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NEW SEEDLINGS, NEW YEAR, NEW HOPE

ADOPTION EVENT INSPIRES SUPPORT FOR COASTAL RESILIENCE RESEARCH

by [Jim Hanchett](#) | November 24, 2025*Above: President Kelly (right) accepts a seedling for adoption**Read time: about 1 min*

The region's ecosystem will be the big beneficiary of an unusual adoption event held on campus.

Members of the CNU community, including President William G. Kelly, "adopted" native Atlantic white cedar seedlings. Each participant received a certificate of adoption as they learned about the [Fear to Hope](#) public science project that contributes to coastal resilience research.

"With every adoption, students, faculty and staff help transform concern into knowledge, and knowledge into hope," said Dr. Linda Manning, director of the [Center for Sustainability in Education](#). "Together, we are advancing research, raising awareness, and nurturing a more resilient future for our coastal communities—from fear to hope, one seedling at a time."

Due to climate change, Atlantic white cedar forests in coastal Virginia are becoming ghost forests as brackish water encroaches on the wetlands in which they grow. Monitoring each seedling as it grows will provide clues to understand the extent of the problem and potential solutions.

The tiny, fragile plantings in pint size cups will reach for the sky in the Forbes Hall growth chamber, on the brick walkway outside McMurrin Hall, and in high school classrooms and learning environments from Maine to Texas.

As the seedlings grow, researchers gather valuable data that informs coastal, salt marsh, and wetland restoration.

Fear to Hope is unique because those researchers are often high school students from rural and urban communities and they're mentored by CNU undergraduates under the guidance of CNU faculty including [Dr. Manning](#), an associate professor of communication, and [Dr. Rob Atkinson](#), a professor of biology.

As he adopted his seedling, President Kelly told the gathering that the project is an example of the University's leadership as well as its commitment to "Building a Foundation to Thrive." That is one of the priorities in the University's [Strategic Compass](#), a plan that emphasizes the importance of sustainability.
