



## **Learners to Leaders program opens door of opportunity for 25 students**

**By Donna Farris, Special Sections Editor**

Smithfield Foods, a leading meat processor and the nation's largest hog producer, is teaming up with the Sioux Falls School District to help disadvantaged students get a head start on a college education.

Smithfield Foods, through its independent operating company John Morrell, is partnering with Sioux Falls schools and Southeast Technical Institute in Sioux Falls to launch the first-ever Learners to Leaders program.

"This partnership will allow a hopeful and promising future to 25 students," said Pam Homan, Sioux Falls superintendent of schools. "We see students every day who just need a chance. They are often kids who have special social, economic or academic challenges but are very eager to learn. Learners to Leaders will give them that one chance they need."

The school district will channel 25 qualified high school juniors into the business administration curriculum at Southeast Technical Institute, where the program will fund each students' first year of a two-year associate of applied science degree in business administration.

Students accepted into the program can take college-level courses that will count toward their high school diploma and the associate's degree. Dennis Treacy, vice president of environmental and corporate affairs at Smithfield Foods, said a group was formed last March to come up with a new initiative for education. "Learners to Leaders is a program that will take many forms throughout the country. It will not be limited to one in Sioux Falls. We're looking to launch programs in Wisconsin and Iowa and hope to take it overseas," Treacy said.

Funding through the Smithfield-Luter Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Smithfield Foods, will cover tuition and a project coordinator.

Steve Crim, vice president and general manager for the John Morrell & Co. meatpacking plant in Sioux Falls, will serve as the local liaison for Learners to Leaders. He said it's hoped the program can continue for a number of years.

"We need to get the first year off the ground and make a success out of it and I'm sure we will," he said.