

RAMS boosts rural schools

By LINDSEY MAAS

MANY of today's most sought-after careers require a solid understanding of mathematics, science and technology. However, according to the National Alliance of State Science and Mathematics Coalitions, many students aren't adequately prepared to enter these fields.

As a result, a number of school districts in Iowa have begun implementing a science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, curriculum. One of these districts is the Oelwein Community School District, which in fall 2008 opened the Regional Academy of Math and Science, or RAMS, in partnership with Northeast Iowa Community College.

The Regional Academy of Math and Science provides rigorous and relevant math, science and technology coursework to high school and college students, as well as teachers and community members interested in these subject areas.

"Having a community col-

Program meets needs of community

OFFICIALS with the Regional Academy of Math and Science envision the program meeting several needs in Oelwein and the surrounding northeast Iowa area. These include:

- Increase the number of students interested in math and science at an earlier age. The academy will engage young learners and get them excited about future possibilities.

- Strengthen, not supplement, coursework offered in Iowa's rural schools. The academy will offer area high school students advanced coursework that high schools no longer have the resources in staff, lab space and finances to offer.

- Provide advanced degree coursework for teachers of math and science in partnership with Iowa Regents universities to improve the quality and content of science classes for future students.

- Train community members with skills needed by area business and industry.

■ For more information about RAMS, visit www.go2rams.org.

Key Points

- Regional Academy of Math and Science opened in 2008.
- USDA Rural Development awarded \$500,000 to project.
- In its first year RAMS averaged 200 students per semester.

lege here benefits our community and surrounding area in many ways," says Jim Patera, Oelwein school district superintendent.

"Not only is it economic development for the area, but it offers opportunities to a lot of kids that they wouldn't otherwise have," he adds.

Rural Development helps

USDA's Rural Development agency awarded the Greater Oelwein Area Charitable Foundation with a total of \$550,000 in loan and grant funds to assist the RAMS project.

"The Regional Academy of Math and Science in Oelwein provides northeast Iowa students with a wonderful learning experience," says Bill Menner, USDA Rural Development director in Iowa. "We are pleased to have had a part in making this project a reality."

The RAMS facility and classroom equipment for many of the courses were funded with more than \$1.7 million in state and federal grants, as well as donations from community organizations. The academy continues to pursue additional funds for technology and equipment for the facility.

The city of Oelwein also assisted the project with \$250,000 and partnered on grant applications on RAMS' behalf, which reinforced the partnership be-



QUALITY EDUCATION: The Regional Academy of Math and Science at Oelwein serves students in northeast Iowa who are pursuing careers in math, science and technology.

tween the school and the city.

"We've had tremendous support from the community and surrounding area," says Patera. "With so many small communities in the area, we need to work together to achieve the same quality education as the larger metro areas."

High school students are offered courses such as calculus, introduction to engineering, and entrepreneurship, and receive dual credit for their work at RAMS.

The credit the students earn goes toward their high school graduation and transfers to any two- or four-year college or university.

Chance to boost skills

Many of the adults who attend courses at RAMS do so because they've lost their job or are looking to upgrade their skills. The University of Northern Iowa also offers an advance class for teachers through the

Regional Academy of Math and Science.

In its first year, the Regional Academy of Math and Science averaged more than 200 students per semester, which included night courses and adult training courses.

The academy expects an even higher enrollment this year due to increased visibility and recognition of the program.

Currently, students from Starmont, Wapsie Valley, West Central and Oelwein Community School Districts attend

classes at RAMS. Patera says RAMS will continue to grow its course schedule each year to provide area students with the most beneficial training to fit their needs.

"We will continue to work hard at building relationships with surrounding communities to show them that it is non-threatening to send their students here," says Patera. "The program benefits all of our communities and everyone wins."

Maas is an intern with USDA Rural Development in Iowa.

He said it

"The Regional Academy of Math and Science offers technology classes for high school, college and adult students. The cooperation of a number of people and agencies helped turn the RAMS idea into reality."

Jim Patera, superintendent, Oelwein Community School District



Unique Iowa FFA fundraiser under way

A NEW program to raise nearly \$4 million for Iowa FFA and the FFA Enrichment Center began at this year's Iowa State Fair. The Stine Seed Program, administered through the Iowa FFA Foundation, allows farmers to buy their seed corn with 100% of the funds going directly to local and state FFA programming.

This opportunity was established when Harry Stine of Stine Seed Co. donated 18,000 bags of high-quality seed corn to be sold by local FFA members. "The simplicity of this program is tremendous," says

Ron Zelle, aged instructor at Nashua. "Our students receive experience, the farmer gets a great product, our chapter is given dollars, and the FFA Enrichment Center gets built. It's a win-win for everyone."

The seed corn is fully serviced and supported through the regular sales and agronomy network of Stine Seed. It will be transported directly to the farmer at no cost. The 12 corn hybrids available, including eight VT Triple hybrids and four Roundup Ready hybrids, will be sold by local FFA members until March 1.

"Timing it with the state fair

was great to get the Stine Seed Program started," says Iowa FFA President Ryan Augustine. "We are excited about seeing the FFA Enrichment Center being built. It'll open its doors and provide exceptional learning experiences for our 12,000 Iowa FFA members."

The FFA Enrichment Center is under construction on the campus of Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny and will serve as a meeting place for Iowa youth organizations and the ag community, as well as FFA members who gather there. Large conference and meeting rooms will accom-

modate any size group, as well as offer exhibition areas and office space. The 57,000-square-foot building is designed to provide advanced programming for leadership training by using unique teaching tools and resources, including greenhouses, computer and science labs, and fiber optic connectivity for long-distance learning.

Source: Iowa FFA Foundation

■ For information on the Stine Seed Program, call 712-249-7277 or visit www.iowaffafoundation.org.