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Big boost for Academy

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Alcoa's \$61,000 grant advances career education

The Stateline Career and Technical Education Academy — which has been in the works for two years and is to debut this fall — accepted its first grant Monday.

The Alcoa Foundation awarded the seven-district consortium with a \$61,000 check in the Hendricks Center for Automotive Technology Studies at the Eclipse Center, the site of one of the academy's first two career paths.



Stateline Career and Technical Education Academy organizer Jim Fisher on Monday accepts a \$61,000 check from Phil Berg, of Alcoa Wheels. The Alcoa Foundation is the first group to award the seven-district consortium with a substantial grant. Staff photo by Ashley Rhodebeck

"We are very pleased to accept the generous financial support given by Alcoa," said Pam Kiefert, Clinton Community School District superintendent and representative for SCTEA's Joint Operating Board. "Even in these difficult times, Alcoa has remained steadfast in its commitment to the future of our young people and our communities. For that we are truly grateful."

The Alcoa Foundation is separate from Beloit's soon-to-be closed Alcoa plant. It has invested more than \$490 million since 1952 to address the needs of Alcoa communities worldwide.

Phil Berg, manager of human resources for Alcoa Wheels in Beloit, presented the check. He said the grant was made possible because SCTEA's focus aligned with Alcoa's desire of providing long-time employment to area high school graduates in a technical career path.

The donation also fell in line with Alcoa's commitment to partnering with the community, he said.

"We need more of that to make this truly sustainable," Berg said.

SCTEA organizers hope to raise a total of \$1.5 million in addition to material donations, said Jim Fisher, the retired businessman who spearheaded the academy.

Because people often wait to financially support a new project until someone else makes the first move, Fisher said he is optimistic now that Alcoa has provided funding.

"Other grants will be easier to come by now that a major corporation has led the way," he said.

The money is intended for books, support materials, curriculum writing, infrastructure and, among other things, transportation, Fisher said. The Joint Operating Board — a group composed of each

participating district's superintendent and Board of Education representative — will decide how to spend it.

The more than 10,000 students in the Beloit, Beloit Turner, Clinton, Evansville, Janesville, Parkview and South Beloit districts will have a chance through SCTEA to prepare for a career. The first career paths the academy will offer are automotive technology and health care. Organizers plan to introduce four more in the 2010-11 year.

The idea for SCTEA formed about two years ago. The key players were Fisher, the late entrepreneur Ken Hendricks and Beloit Superintendent Lowell Holtz, who on Monday recalled talking with Hendricks about the idea.

"We both got really excited about it," he said. "The shame is he's not right here."

Designed to save districts money by combining resources, the consortium was needed.

"Was it doable? That was questionable," Fisher said. "This was so foreign to anything we had done in the education system."

Organizers pitched the idea to Stateline Area school districts last summer; seven committed to the project.

The months before the 2009-10 academic year begins will be spent finalizing details such as student schedules and transportation.

"I think it's really going to take off in our area," Holtz said.

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