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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**R-AHEC receives grant for ‘Wyoming County Rural Health Immersion Program’**

**Warsaw, NY (March 27, 2019)** – Western New York Rural Area Health Education Center (R-AHEC) announces receipt of a grant award for the organizations rural health immersion program. R-AHEC submitted an application to the William F. Thiel Trust at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The \$38,000 grant will provide housing for students during each of their four-week long competency-based clinical rotations and would include a program that would immerse the students in rural medicine and receive opportunities to learn about the community in which they serve. Additionally, the grant will work with Wyoming County high schools to connect interested juniors and seniors to area colleges and universities that offering healthcare career programs. The students performing their clinical rotations in Wyoming County would reside at the William F. Thiel Hospitality House, which is located directly behind the hospital and is owned and operated by R-AHEC.

R-AHEC’s Chief Executive Officer, Catherine P. Huff said, “R-AHEC is very grateful for the continued support of the William F. Thiel Trust. This project addresses a key funding priority for the foundation of enhancing healthcare infrastructure and personnel in Wyoming County. There is a need to increase healthcare professionals as well as to maintain, enhance, and support existing professionals in the county.”

In 2018, the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) increased the Wyoming County Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designation score for Primary Care from 9 to 15. Scores range from 1 to 26, the higher the score, the greater the priority. R-AHEC staff have been working with Wyoming County Community Hospital Systems (WCCHS) and academic providers to determine an effective approach for addressing the workforce shortage.

R-AHEC owns and operates the William F. Thiel Hospitality House located behind the Wyoming County Community Hospital. The House was originally constructed and opened for guests in 2005 and underwent a significant renovation and repairs to the house in 2018. The House primarily provides individuals or families facing a health care crisis and on-call or visiting medical professionals (short and long term stays). In addition, half the house is committed for use by health professions and medical

students performing clinical rural rotations in Wyoming County with the ultimate goal that they will consider serving a medically underserved area/population upon graduation. Since it's opening, more than 1,743 people have stayed at the Hospitality House. That number includes 315 physicians, 769 health professional students, 434 community members, and 169 family members facing a health care crisis locally.

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*R-AHEC was formed in 1999 as a non-profit organization, serving a 12-county region of Western New York. Its mission is "to improve health and healthcare through education." R-AHEC focuses on Health Workforce Development; Preceptor Development/Student Housing; Pipeline Programming; and Rural Healthcare Technology Infrastructure Development. In addition, R-AHEC operates the Western NY Rural Broadband Healthcare Network (RBHN), providing subsidies to non-profit healthcare facilities through a point to point fiber optic network. For more information, visit R-AHEC's website at [www.r-ahec.org](http://www.r-ahec.org) or the RBHN at [www.wnyrbhn.org](http://www.wnyrbhn.org).*

*Wyoming County Community Hospital (WCCH) is a healthcare provider in Wyoming County with a workforce of over 500 employees. They are a County owned facility which offers acute care, long term care, ambulatory surgery, rehabilitation, and inpatient and outpatient behavioral health. For more information, visit [www.wcchs.net](http://www.wcchs.net).*

*Celebrating its centennial year in 2019, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo was established in 1919 to enhance and encourage long-term philanthropy in the Western New York community. A 501 (c)(3) organization, the Community Foundation's mission is: Connecting people, ideas and resources to improve lives in Western New York. For 100 years the Community Foundation has made the most of the generosity of individuals, families, foundations and organizations who entrust charitable assets to the Community Foundation's care. Learn more at [www.cfqb.org](http://www.cfqb.org).*