



# A Community Foundation at the Center of Community Advancement

**As a region**, southeast Indiana shares the educational challenges of the rest of the state and then some. The good news: Honda Motor Co. and Cummins Inc. announced in 2007 plans for new manufacturing plants in the region. This means 6,500 additional employees in advanced manufacturing to fill positions at those plants and the new needs of other nearby advanced manufacturing companies.

The not-so-good news: Although approximately 3,000 students graduate from high schools in the area each year, about 30 percent of them do not pursue higher education. At 15.5 percent, southeast Indiana's percentage of college graduates in the adult population is lower than the state average of 21 percent.

Because of its long history of leading community progress and the strength of its board and staff, the Heritage Fund of Bartholomew County in Columbus, Ind.,

was invited by Lilly Endowment to develop a plan to help the residents of its community take full advantage of the Honda and Cummins opportunities and any others that might be compelling. Heritage Fund decided to collaborate in this endeavor with the Community Education Coalition (CEC), a Columbus-based nonprofit organization with a decade of experience in working with CEC and other educational institutions in the area.

The result is EcO<sub>15</sub>—Economic Opportunities 2015—for which the Endowment awarded two grants totaling \$38 million in 2007.

The ambitious initiative unites 10 counties in southeast Indiana (Bartholomew, Dearborn, Decatur, Franklin, Jackson, Jefferson, Jennings, Ohio, Ripley and Switzerland), building on work initially begun by the Heritage Fund with support from the Endowment's 2000 Community Alliances to Promote Education (CAPE)

initiative. CAPE encouraged and supported community foundations' efforts to mobilize their communities to identify and address their most compelling educational challenges. "Ultimately our goal is to enable each person

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to move up at least one level in terms of education, training or job placement," says Sherry Stark, president and CEO of the Heritage Fund.

Education—with an emphasis on human potential—is at the heart of the effort, according to John Burnett, EcO<sub>15</sub> project chair and president of the Irwin Financial Association.

EcO<sub>15</sub> will include limited bricks-and-mortar projects such as construction of an advanced manufacturing education center and a clinical health care simulation lab to provide education facilities. Its most important task will be to serve as an organizational framework for the educational effort. Through it, funds will be provided to hire an EcO<sub>15</sub> coordinator in each of the 10 counties to work with private industry and educational institutions to establish educational pathways for students from middle school through high school, two or four years of college and even graduate school, according to Burnett.

Besides advanced manufacturing, EcO<sub>15</sub> will focus on developing the region's workforce in health care services, hospitality and tourism.

"Those fields currently employ about half the region's workforce and are poised for even further growth—if we can find enough skilled workers to meet the demand of employers," says Joe Loughrey, Cummins' president and chief operating officer.

Loughrey is especially pleased that EcO<sub>15</sub> will help implement the *Dream It. Do It.* program in southeast Indiana and that these efforts will complement the *Dream It. Do It.* efforts of Conexus in Indiana. "While our products and services may be very different, our manufacturers, health care providers and hospitality-based organizations share one fundamental need," Loughrey says. "We all need talented, motivated employees to succeed in an increasingly complex and competitive market."

## SPURRING SELF-DETERMINATION

Long-term solutions don't come from an open checkbook but from building stronger communities from within, according to the Heritage Fund's Stark. Like the life sciences initiatives, the success of EcO<sub>15</sub> depends on tearing down Indiana's obsolete silos and finding new ways for communities to work.

"The Heritage Fund believes that one of its key roles as a community foundation is to be at the vanguard of community advancement," Stark says. "Such advancement can't happen without strong leadership from the business sector. This is amply demonstrated by EcO<sub>15</sub>, which is a dream come true. It's an opportunity to move further, faster and extend an invitation for everyone to come to the table. Our success will breed more success." ↻

**OPPOSITE** EcO<sub>15</sub> leaders discuss issues of educational attainment levels and workforce development that the \$38 million initiative will address in southeastern Indiana. They are (left to right) John Burnett, project EcO<sub>15</sub> chair; Sherry Stark, president of the Heritage Fund of Bartholomew County, and Joe Loughrey, president of Cummins in Columbus, Ind.

**RIGHT** (above) Bob Sexton, manufacturing systems teacher at Seymour (Ind.) High School in Jackson County, works with student Gunnar Hobson. The school has added areas of study that relate to the area's local industries. (below) Marsha Terry, a nursing student at Ivy Tech in Columbus, practices with a "wired" dummy at the Columbus Learning Center, one of the hubs of the EcO<sub>15</sub> initiative.

