

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Information:

Christina K. Smith
Executive Director
Questa Foundation for Education
3468 Stellhorn Road
Fort Wayne, IN 46815
(260) 407-6494 [office] (260) 515-3822 [cell]
cksmith@questafoundation.org
www.questafoundation.org

Questa Foundation – WorkOne Northeast Partnership Offers \$1 Million Workforce Investment to Support College Degrees, High Tech Skills

Thursday, May 5, 2011, Fort Wayne, Indiana – Questa Foundation for Education and WorkOne Northeast announced a new partnership that brings with it a major investment of up to \$1 million this summer to help transitioning workers pursue college degrees in high demand fields related to the advanced manufacturing, defense and aerospace industries critical to northeast Indiana’s economy.

Questa Foundation for Education also announced the expansion of its pioneering Questa Scholars Program this year to provide financial assistance to transitioning workers in northeast Indiana who seek to increase their job skills and marketability by securing an associate or baccalaureate degree in STEM-based training programs or disciplines of study with direct relevance to the advanced manufacturing, defense and aerospace industries.

Transitioning workers are broadly defined as any person in the current or emerging workforce who seeks a degree to attain or expand job skills. Transitioning workers include adult learners, dislocated workers, those who are currently under employed, incumbent workers wishing to enhance their job skills or acquire new ones through formal training and traditional college-aged students who seek a degree to acquire skills essential for our region’s workforce and economic development.

The new program, named the *Questa Scholars Program for Transitioning Workers*, provides an attractive mix of WorkOne grants and Questa Foundation loans, which include the benefit of up to 50% debt forgiveness if the degree candidate graduates with a 2.75 or higher cumulative GPA and elects to live and work in one of the eleven counties of northeast Indiana after college.

In making today’s announcement, Christina K. Smith, executive director of Questa Foundation, said “We know that talent development and talent retention are critical to northeast Indiana’s future economic growth and our region’s capacity to compete successfully in a high-tech, 21st century global economy. The Questa Foundation – WorkOne partnership holds great promise for transformational impact as we begin to redefine the current educational and economic landscape in northeast Indiana.”

“Raising the educational attainment level of all citizens is the single most important step we can take to reverse a 15-year decline in per capita income, our region’s brain drain and a drop in overall employment. To be sure, this ambitious goal will not be achieved through the efforts of any one organization and that is why we are so grateful for the workforce development leadership and partnership offered to us by WorkOne Northeast,” commented Smith.

Kathleen Randolph, president and CEO of the Northeast Indiana Workforce Board, joined Smith to announce the partnership and WorkOne Northeast’s investment in the *Questa Scholars Program for Transitioning Workers*.

“A critical regional imperative we face in northeast Indiana is to continually invest in the cultivation of a well-trained, evolving workforce that possesses high tech skills in sectors vital to our economic growth, especially in the areas of advanced manufacturing, engineering, computers and technology,” Randolph said.

“Questa Foundation’s college assistance program offers a great vehicle to increase college degree attainment and invest in workforce development and training in these important skill clusters. We are excited about our partnership and the opportunity it provides both organizations to serve a broader segment of the workforce critical to northeast Indiana’s future economic growth,” stated Randolph.

The *Questa Scholars Program for Transitioning Workers* will provide up to \$20,000 in grants and loans over four years for full-time students pursuing a baccalaureate degree and up to \$10,000 in grants and loans over two years for full-time students pursuing an associate degree in eligible fields of study. Questa Scholars selected for participation in the program will benefit from \$6,000 in WorkOne grants and either \$14,000 or \$4,000 respectively in Questa Foundation loans depending on enrollment in a four or two-year degree program.

Eligible programs of study are engineering, advanced manufacturing, computer science, informatics and certain technology programs, including information technology, industrial technology, engineering technology and biotechnology.

To apply, candidates must have a high school diploma or GED, be a resident of Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko or Whitley County and demonstrate financial need and academic merit.

Applicants also must enroll full-time in an eligible associate or baccalaureate degree program at one of nine northeast Indiana colleges that partner with Questa Foundation. These schools include Grace College, Huntington University, Indiana Tech, Indiana Wesleyan University, IPFW, Ivy Tech Community College Northeast, Manchester College, Trine University or University of Saint Francis. Each of these universities has committed to pay back an additional 25% of a Questa Scholars loan upon graduation, allowing Questa Scholars to benefit from a total of 75% debt forgiveness and loan repayment assistance.

The announcement of the *Questa Scholars Program for Transitioning Workers* and new partnership with WorkOne Northeast are vital components of Questa Foundation’s more comprehensive *Northeast Indiana College Attainment and Talent Retention Initiative* announced in March. This initiative is a long-term commitment of Questa Foundation’s resources and efforts to increase college attainment rates in northeast Indiana from the current 11-county average of 26.5% to 60% of young adults 22-26 years of age by 2025.

As part of this strategic initiative, Questa Foundation intends to expand the Questa Scholars Program to all 11 counties of northeast Indiana by 2013 as local partnerships and additional resources become available and, through collaborations like that with WorkOne, to invest \$25 million to significantly increase regional college attainment rates.

The announcement was made today at WorkOne Northeast’s corporate headquarters in the Arts United Auer Center (formerly the Fourth Wave Building) in downtown Fort Wayne.

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.

About WorkOne Northeast: WorkOne is a partner agency of the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. WorkOne Northeast is the heart of Indiana’s workforce development system in northeast Indiana. WorkOne helps people find a new or better job, choose a career, find a good employee, access training, or get the information needed to succeed in today’s ever-evolving workplace. For more information, visit www.workonenortheast.org.