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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Three High School Students Win Cash Awards in Connect Rockingham Essay Contest

REIDSVILLE, N.C., April 1, 2025 – Since 2018, Rockingham County leaders and Spectrum have collaborated to expand broadband access in rural communities across Rockingham County, NC. Through multiple state grants, federal projects, and an innovative direct-deal—the first of its kind public-private partnership in the state—more than 4,000 previously unserved homes now have or will soon have access to high-speed internet.

During an event in October 2024 commemorating the completion of the broadband network expansion project, an essay contest for Rockingham County high school students was announced. Participants were asked to explore the impact of digital equity on students in Rockingham County, including how connectivity affects learning, and to discuss the responsibilities of community organizations—both public and private—in closing the digital divide.

The essay contest was supported by NC 100, the Rockingham County Digital Inclusion Coalition, Spectrum, and the Reidsville Area Foundation. Following a rigorous selection process, three winning essays were chosen. Selection committee members from the participating organizations visited each winner’s high school to honor their achievements in front of their principals, teachers, and fellow students and to present their awards.

“We are grateful for the hard work and thoughtful responses submitted by each of our local students,” said Merald Holloway, CEO and Executive Director of NC 100. “The essays from Kyosha, Ashlyn, and Levi not only demonstrate a strong understanding of the challenges in our community but also highlight the important work being done in our classrooms by Rockingham County educators.”

First Place Winner – Kyosha Dalton

Kyosha Dalton, a senior at Dalton McMichael High School from Eden, NC, won first place and received a \$1,000 award. She plans to attend NC State University to major in marketing and supply chain management. Reflecting on her essay, Dalton shared, “I thought about being in elementary school and the Chromebooks we were given. I had never had a computer before, and suddenly I had access to the internet and endless knowledge that I didn’t know existed.” She credits internet access and technology with significantly shaping her educational journey. Currently, she is taking a mix of online and in-person classes and will graduate with more than 30 hours of college and Advanced Placement credits.

In her essay, Dalton wrote, “Access to technology can shape a person's future, which is what makes digital equity so important. It allows students to learn new information, develop skills, and give back to their community. Organizations within the community have a responsibility to support this through various efforts because nurturing students is nurturing the future of Rockingham County.”

Second Place Winner – Ashlyn Slade

Ashlyn Slade, a junior at Reidsville High School in the International Baccalaureate program, placed second and received a \$750 award. Discussing her motivation for participating in the contest, Slade said, “I hope to attend High Point University, and I have to work hard academically to make that dream a reality. Another part of that is using my knowledge and experience with technology to earn scholarships and awards to help my family cover the cost of attendance.”

Regarding her essay, Slade shared, “I argue that the expansion of broadband access in Rockingham County has the potential to significantly impact education for students in rural areas. I highlight the challenges of affordability, digital literacy, and the need for public-private partnerships to ensure equitable access to technology for all students and families.”

Third Place Winner – Levi Corriher

Levi Corriher, a sophomore at Rockingham County Early College from Madison, placed third and received a \$500 award. Corriher stated, “In Rockingham County, digital literacy has become a necessity to reach our goals and access information. We’ve improved over the last five years, but I really wanted to highlight the need for continued effort and bring awareness to those who still need assistance in accessing the internet and using technology.”

In his essay, Corriher explored the critical need for digital equity, emphasizing how the lack of high-speed internet access exacerbates social, educational, and economic inequalities in Rockingham County and beyond. He highlighted the digital divide’s impact on marginalized groups, the importance of community support, and the role of technology in fostering inclusion. His essay argued for collaborative efforts to invest in infrastructure, affordable access, and digital literacy to bridge the gap and ensure equitable opportunities for all residents.

NC 100 is a social enterprise working with local, regional, and statewide leaders committed to authentic acts of community service. Our vision is to help create a community with full access to the resources and relationships that support, protect, and inspire wealth creation and healthy outcomes. Our Theory of Change is rooted in the belief that by serving as witnesses, conveners, coaches, facilitators, connectors, documenters, and consensus-builders, we can help Rockingham County, and the surrounding communities access the resources needed to foster economic and social well-being.

The Rockingham County Digital Inclusion Coalition was established to create a strategic plan for expanding reliable, affordable high-speed internet access to all residents while providing the necessary hardware, tools, and skills to improve their lives and livelihoods. Our vision is for all Rockingham County residents to have full access to quality broadband and the knowledge and skills needed to participate fully in society, democracy, and the economy, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Spectrum is a suite of advanced communications services offered by Charter Communications, Inc. (NASDAQ: CHTR), a leading broadband connectivity company and cable operator serving more than 57 million homes and businesses in 41 states. Over an advanced communications network, the company provides state-of-the-art residential and business services, including Spectrum Internet®, TV, Mobile, and Voice. Spectrum Business® delivers the same suite of broadband products and services, enhanced with features and applications for small and medium-sized businesses. Spectrum Enterprise offers highly customized, fiber-based solutions for larger businesses and government entities. Spectrum Reach® provides tailored advertising and production services. The company also delivers award-winning news coverage and sports programming through Spectrum Networks. More information is available at corporate.charter.com.

The Reidsville Area Foundation is a private health legacy foundation dedicated to fostering a thriving Rockingham County through grantmaking and community partnerships. We support transformative initiatives and strategic projects in early childhood and public education, health and wellness, and community development. Our goal is to improve education, health, and overall quality of life for Rockingham County residents. We work alongside community partners to create pathways to success and eliminate obstacles that hinder residents' progress.