

NEWS RELEASE – May 7, 2012

Danville Community College's Alumni Association honored four individuals as the *2012 Outstanding Alumni* in ceremonies and at a reception May 7 in the Board Room of Wyatt Building. Honorees represent Danville Community College and its two predecessor institutions, Danville Technical Institute and Virginia Polytechnic Institute—Danville.

Outstanding Alumni selections include **Richard Stevens “Steve” Bendall**, VPI-Danville graduate, who was a local real estate broker previous to his death; **Jerry Alton Foster**, Danville Technical Institute and VPI—Danville graduate, who is a CPA and partner at Harris, Harvey and Neal, Co. LLP; **Frank T. Grogan, Jr.**, VPI-Danville graduate, who founded and operated Grogan Oil Company; and **Matthew “Matt” O. Nelson II**, VPI—Danville graduate, former George Washington High School business instructor and one of the initial six who organized and promoted the establishment and growth of Piedmont Credit Union in Danville and the region.

The first honoree, Steve Bendall, was a graduate of George Washington High School where baseball was his game, a sport that would become his lifelong passion. An alumnus of VPI-Danville, a business graduate of VPI—Blacksburg and a U.S. Army veteran, Bendall was a real estate broker for many years. In that capacity, Bendall served as president of the Danville Real Estate Board for two terms.

As a businessman, his rental property was kept in such excellent condition that everyone who rented from him said he was the best landlord they had ever had. Bendall believed in fairness, thus his focus on doing the right think for those who rented his property. Throughout his business and personal relationships, he was known for being organized, honest, sincere and dependable.

Adept and knowledgeable in financial matters, Bendall was a lifelong member of the executive committee of Roman Eagle Memorial Home as well as a director on the board of Virginia Bank and Trust from January 26, 1969 until 2007. That board noted at his death that Steve Bendall, as a staunch supporter and director, was “most helpful in building our bank to a prestigious position...his advice and counsel will be greatly missed.”

Bendall, a longtime member of Mount Vernon United Methodist Church, served on the board of ushers. Beyond church activities, he was a member of Roman Eagle Masonic Lodge 122 and the Danville Scottish Rite Bodies.

As a nature lover, he enjoyed hunting, animals and birds, becoming an expert on the winged creatures he encountered throughout the region.

Before nature, he enjoyed being with people from all segments of the community, possessing a gift of making them feel special through remembering their names and associated events in detail. Known as a quiet man, he was kind, often doing for others in a quiet manner. Beyond people and animals, Bendall loved history and biblical literature, reading widely.

Bendall died April 7, 2007, after a successful career. His wife, Catherine Carter Bendall, lives in Danville.

The second honoree, Jerry Foster, graduated from Semmes High School in Mobile, Alabama, in 1960, after which he moved to Danville with his family. For five years after graduation, he worked for Disston, Inc., where he watched guys studying for college classes while on their lunch time and during work breaks. He said to himself, “I don’t know whether I can do that,” but he decided to try. The only option for higher education, Foster determined, was to work second shift and go to college during the day. Disston management agreed to place him on second shift.

Because of that agreement, he entered the Danville Technical Institute accounting curriculum in the fall of 1962 as a full-time student. There he met two instructors who would be instrumental in his education and his future. “I can’t emphasize enough how important Harold Henry, the instructor, was to my life. He exposed me to accounting, taught me exceptionally well.” Kenneth Neathery, from VPI-Danville, taught some classes at DTI also. “Neathery got me interested in enrolling at VPI—Danville as I finished my DTI courses. He would play checkers with students in the lounge areas, always talking, always encouraging us. He brought us information, answered questions, directed; he was a big help to me. Without these two instructors, I’m not sure I would have gotten a four-year degree.”

In 1963 Foster entered VPI—Danville, taking sophomore level accounting courses under Neathery as a freshman. While finishing the first two years of

VPI—Danville, Foster was in the first group of students to have classes in the new Taylor Building, built to house VPI-Danville as its numbers grew.

Foster explained concerning his three years on the college campus, “After being out of high school five years, DTI taught me how to study again. I was well prepared for Neathery’s classes.” After his sophomore year at VPI-Danville, he was honored with the *Wall Street Journal Award* for the highest average in Economics, an award that still is displayed in his home.

After graduation from VPI-Blacksburg, he was employed with the General Accounting Office in Washington, D.C., but the employment was interrupted by the draft because of the Vietnam War. Foster was sent to Ft. Bragg and then to Heidelberg, Germany. After discharge, he returned to the GAO and began studying for the CPA exam, a certification he quickly gained. In ensuing years, he worked for a Washington accounting firm, then moved with his wife to Roanoke, Virginia, where he worked as comptroller for Fralin and Waldron one year and Anderson and Reed until 1974.

In 1974 he learned of an accounting position open in Danville leading to his entering Harris, Harvey, and Neal as a CPA on October 1, 1974, working principally in tax advising and preparation for business and individuals. The firm regionally expanded its operations over the years. In 1976 Foster became a partner.

Early in his time in Danville, he volunteered to help Mount Vernon United Methodist Church, his home church, set up a new accounting system. As a member of the church, he later served as the church treasurer for several years and on the church board.

In civic activities, Foster had become a member of Kiwanis while living in Roanoke, transferring that membership to the Danville Kiwanis Club. Employment responsibilities led to his withdrawal from membership in later years. He and his wife have served as volunteers for the United Way. Beyond civic activities, he has been treasurer for the Danville Golf Club and served on the Danville Golf Club board and the Tuscarora Golf Club board.

He and his wife, Ely, have three adult daughters.

The third honoree, Frank T. Grogan, Jr., entered the first class of VPI—Danville in 1946, completing classes locally in 1948, going on to the Blacksburg campus where he graduated in 1950. He then enlisted in the U.S. Navy. After his

military discharge, his first employment was with DuPont out of state in engineering within their plant.

Later returning to Danville, where his father was a distributor of ESSO gas, Grogan learned that ESSO needed a home heating oil distributor. Grogan invested in one truck which he drove making deliveries while his mother manned his small office in a tiny, cinderblock building. Over time, he added several trucks while outgrowing his small office.

Later he became a Gulf oil dealer, moving his office to Industrial Avenue. He added gas delivery to service stations which purchasing several local stations.

Expanding operation over time, he added propane service for tobacco barns throughout the region. Propane was a huge expense in new infrastructure, since the trucks had to be pressurized trucks.

In civic activities, he was a longtime member of Rotary, being eventually honored for service with the *Paul Harris Award*. A member of the Danville Science Center, he is one of the founding members who answered the call to service when funding for the center was being sought.

A major supporter of the arts, especially music, Grogan donated pianos to Mount Vernon United Methodist Church and donated a Steinway to the North Theater revival operation. A strong supporter of Mount Vernon, he has served in numerous positions within the church.

The fourth honoree, Matthew O. Nelson II, is a retired George Washington High School business instructor, who has served the community far beyond many others. When he was in the Navy, from 1955-59, his mother died. Far away in Nevada, he was short on funds to get home for her funeral. A credit union came to his aid while other avenues of help had declined, allowing him the funds to drive home for the funeral.

Returning to Danville after military service, he entered VPI—Danville in 1959, majoring in business with a desire to enter sales. Kenneth Neathery encouraged him to teach; he wasn't sure that was where he should direct his training, but he pursued both business and education fields, completing his Business Education degree on the Blacksburg campus in 1964. Returning to Danville, he discovered that no teaching positions were available in business instruction, but before school opened, he was notified of a position available at

George Washington High School. Hired in 1964, Nelson completed his master's degree in business at the University of Virginia in 1969.

Nelson never forgot his problems when he was seeking to return home for his mother's funeral. He vowed that no one locally, with means to pay back a loan, would ever not have access to funds in an emergency if he could make a dream come true for the locality.

Recruiting a core group of six people who were willing to go through the process of creating a credit union and then oversee its operation, he and those individuals started, with \$26.25 each, a local credit union initially housed in his basement. Tirelessly, over the years, he solicited educators to join the Piedmont Credit Union and learn how accounts in a credit union could effectively serve them and their families.

For years and years, he was one of the major driving forces behind the success of Piedmont Credit Union while serving continuously thousands of students who trained in business in his classroom. Eventually, the credit union moved from his basement to offices, expanded regionally, eventually offering accounts and services to residents other than educators.

Today, Piedmont Credit Union operates from a modern two-story building constructed within the last ten years on Piney Forest Road. It is a local success story now worth \$50 million. Nelson no longer is involved with the enterprise, but it serves its customers daily because of Nelson's tenacity. Beyond this effort, Nelson serves and has served on the Deacon Board and the Church Council for Riveroak Church of God and is actively involved with the Red Men.

He and his wife have a son and a daughter.