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GRREC gala raises funds for new educator scholarship

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Student athletes from the girls' basketball teams at Metcalfe County, Cavi Campbellsville Independent schools help serve dessert Tuesday at the A Coale, a former college coach, was the speaker.

PHOTOS BY Grace Ramey/grace.ramey@bgdailynews.com

Educators and students from across the commonwealth joined the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative for a gala to raise funds for their inaugural educator scholarship.

Over 180 guests took their places Tuesday night for a dinner and keynote address at the Aspiring Educators Scholarship Dinner, raising around \$4,500 for the fund.

“That scholarship goes to help us get our own students who are graduating from your 54 GRREC high schools to come back to your schools and be educators,” executive director Bart Flener said.

The new scholarship provides \$2,000 each year of college – \$8,000 in total – to a high school senior planning to attend Western Kentucky University to study education.

It’s made possible through a partnership between GRREC and WKU, which match the costs.

For their first year, GRREC and WKU provided two additional scholarships, awarding three students in total from Barren County and Hopkins County.

Corinne Murphy, dean of WKU’s College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, said scholarships like these are increasingly important as the country faces the “gravest teacher shortage we’ve ever seen.”

“That extends from elementary education in rural areas to special education in secondary education across all of our high schools,” Murphy said. “We’ve got to make sure we’re shoring up the pipeline of new teachers so we actually have schools that are (run by) highly skilled and highly prepared educators.”

James Neihof, director of GRREC’s Deeper Learning program, said they hope to increase the scholarship in the coming years to provide more funding to more students.

“There’s no management cost here. All of the dollars raised go to the scholarship,” Neihof said. “When you look at the faces of kids who are getting ready to go to college at that age and to think the whole world is open for you, there’s no downside to supporting that 18-year-old.”

Neihof said GRREC provides professional development, resources and support to educators and professionals across the region. The scholarship serves as another tool to meet the needs of superintendents looking for talented staff and students looking to further their careers.

The event featured a keynote speech by Sherri Coale, a retired women’s basketball coach recognized in the Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame.

Coale recalled her experience coaching the University of Oklahoma Sooners for 25 years, netting numerous championship and NCAA tournament appearances.

She also served as head coach of the USA Basketball team that won gold in the 2013 World University Games in Kazan, Russia.

Coale's book, "Rooted to Rise: The Redwood Legacies of Life-Anchoring People," was handed out to guests thanks to the support of the event's three primary sponsors: American Fidelity, Benefits Resource Group and Houchens Insurance Group.

Coale also acted in various educational roles throughout her time as a coach. She said educators and coaches are often the most influential people in a student's life beyond family.

"A significant part of an educator's job is to equip young people with the ability to chase, relentlessly and continuously, the best version of themselves," Coale said. "That's the worthiest work I know."

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