

# QUESTA

FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION

## For Immediate Release

### Contact:

Christina K. Smith  
Executive Director  
Questa Foundation for Education  
3468 Stellhorn Road  
Fort Wayne, IN 46815  
260.407.6494  
cksmith@questafoundation.org

## Questa Foundation's Regional Expansion Boosts College Attainment and Talent Retention

March 16, 2011, Fort Wayne, Indiana – Questa Foundation for Education formally announced today that it will expand its innovative Questa Scholars Program to DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko and Whitley counties this year.

The regional expansion of the Questa Scholars Program results from new partnerships between Questa Foundation and several local community foundations in northeast Indiana that involve commitments of over \$600,000 in new funding available for college-bound students this year from DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko and Whitley counties.

Questa Foundation also announced its commitment to a *Northeast Indiana College Attainment and Talent Retention Initiative* that seeks to increase college attainment rates from the current 11-county average of 26.5% to 60% by 2025 for young adults 22-26 years of age. Questa Foundation intends to expand the Questa Scholars Program to all eleven counties of northeast Indiana by 2013 as local partnerships and additional resources become available.

In addition to significantly boosting college degree attainment rates in the region, the Questa Scholars Program focuses on talent retention – incentivizing these graduates through college debt forgiveness to remain in, or return to, northeast Indiana after college to become contributing members of our region's workforce.

The Questa Scholars Program – the nation's only college debt forgiveness program of its kind – offers qualified students forgiveness of up to 50 percent of their Questa Scholars loan if they graduate from college with a 2.75 GPA and choose to live and work in northeast Indiana for at least five years after graduation. Questa Scholars may borrow \$20,000 over four years for college.

High school graduates from Allen County will continue to benefit from the Questa Scholars Program as they have done since 2007 when the program was launched. Currently, 210 Allen County students benefit from the Questa Scholars Program. Questa Foundation has committed \$4 million to the Questa Scholars Program from 2007 – 2011.

Christina K. Smith, Questa Foundation's executive director, was joined by September McConnell, executive director of Whitley County Community Foundation, Suzanne Light, executive director of Kosciusko County Community Foundation, Wendy Oberlin, executive director of DeKalb County

Community Foundation and Troy Irick, foundation administrator of the Huntington University Foundation, for today's announcements. Each of these foundations has made a financial commitment to offer the Questa Scholars Program to students in their respective counties. Questa Foundation has secured matching grant funds to match dollar for dollar funding provided by partnering foundations in DeKalb, Huntington and Whitley counties. Additional matching grant funds are sought to assist with program expansion to other counties.

Smith commented, "Today's announcement is really targeted to our region's young people – northeast Indiana's emerging workforce. We say to you 'Good is no longer good enough. We are no longer content to remain 46 out of 50 states in college attainment rates. We are no longer content to have only a quarter of our population achieve the dream and promise of a college degree. We are no longer willing to see our region be a net exporter of talent and defined by declining per capita income and a brain drain. And, we are no longer willing to see graduates from our region leave college with the 13<sup>th</sup> highest debt load in the nation.'"

"Rather, we stand together today as leaders from across our region to say to you 'We are not only raising the bar of expectation of you, but we are committed to opening wide the door of opportunity for you.'"

Smith said that Questa Foundation, as part of its strategic plan and *Northeast Indiana College Attainment and Talent Retention Initiative*, will work in collaboration with other regional partners to invest \$25 million from 2010-2025 to significantly increase college attainment rates through its Questa Scholars Program and incentivize these graduates to live and work in northeast Indiana after college.

Maclyn Parker, president of Olive B. Cole Foundation, announced funding to support the expansion of the Questa Scholars Program in DeKalb County. Questa Scholars from DeKalb County also will be recognized as Cole Scholars and thereby are eligible for Questa Foundation's debt forgiveness program and to apply for Cole Foundation's loan repayment program.

Ben Eisbart, vice president of human resources for Steel Dynamics, Inc., announced Steel Dynamics Foundation's commitment of a \$229,000 grant to Questa Foundation to provide matching grant funds for local community foundations along with program support funding to help underwrite Questa Foundation's regional program expansion.

In announcing the Steel Dynamics Foundation's grant, Eisbart said, "The idea of linking college financial assistance to talent retention is an important and impressive innovation Questa Foundation brings to our region. Talent development and retention, including increased college degree attainment, are critical to northeast Indiana's future economic growth and our region's capacity to compete successfully in a high-tech, 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. We applaud the idea of offering incentives that reward students for doing well in college *and* contributing to our region's workforce after graduation."

The announcements were made today, March 16, at a news conference sponsored by Questa Foundation in the Paul Seitz Conference Center in Andorfer Commons on the campus of Indiana Tech.

**About Questa Foundation for Education:** Questa Foundation for Education assists young people with financial need to attain a college education, graduate with less debt and become contributing members of northeast Indiana's workforce. The Questa Scholars Program is the nation's only college loan forgiveness program tied to regional talent retention. In 2010, Questa Foundation adopted a strategic goal to increase college attainment rates in northeast Indiana from 26.5% to 60% of 22-26 year olds by 2025. For more information, visit [www.questafoundation.org](http://www.questafoundation.org).

###