



Contact:

Starke County Economic Development Foundation

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EMBARGOED FOR THURSDAY, AUGUST 23, 2012, AT 5:00 A.M. CDT:

STARKE COUNTY IMPLEMENTS WELDING PROGRAM

Starke County, Indiana – Recognizing that the best way for Starke County residents to improve their standard of living is to increase job skills, the Starke County Economic Development Foundation (SCEDF) and the Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning (SCILL) jointly announced today the start of a new welding program for high school students within the North Central Area Vocational Cooperative (NCAVC). NCAVC includes the three school corporations housed in Starke County, as well as schools in Marshall, St. Joseph, and Fulton Counties. Jerry Gurrado, Director of SCILL said that “we have examined how we might best help the industry that we already have in Starke County that have told us how hard it is to hire qualified welders, as well as help high school students obtain work-ready skills, and it became obvious that welding was the right program for us.” This program has been created in order to fill a vital need in the job market.

The high school program began on August 14, with a full class of twelve students, eight of whom attend Starke County high schools. The welding lab and classroom is located in the Knox Middle School, in a former wood shop no longer being used. With the assistance and permission from the Knox School Board, that area of the school was made available to SCILL. SCILL replaced the existing dust control system with a fume control system. Electrical work brought the area up to the welding needs and ArcelorMittal provided materials and labor to build twelve work stations that have been installed. Sabre LLC, another Starke County employer that hires welders, donated the cleaning and painting of those stations. NCAVC has provided funding to purchase the equipment needed to operate the welding lab through the use of Perkins Funds and has been instrumental in helping qualify Starke County resident Andrew Odle as the instructor for this program. Odle, an

employee at ArcelorMittal, is a Certified Welding Inspector (CWI), has taught welding for years, and is a certified welder himself, holding many distinctions and certifications.

The Starke County Community Foundation, Kankakee Valley REMC, and Northern Indiana Public Service Company have provided seed money and Starke County has committed CEDIT Economic Development Funds to the project. Several local and area industries have pledged money and materials needed for the welding lab, including Sabre, LLC, Kruz, Inc., Galbreath, Inc., and Tefft Bridge & Iron, LLC. SCEDF Executive Director Charles W. Weaver noted that “We are very pleased with the reception this program has already received locally and we look forward to expanding this program in the future as word gets out about the skills being taught and the ability to gain employment in the area at a good wage.”

This program will also be benefitted by Vincennes University, which will provide their curriculum, help fund various aspects of the program, and provide an opportunity for students to obtain dual credit for both a high school diploma as well as college credits. Each student will also have an opportunity to obtain an American Welding Society (AWS) certification as a part of the program, and the curriculum is based on AWS standards. Students will receive instruction in several types of welding as well as blueprint reading, welding symbols, and other related areas.

SCILL was created by SCEDF, in 1996 in order to help train the existing workforce as well as adults and students of all ages. In this welding endeavor, SCILL and Gurrado have been greatly aided by the support and assistance of a team composed of local educational leaders AJ Gappa, Knox Community Schools; and Lynn Johnson, North Judson-San Pierre School Corporation; SCEDF Board Member and former General Manager of the MPI facility in Knox, Alex Weisheit; Jerry Hollenbaugh, Executive Director of the NCAVC; and Adam Collins of Kruz, Inc., a Starke County industry that hires welders. That team was assembled by SCEDF President Bill Sonnemaker and charged with seeing what workforce opportunities existed and what programs could be implemented to help the unemployment situation in the County, as well as provide assistance to industry.

ABOUT STARKE COUNTY INITIATIVE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

SCILL (Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning) was created in 1996 to assure employers that a qualified workforce would be available in Starke County. SCILL, working in conjunction with area employers, provides a customized, innovative training program that meets the needs of area employers and employees and also offers high quality vocational educational programs in automotive technology and welding. For more details regarding Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning, visit www.scill.biz.

ABOUT STARKE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

The Starke County Economic Development Foundation 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 Town of Hamlet through the

development of industrial parks, rail spurs, greenfield sites, shovel-ready sites, infrastructure, and workforce development. For more information regarding Starke County Economic Development Foundation, visit www.scedf.biz.

ABOUT NORTH CENTRAL AREA VOCATIONAL COOPERATIVE

The North Central Area Vocational Cooperative coordinates efforts with community businesses and industries, as well as colleges, to create vocational training opportunities for ten area high schools in a three-county area. For more information regarding North Central Area Vocational Cooperative, visit www.ncavc.org.

ABOUT VINCENNES UNIVERSITY

Vincennes University, Indiana's first college, is the State's premier transfer institution and leader of innovative career programming. The VU community ensures educational access, delivers proven associate and baccalaureate programs, and offers cultural opportunities and community services in a diverse, student-centered, collegiate environment. For more information regarding Vincennes University, visit www.vinu.edu.

ABOUT SCEDF

The Starke County Economic Development Foundation 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 Starke County Economic Development Foundation, visit www.scedf.biz.

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