



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 16, 2010

Contact: James Douglass, Director of Communications, Riverland Community College: (507) 433-0611, (507) 440-5112 cell phone, james.douglass@riverland.edu

Hormel Foundation funds Riverland's 'Cycles of Success'

The Hormel Foundation will fund Riverland Community College's new *Cycles of Success* scholarship program at \$200,000 annually for five years.

Riverland created *Cycles of Success* to inspire students at Austin and Pacelli High Schools to graduate and earn a college education locally and thus provide employers with a skilled workforce in high-wage, high-demand occupations.

"*Cycles of Success* is a logical extension of The Hormel Foundation's long-term commitment to enhancing education in Austin," said Dick Knowlton, chair of The Hormel Foundation's board of directors. "This community-based initiative is another point of difference that distinguishes Austin from other communities. The Foundation is especially interested in investing in needy students willing to work hard and rise above their circumstances."

Students who attend four years and graduate from Austin and Pacelli High Schools will be eligible to use the scholarships funded through *Cycles of Success* for postsecondary education at Riverland Community College. The program's goals are designed to empower students with financial barriers to overcome so they will enroll at Riverland, complete their college education, and remain in the community as skilled members of the workforce. While scholarship recipients are also free to pursue additional education after they complete their program of study at Riverland, *Cycles of Success* funds for Riverland only.

Cycles of Success focuses on graduating high school students who typically could not pursue postsecondary education because of financial barriers. The Hormel Foundation funds will flow to the Austin Public Schools as the fiscal agent. The Austin Public Schools will allocate the funds to the Riverland Community College Foundation, which will award student scholarships to eligible students.

"One hundred percent of The Hormel Foundation funding will go to students as scholarship awards," said Dr. Terry Leas, college president. "Riverland will receive the scholarship funds in the form of tuition revenues."

Leas said the program focuses primarily on assisting "traditionally underrepresented students" who fall within the middle fifty percent of their class ranking because they will not have other resources available to them. The Minnesota State College and University System defines "underrepresented students" as underserved students (African Americans/Black, Asian, Hispanic, American Indian and multiracial) plus first-generation students and low-income students. (In specific instances, other groups of students may be considered underrepresented. For example, in a traditionally female discipline like nursing, males may be considered underrepresented.)

Riverland will focus on these students because of some startling realities facing our region. According to Annie Levenson-Falk, policy coordinator for the Citizens League, while Minnesota's need for skilled workers is increasing, the number of Minnesotans prepared to fill those jobs is decreasing:

- a. Between 2002 and 2010, the number of jobs requiring some higher education and providing a living wage increased 21 percent.
- b. The number of college graduates leaving the workforce will increase as members of the baby boom generation begin to retire; by 2020, Minnesota will have more retirees than schoolchildren for the first time in history.
- c. During the same period, the number of high school graduates will decline by 10.3 percent, and the number of college graduates will decline by 12 percent.

Minnesota faces the daunting challenge of a 20-percent decline in overall high school students between 2005 and 2015 due to declining rural populations. If current trends continue, Minnesota will soon have too few qualified workers to fill the jobs available. In order to meet coming workforce demands, more students must graduate from high school, complete higher education, and be prepared to participate in the workforce. *Cycles of Success* addresses these critical workforce issues locally in partnership with Austin K-12 systems in a comprehensive, integrated manner that is uncommon in rural America.

"An overarching assumption of this program is that educating young people is a prudent investment in the workforce, economic, and community development of the Austin area," Leas said.

Cycles of Success not only assists underrepresented students by removing the financial barriers but also provides enhanced support services to improve academic success at high school and college levels. Riverland will extend outreach to Austin and Pacelli High School students to raise expectations and preparation. According to Leas, as the project evolves, project results will help to inform long-term public policy decisions regarding college accessibility, student success, and workforce development.

"*Cycles of Success* uses scarce resources efficiently," Knowlton said. "By first seeking state and federal financial aid and scholarships for students, college officials can spread The Hormel Foundation's funding further among more deserving recipients."

"The Hormel Foundation's support of *Cycles of Success* is an extraordinarily generous strategy for filling funding gaps," said Leas. "It shows the board members' support for improving access to postsecondary education for Austin's high school students. This support can only enhance the efforts to improve high school graduation rates, students' readiness for college-level courses, and college students' retention and success rates."

Riverland Community College, a member of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, is a regional comprehensive community college inspiring learning for living through a personalized educational environment. Approximately 4,000 students are served annually through a wide range of credit-based educational opportunities. An additional 5,600 students are annually served in non-credit courses. Facilities are located in Albert Lea, Austin, and Owatonna, Minn. Riverland may be found on the Internet at www.riverland.edu.

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system comprises 32 state universities and community and technical colleges serving the higher education needs of Minnesota. The system serves about 250,000 students per year in credit-based courses and an additional 140,000 students in non-credit courses.

#

Riverland Community College is an Equal Opportunity employer and educator. This document can be made available in alternative formats upon request.