



LOCAL STUDENT SELECTED FOR \$14,000 GOLDEN LEAF FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP

ROCKY MOUNT, N.C., (June 12, 2025) - Today, the Golden LEAF Foundation announced that 215 rural North Carolina students were selected to receive up to a \$14,000 Golden LEAF Scholarship, including one in Jones County.

High school seniors entering college as first year students are eligible for a \$3,500 scholarship each year for up to four years of undergraduate study at a participating four-year North Carolina college or university. Community college transfer students are eligible for \$3,500 a year for up to three years of undergraduate study.

Recipients from rural or economically distressed North Carolina counties are selected based on future career goals and an expressed intent to contribute to the state's rural communities upon graduation from college.

The Golden LEAF Foundation established the Golden LEAF Scholarship Program to broaden educational opportunities and provide support to students from rural counties with the goal that recipients will return and contribute to rural communities after graduation. The North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) administers the program and selects students for awards.

"We are proud to award scholarships to students who have deep connections to their rural communities," said Scott T. Hamilton, Golden LEAF President, Chief Executive Officer. "These recipients were selected from nearly 1,600 applicants. We look forward to their future accomplishments as they continue their education and become North Carolina's next generation of rural leaders."

Scholarship recipients may also apply for the Golden LEAF Rural Internship Initiative. The Rural Internship Initiative provides Golden LEAF Scholars with professional work experience related to their career field in a rural North Carolina community. The Golden LEAF Foundation provides funding to pay interns \$18 per hour for up to 400 hours of work. Internships take place between May and August.

"It is because of students like the ones from my district that I have confidence in the future of our rural communities," said Senator Brent Jackson. "Congratulations on receiving a Golden LEAF Scholarship. You have been provided an exceptional opportunity to gain invaluable skills that will positively impact our community long after you graduate from college."

"I am thrilled to congratulate the exceptional students from NC House District 12 selected as this year's Golden LEAF Scholars," said Representative Chris Humphrey. "The Golden LEAF Foundation's investment ensures our young people are equipped with the skills and experiences necessary to drive economic and community growth. Our past Golden LEAF Scholars from District 12 have excelled in fields such as engineering, business, entrepreneurship, and government affairs, showcasing our

district's incredible potential. I am confident these talented students will significantly contribute to our rural areas, creating a prosperous future for North Carolina."

The newly selected 2025 Golden LEAF Scholarship recipient from Jones County is as follows:

Name	College Name	High School
Katie Penaloza-Ruiz	Methodist University	Jones Senior High School

About Golden LEAF Foundation:

The Golden LEAF Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1999 to receive a portion of North Carolina’s funding from the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement with cigarette manufacturers. For 25 years, Golden LEAF has worked to increase economic opportunity in North Carolina’s rural and tobacco-dependent communities through leadership in grantmaking, collaboration, innovation, and stewardship as an independent and perpetual foundation. The Foundation has provided lasting impact to tobacco-dependent, economically distressed, and rural areas of the state by helping create 68,000 jobs, more than \$780 million in new payrolls, and more than 98,000 workers trained or retrained for higher wages. For more information about Golden LEAF and our programs, please visit our website at GoldenLEAF.org.

About North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority:

North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) administers the program on behalf of the Golden LEAF Foundation. Established in 1965, NCSEAA is the State agency that promotes access to higher education by administering financial aid and savings programs, informing students and families about paying for college, teaching educators about financial aid administration and advocating for resources to support students.

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