, with multiple employers expressing a need for skilled workers in the fields. The Fiber Optic Installation Program was launched in partnership with Scott County Telephone Cooperative, which will also provide equipment for the training.

## Virginia Foundation for Community College Education, MECC Foundation Support Students Impacted by Hurricane Helene

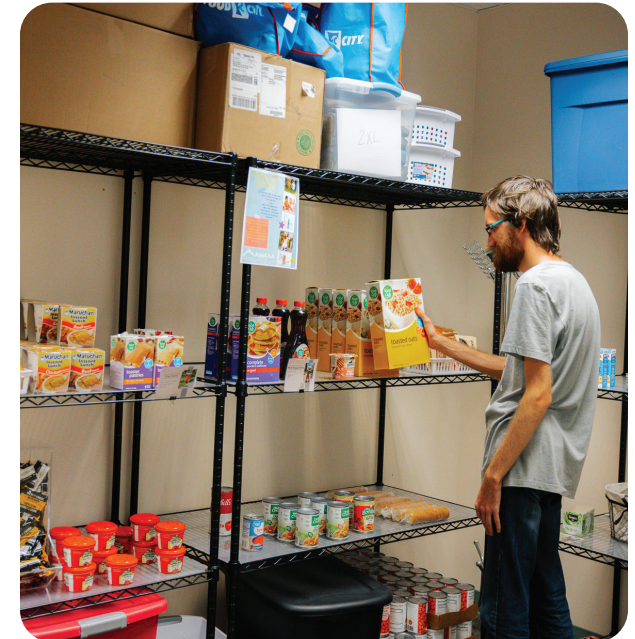
MECC students impacted by the devastating destruction of Hurricane Helene were able to receive needed assistance thanks to the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education (VFCCE) and the MECC Foundation's Emergency Assistance program.

Following the storm, many students and staff were impacted by loss of power, water, and food supplies. MECC opened its library and food pantry for student use. The VFCCE immediately began to raise funds to assist Southwest Virginia colleges with emergency needs. Thanks to gifts made to MECC's Student Emergency Assistance Fund and the VFCCE's Emergency Fund for Community Colleges of Southwest Virginia, MECC was able to provide students with emergency food and gas and food gift cards.

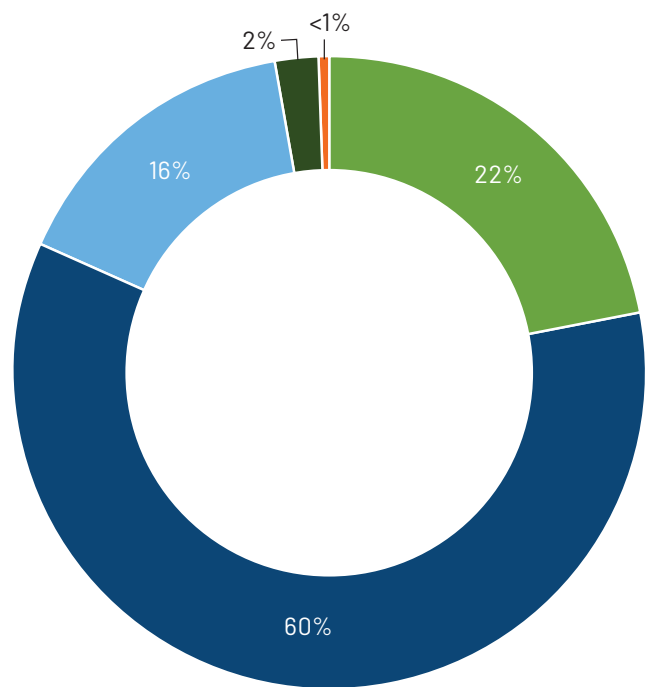
"We've heard from students and families who, because of power outages, have lost the food they had frozen for the winter," said Amy Greear, VP of Institutional Advancement at Mountain Empire Community College. "For many, that loss is an enormous issue."

"Some students and families have lost everything, yet many of our students are determined to go back to college," said VFCCE Executive Director Jennifer Gentry. "We're so grateful to our colleges who are assisting in so many ways. We have an opportunity to help them and help our fellow Virginians."

"Responding to the needs of our communities is in the best traditions of our community colleges and embodies our determination to do more to help students during emergencies, one of the goals we set in our new system-wide strategic plan," said VCCS Chancellor David Dore. "I hope our colleagues statewide will offer a helping hand at this time of need."



# MECC Foundation Financial Report



## PROGRAM BUDGET 2024-2025

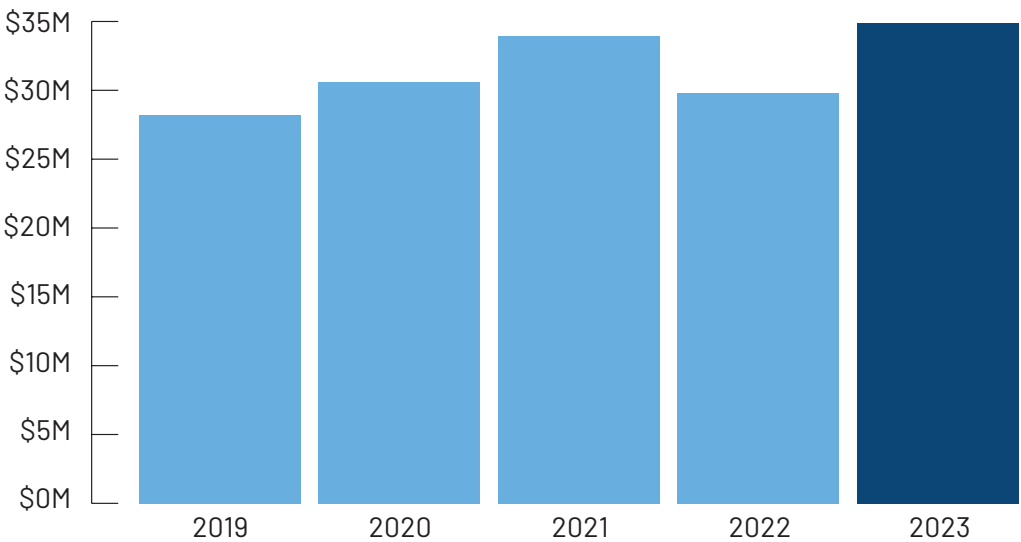
Operating Expenses	\$382,000
Scholarships and Student Student Aid	\$1,033,897
Student Programming and Support	\$269,082
Community Cultural and Humanities Programming	\$35,295
Staff Professional Development	\$9,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,729,274</b>



## NEW SCHOLARSHIPS

- Smitty Baker Annual Memorial Scholarship
- Healing Hands of Mercy Leadership Award
- David Louis Isaac Endowed Scholarship
- Ladley Family Endowed Scholarship
- Shirley Lane Stiles Memorial Endowed Scholarship
- David L. Williams Endowed Scholarship

## ENDOWMENT GROWTH







## 48TH ANNUAL

# John Fox Jr. Festival

## Kingsolver, Trigiani Reflect on Their Appalachian Roots

Pulitzer Prize Winning Novelist Barbara Kingsolver and Origin Project Founder and New York Times Bestselling Author Adriana Trigiani were the featured artists for the 48th Annual John Fox Jr. Literary Festival held April 17.

The two spoke to a packed audience of students and community members, with the authors reflecting on growing up and living in Appalachia, their roles as female writers and how they develop the themes and stories within their work, as well Kingsolver's work to raise awareness of the opioid crisis and its impact on the region.

The MECC Foundation welcomed students from the Origin Project, Trigiani's in-school Virginia writing program, to the festival, and featured the unveiling of its 10th Anniversary Cookbook in memory of the project's co-founder Nancy Bolmeier Fisher.

Trigiani, a native of Big Stone Gap, is The New York Times bestselling author of 20 books in fiction and nonfiction, including *The Shoemaker's Wife*, *The Good Left Undone*, *Don't Sing at the Table*, and *Lucia, Lucia*, and she is published in 38 languages around the world. She is host of the hit podcast, *You Are What You Read*, in conversation with the luminaries of our time about the books that built their souls.

Kingsolver is a novelist, essayist, and poet. She is the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Demon Copperhead*, a contemporary re-telling of *David Copperfield* set in Appalachia at the onset of the opioid epidemic. In addition to *Demon Copperhead*, her bestselling works include *The Lacuna*, *The Poisonwood Bible*, *The Bean Trees*, and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. She was awarded the National Humanities Medal, the highest honor given by the U.S. government for service through the arts, as well as the Dayton Literary Peace Prize for the body of her work.



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JULY 1, 2023 THROUGH OCTOBER 1, 2024

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Virginia Foundation for Community College Education  
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