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EDITORIAL

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A GREAT IOWAN
COMES HOME TO RUN
A GREAT FOUNDATION

When Ken Quinn left Iowa for the second time, in 1982, it was not only a brain drain.

It was a charm drain as well.

For Ken Quinn is as engaging as he is bright and effective. And it was that combination — the twinkle in the eye, the infectious laugh, the passionate beliefs, the dogged persistence and the hard-headed analysis — that he used to change the face of this state.

That, without exaggeration, is what he did from 1978 to 1982, when President Gerald Ford shipped him out here to help Gov. Bob Ray on a special project. That project was to organize Iowa's unique efforts to bring here 3,000 or so Tai Dam refugees from Southeast Asia. That changed lives. He then organized a massive program in which Iowa sent people and aid to Southeast Asia. That saved lives.

The resettlement was the greatest accomplishment in Ray's 14 years as governor. It was so successful that Iowa today remains the only state that is among the 10 official resettlement agencies in America; the other nine are religious or international organizations.

Quinn, who was raised in Dubuque and educated at Loras College, returned to the Foreign Service in 1982. Earlier, he



had been with the State Department in Vietnam — he was among the last Americans to evacuate from there — and after a series of assignments in Washington and Europe he was named ambassador to Cambodia in 1996. In all, he was with the Foreign Service for more than 30 years, and he became one of its most decorated members.

Some examples:
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Ken Quinn

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He has received the Secretary of State's award for valor and heroism, the secretary's lifetime

achievement award, the presidential distinguished service award, the State Department's superior honor and meritorious honor awards and the Defense Department's decoration for distinguished civilian service. Along the way he also picked up master's and doctoral degrees.

Now, Quinn, who is 57 years old, has resigned as ambassador and is leaving the State Department — to return to Iowa, something he had long hoped to do. (The Quinns never sold their house in Des Moines.) In January, he will become executive director of the World Food Prize Foundation, the fund set up 10 years ago by John Ruan to recognize those men and women who have improved the quality or quantity of food in the world. The prize is sometimes called "the Nobel Prize for food," and its recipients over the years have saved millions of lives by developing stronger strains of food or eliminating pests or otherwise advancing the cause.

The prize is a great thing. John Ruan's name is on buildings and trucks and enterprises, but this prize — the result of his own passion and doggedness — is what he'll be remembered for generations from now. It's important that it be put in good hands — Ruan himself now is in his mid-80s, though he still has a twinkle in his eye and still is at work before most people are out of bed — and the hiring of Quinn ensures the continued integrity and rising status of the prize.

If all goes as planned, the foundation will expand in coming years and it will seek to finance those scientists who hope to save lives in the future as well as to reward those who have saved lives in the past. No one is better equipped for this job than Quinn — a man with exposure to the world's problems and experience in solving them.

So it's a great thing that this Iowan is returning, again.

It's a great thing for the people of this state.

But it's greater thing for the people of the world.

In the interest of full disclosure, the editor of The Tribune points out that he is on the Board of Advisers of the World Food Prize, a nonpaid position.
