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Cheely scholarship available for vocational-technical careers



When Sheryl Cheely talked with Golden Belt Community Foundation (GBCF) officials recently, “a light bulb came on.”

That flash of inspiration has led to a change in a local memorial scholarship in honor of Cheely’s husband, Ray A. Cheely. The scholarship, which was established in 2009, was available for business/accounting students. Now it is geared to vocational-technical careers.

“As a certified public accountant, Ray had many clients with vo-tech educations,” said Cheely, Great Bend. “He took great pride in seeing his clients succeed; he loved small-business entrepreneurs.

“Ray would absolutely support this change because vo-tech careers are vital to our community,” Cheely noted. “He would be pleased to help those who are interested in pursuing these professions.”

Vo-tech education programs offer certifications for professionals such as electricians, plumbers, mechanics, welders, machinists, truck drivers, and heating and air-conditioning specialists.

“All of us need this type of expertise available locally,” said Cheely, who is a former GBCF board member. “If your electricity goes out or you are facing a plumbing problem, you want to call a local expert.”

An applicant for the Ray A. Cheely Vocational Scholarship must be a Barton County high school graduate, or a Barton County resident for at least two years with plans to stay in the area after completing program requirements.

In addition, the applicant must attend an accredited vocational/trade school to pursue a certificate program. (This doesn’t include continuing education or re-certification.)

Preference will be given to programs that encourage local entrepreneurship; could result in a better-paying local job; and/or that fill a gap in the community.

Anyone with a GED, high school diploma or an under-graduate college degree is eligible to apply from April 1 to June 1. The application form is on the Foundation’s website: www.goldenbeltcf.org.

Sue Cooper, GBCF program officer, noted the board of directors recently voted to amend the scholarship’s purpose after analysis of scholarship funds and recipients, as well as career interests and trends.

“The board determined there was a gap in funding for vo-tech students,” Cooper explained. “The Foundation did not have any scholarships solely designed for these important programs. However, there are other scholarships available for business/accounting majors.”

Last year, approximately 2 percent of scholarship applicants were majoring in accounting, with another 5 percent in business.

“When the board considered all these factors in its thorough review and during many discussions, it became apparent this change would be a great fit for our community,” Cooper said. “And, most important, Sheryl strongly supports the change.”

Ray Cheely was a 1971 Great Bend High School graduate. He attended Barton Community College, earned an accounting degree in 1975 from Fort Hays State University and became a CPA.

His Great Bend business, Ray A. Cheely Chartered, specialized in small business accounting and consulting, and personal accounting and tax returns. He passed away in 2009.

At \$21 million in total assets and more than 170 funds under management, the Golden Belt Community Foundation has been connecting people who care to causes that matter since 1996. Golden Belt Community Foundation exists to provide non-profit organizations in central Kansas with a permanent source of support and to serve as a vehicle for charitable giving for donors. GBCF serves the counties of Barton, Pawnee, Rush, and Stafford. For more information about Golden Belt Community Foundation, call (620) 792-3000 or visit their website at www.goldenbeltcf.org.