

# *building* EDUCATION *with* OPPORTUNITIES



*Scholarships on the local and national level through SkyLine aid in the next generation's future, including Max Hagaman of Watauga County. The newest national scholarship through the Foundation for Rural Service (FRS) is helping Max while honoring the memory of the CEO of ATMC, a sister cooperative to SkyLine.*

Community connections are at the heart of what SkyLine does. That is why SkyLine has participated as a local sponsor of the Foundation for Rural Service (FRS) Scholarship Program since 2006. This year's recipient, Watauga High graduate Max Hagaman, was awarded one of three Roger Alan Cox Scholarships, named in memory of the former CEO and 27-year employee of Atlantic Telephone Membership Corporation (ATMC) a sister cooperative of SkyLine's and one of eight TMCs in the state. Max is the 16th beneficiary of the FRS Scholarship Program and the first to receive the new Roger Alan Cox scholarship.

"What made this scholarship so special is how it honors Roger's passion and endless drive to help ensure that rural

Americans have access to the same technology and education as every other American, which also speaks to the core of SkyLine's historical mission," said SkyLine PR Administrator Karen Powell.

The FRS is the advocacy arm of NTCA, The Rural Broadband Association, which represents more than 800 rural, independent and cooperative telecommunications providers across the U.S., including SkyLine. The FRS provides scholarships, a Youth Tour and a number of other programs to help invest in the next generation of rural leaders. With investments of more than \$100,000 a year, the FRS has awarded more than \$1 million in scholarships since its inception in 1994. Of this year's pool of nearly 1,400

*Left: SkyLine Board Vice-President Joe McNeil and PR Administrator Karen Powell present the FRS Scholarship and SkyLine matching award to Max Hagaman at Watauga High's Awards Day event.*



*Inside Watauga High's greenhouse, Max Hagaman holds a Fraser fir seedling, which is the most popular of Christmas trees grown and sold across the High Country and represents the main agricultural commodity of this region.*



applicants from across the U.S., 53 students received scholarships, including Max. SkyLine matched the \$500 award, giving Max a total scholarship award of \$1,000 toward his first year at N.C. State University in Raleigh, where he plans to major in agricultural business and communications.

The FRS helps local telecom providers like SkyLine make a positive difference in the educational future of local youth and in the future of rural communities, regardless of whether or not the students return to their home communities after college or go on to careers that impact public policy through rural advocacy.

A proven student-leader throughout his high school career, Max excelled not only in his academics, but also in several extracurricular activities, particularly the Future Farmers of America (FFA).

At the start of his freshman year, Max set a high goal to become a regional officer in the FFA. At the time, the local chapter was not as active, and it had been nearly 30 years since a regional officer had been elected from the school's local chapter. With a bit of a vacuum left from several graduating FFA students, the door was open for Max to run for chapter president his sophomore year, a position he held

*There are three circles of Agricultural Education at Watauga High School: Classroom/Laboratory, FFA and a Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE). Max accomplished all three and for his SAE, he completed an internship with the Watauga Agricultural Cooperative Extension where he researched, wrote and recorded four-minute-long radio features on such topics as root rot and hog weed.*

With nearly 300 FFA chapters statewide, the group's mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agriculture education. They do this through a program of activities that includes: student development — improving life skills, chapter development — encouraging teamwork and

community development — making the community a better place to live and work.

At the June 2018 statewide FFA convention, Watauga High School had its best year in the chapter's history — winning third place in the Farm Business Management



Competition and first place in Building NC Communities, a community service program in which the chapter led a landscape project for the entire Watauga campus in the fall. For teacher and FFA Advisor Olivia Haigler "it was the highlight of my summer."



**Max and his fellow classmates and FFA members experience real-world applications including the process that helps address root rot, which has plagued local Fraser fir tree farmers in recent years. Students take a Fraser fir seedling and graft it to a Momi fir, which has more resilient roots. At least one full growth cycle (an eight-year period) of these trees has occurred on a commercial farm.**

for the next three years. He was elected FFA Regional Vice-President during his sophomore year and FFA Regional President his junior year. At the state convention in Raleigh this June, he was elected FFA State Secretary after completing a rigorous vetting process that included several days of interviews, mock speeches and tests.

Long term, Max hopes to work in agriculture policy at the state or national level. Coming from a family of teachers, he didn't initially see himself working in agriculture, but Max credits the FFA for providing numerous connections for

development in his leadership ability, service opportunities and career options. "After college, I may first focus on working for an agricultural company and later transition to the political world," Max said.

FFA Advisor Olivia Haigler, who has her own deep connections to the area—she grew up in Avery County and has been at Watauga High the past four years — affirms the role of FFA to take students beyond their back door to see leadership opportunities that exist elsewhere that they can put into practice. "I've seen how FFA chapter involvement for leadership development equips students for success and really changes their whole outlook." She also sees a bright future ahead for Max. "I could envision Max at Farm Bureau in advocacy within the political realm and on the national level working with congressmen and senators." She added, "I'm very proud of him and excited for him to be going to N.C. State. He has left a good legacy with the FFA chapter, paving the way for future successes and has been a role model for kids. He has motivated others to be involved."

For Watauga High senior and FRS scholarship winner Max Hagaman, securing first place in the Parliamentary Procedures competition, a mock business meeting, was his proudest moment. Considered the "Super Bowl" of competitions, the chapter never had the expectation of winning, but was named as one of four finalists and ultimately clinched first place.

