



IOWA WEST FOUNDATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 27, 2009

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IOWA WEST FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES NEW COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAM

(Council Bluffs, IA, March 27, 2009) The Iowa West Foundation, a private foundation headquartered in Council Bluffs, Iowa, has announced a six-year commitment of \$4.4 million for a new college access program in the community.

The program will begin this summer with the identification of 25 students entering ninth grade, who might not otherwise go to college, and more students will be identified in following years. Once fully implemented, there will be 100 students over a four year span from the Council Bluffs Community School District in the program. With the completion of the program at the conclusion of their senior year from high school, the students will receive a \$1,000 completion scholarship to attend college. They will also be given preference in a new competitive scholarship program with other higher needs students in the district, who plan to go to college. This program, called Iowa West Opportunity Scholarships, will include 25 scholarships funded annually by Iowa West at \$4,000. For example, if a student would complete four years of college, the student would receive the funding each year resulting in a scholarship of \$16,000 or \$8,000 for two years.

The foundation's initiative is based on three sets of findings:

- An independent community needs assessment for Pottawattamie County, which identified increasing educational attainment in Council Bluffs - by completing high school and entering college - as the top priority in Council Bluffs;

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- An outside evaluation of Iowa West’s current scholarship programs, which revealed that - while the traditional college scholarship program for southwest Iowa and southeast Nebraska was a positive award for high-achieving students already planning to attend college - it was not changing the trajectory of many at-risk students to get them onto college;
- Recommendations from Education First Consulting that were developed from best practices research and a national benchmarking report of successful college access programs across the country.

Currently, a similar program, which is called the College Bound Club, is operating at Council Bluffs Thomas Jefferson High School, and it is coordinated by the AIM Institute of Omaha, Nebraska. Such AIM programs have proved successful with near 100% graduation rates from high school and 95% college- going rates. The Iowa West Foundation initiative will help expand the College Bound Club, which currently serves 50 students over a four year period, and add a college access program at Council Bluffs Abraham Lincoln High School.

“The Foundation has made educational attainment an over-arching goal,” said Todd Graham, President & CEO of the Iowa West Foundation, “and starting early to help more students get on a track for college will make a big difference.”

Program components include:

- After school academic tutoring;
- College placement test preparation;
- Assistance with financial aid/scholarship applications;
- Academic improvement planning;
- Parent involvement activities;
- Summer programs on college campuses;
- Stipends for students who may miss part-time work.

“Programs such as these have shown to especially make a positive impact on higher needs youth who aspire to be the first member of their family to go to college,” said Melissa Heaton of Education First Consulting, which is headquartered in Seattle (WA) and has worked with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private foundations to improve educational outcomes for students.

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The AIM Institute will be the local partner to implement the college access program at the Council Bluffs schools. AIM's program in Nebraska at Papillion-La Vista High School is showing good results. The new Iowa West Opportunity Scholarships will be administered by the Iowa College Foundation in Des Moines, Iowa. Since its founding in 1952, the Iowa College Foundation has administered dozens of scholarship programs throughout Iowa.

Funding for Iowa West Foundation grants and initiatives comes from investment earnings and the Iowa West Racing Association (IWRA), which receives contracted fees from casino operators – Ameristar and Harrah's. The IWRA distributes funds to the Iowa West Foundation, which is an independent private community-based foundation.

For more information on the foundation visit its website at www.iowawestfoundation.org.

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