BCCC Foundation Board President Earns National Recognition

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BCCC Foundation Board President, and long-time Mayor of Belhaven, Dr. Charles Boyette, recently earned national recognition as a finalist for the “Country Doctor of the Year” award. The award honors rural physicians who demonstrate extraordinary dedication to their patients and community. Boyette was selected from a field of 248 nominees.

“The hospital, the practice, the town – those things are Dr. Boyette’s life,” explains Joe Caldwell, executive vice president of Staff Care. Caldwell’s Texas-based temporary physician staffing firm sponsors the award. “We read every year about the crisis in rural health care,” he adds. “But some doctors respond to the challenge through innovation, hard work, and acts of sheer nerve.”

Twenty percent of all Americans — 54 million people — live in rural areas. Yet barely 10 percent of all physicians practice in small towns or rural communities. Many people must drive an hour or more to reach medical care. More than 20 million Americans live in medically underserved areas, where towns often rely on a physician assistant for health care. More than 460 rural hospitals have closed since 1980, and more than 1,000 doctors leave America’s rural communities every year.

Country doctors, on average, work longer hours and treat more patients than their urban counterparts – for less money. “There’s no forgiveness factor in rural health care,” says Ken Ragland, CEO of Pungo District Hospital. “The quality of care has to be the same in Belhaven as at the Mayo Clinic. But they don’t get the same level of support here.”

Yet Dr. Boyette has never wavered in his support for Belhaven. “I always wanted to practice rural medicine,” he says defiantly. Dr. Boyette believes that seeing people in his clinic and around town year after year makes him a better diagnostician. “I can just look at them and know if they’re sick or well,” he says. Treating families for generations also allows him to mentally catalogue their various illnesses, prescriptions, and other items normally filed in a manila folder. Because of his longevity, Dr. Boyette explains, “I can take care of a lot of problems just by listening and knowing the patient.”