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Potomac State College of WVU's Agriculture, Forestry Programs Receive Historic \$4.2 Million Gift

SEPTEMBER 28, 2015, KEYSER, WV – A transformational, \$4.2 million gift to Potomac State College of West Virginia University's Agriculture and Forestry Programs – the largest in the school's history – will result in the launch of entrepreneurial education courses designed to promote sustainable agriculture, announced Campus President Leonard Colelli.

The gift from J. Duncan Smith, a successful businessman who has had a life-long passion for agriculture, will be used to implement a two-year associate of applied science degree and the development of a four-year bachelor of applied science degree designed to teach students the skills needed to create or expand an agricultural business. Smith believes in the promotion of sustainable agriculture through education and hands-on learning to benefit future generations. Smith's ties to Potomac State date back to the early 1900s when relatives, members of the Gerstell family, attended the College.

"Promoting sustainable agriculture has been an interest of mine for several years," said Smith. "Potomac State's administration and faculty believe in this philosophy too and they have a vision for growing and expanding their Ag and Forestry Programs that I find very exciting and promising. I firmly believe bringing the College's vision to fruition will not only stimulate college enrollment but also economic growth in the region."

The donation comes in two parts – monetary and gift-in-kind – to benefit the College's Ag and Forestry Programs. The monetary gift of approximately \$3 million will fund three endowments in memory of the Gerstell Family that will be used to support: program development, classroom/lab enhancements, farm operations, student scholarships, faculty development, student experiential learning, and facility enhancements to the Deremer Farm, in Fort Ashby, W.Va. The gift-in-kind includes a 364-acre plot of farmland, valued at approximately \$1.3 million, that sits adjacent to the Deremer Farm, which was donated to the College in 2010 through the Deremer family's estate plan.

“It has been well established that the production of food could be a significant area of growth in the West Virginia economy,” stated President Colelli. “We’re thrilled that this historic gift gives Potomac State the opportunity to lead that charge. We’re fortunate to be in the unique position that agriculture has been our foundation since the College’s inception in 1901, we’re located in an agricultural belt that produces a significant proportion of the state’s food and the College possesses more than 800 acres of farmland.”

A new report released by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows tremendous demand for recent college graduates with a degree in agricultural programs with an estimated 57,900 high-skilled job openings annually in the food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, and environment fields in the United States (U.S.). However, there is only an average of 35,400 new U.S. graduates with a bachelor’s degree or higher in agriculture-related fields – 22,500 short of the jobs available annually. The report projects almost half of the job opportunities will be in management and business.

“There is incredible opportunity for highly skilled jobs in agriculture,” said U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in the report. “Those receiving degrees in agricultural fields can expect to have ample career opportunities. Not only will those who study agriculture be likely to get well-paying jobs upon graduation, they will also have the satisfaction of working in a field that addresses some of the world’s most pressing challenges. These jobs will only become more important as we continue to develop solutions to feed more than 9 billion people in 2050.”

The Smith gift was made in conjunction with *A State of Minds: The Campaign for West Virginia’s University*. The \$1 billion comprehensive campaign being conducted by the WVU Foundation on behalf of the University runs through December 2017. For more information regarding supporting Potomac State College of WVU, please contact Lucas Taylor, director of development, at lstaylor@mail.wvu.edu or 304-788-6995.

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This photo was taken in spring 2015 on Potomac State College of WVU's Upper Farm, adjacent to the College. Agriculture Students Shelby Boatwright, Jaclyn "Jackie" Cleaver and Eric Husick were herding meats goats to the barn.