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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Driving Force Behind the Formation of
Starke County Economic Development Foundation Dies**

Word has been received of the death of Robert E. Hamilton in Colorado Springs, Colorado on February 25, 2011 at the age of 83. Hamilton was the driving force behind the formation of the Starke County Economic Development Foundation (SCEDF) in 1985. SCEDF celebrated its 25th Anniversary in December of 2010 and at that time, announced the creation of the "Robert E. Hamilton Award," to be given to a person who had contributed greatly to economic development in Starke County, Indiana. Services for Hamilton will be held on March 2, 2011 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, with interment to take place at a later date at Ft. Logan National Cemetery in Denver, Colorado.

Hamilton came to Starke County from the State of Nebraska in the early 1980's to serve as President of what was then known as Farmers Bank & Trust (now KeyBank.) Shortly after arriving, Hamilton began to see the need for a County-wide effort to increase the number of job opportunities and the need to stabilize the tax base. That began a lengthy period of planning leading to the formation of SCEDF using a tax credit made available in Indiana along with fund raising from individuals and businesses in the County. The first project of the new group was the purchase of an old foundry building that had stood vacant for about 15 years, its rehabilitation, and the establishment of an incubator for new business starts in that building.

Almost immediately, a single company occupied the entire building, eventually buying it and making several additions. That building is still being used today.

In a telephone interview in November of 2010, Hamilton spoke of why he was involved in the effort to create an economic development organization. He said that he had told his Bank Board of Directors, that “you can’t make loans and expect them to be paid back without jobs.” He also said that while this organizing effort was going on, he spent more time in that endeavor than he did running the bank, something that other early leaders attested to as well. Hamilton’s final words in that interview continue to echo in the ears of all of Starke County when he said, “What would it be like if we hadn’t made the effort to attract industries? Keep up the good work. Have the strength and courage of your convictions and a willingness to be involved. Keep trying to get the industrial base. Wish everyone well and don’t get fat with past successes. It is a never-ending process; a never-ending effort. Companies come and go and need to be constantly replenished. We can keep them coming if we don’t abandon hope for the future.”

Robert E. Hamilton was truly a visionary who proved to be the right man at the right time for Starke County. Through his efforts, all residents of the County have been enriched, and his lasting legacy to Starke County is the many industries who over the years have located and expanded in the County, thereby creating jobs and tax base that otherwise might not have ever existed.

SCEDF is a not-for-profit Local Economic Development Organization (LEDO) providing economic development opportunities on behalf of Starke County, Indiana, the City of Knox, and the Towns of North Judson, and Hamlet through the development of industrial parks, rail spurs, greenfield sites, shovel-ready sites, infrastructure, and workforce development. For more information regarding SCEDF, visit www.scedf.biz.

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