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Opinion

Kenneth M. Quinn: Birthday present for an Iowa hero

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Although Borlaug died in 2009, it is especially appropriate that each year we honor and build upon his legacy, especially since he is known as "the man who saved more lives than any other person who has ever lived."

In thinking about what kind of birthday presents Borlaug might like, as he looks down upon his native state, it occurred to me that there are several "gifts" that are already wonderful tributes to him, including:

-*- The action by Gov. Terry Branstad and the bipartisan leadership of the Iowa Legislature to place a statue of Borlaug in the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

-*- The new \$30 million Norman E. Borlaug World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in Des Moines, which will be a museum open free to the public later this year to tell the story of Borlaug and Iowa's other agricultural and humanitarian heroes.

I believe that if we could ask Borlaug, he might actually express a desire for another "gift" -- the creation of a program to reach into every high school in the state, in order to inspire students to study science and alleviate hunger in the world.

Being a typical humble Iowan, Borlaug never sought great personal recognition. In his heart, Borlaug was always, first and foremost, a teacher.

Now there is an opportunity to give him this birthday present. With a generous contribution from Paul and Claudia Schickler, and with the critical partnership of Iowa State University and President Steven Leath, the World Food Prize is endeavoring to build a special Norman Borlaug connection in every high school in the state. It is called the Iowa Youth Institute.

The concept is simple. Students explore a country and a pressing food-related issue there, and write a paper with their solutions. Each high school selects one student to be recognized as its Borlaug Scholar. With a teacher, the student will attend a day-long program at ISU on April 30.

Following this unique one-day opportunity to interact with leading educators, business executives, government officials and research scientists, 80 students in the state will be chosen to attend the World Food Prize Global Youth Institute in October.

The rewards for both students and teachers attending are significant. Each student who participates on April 30 receives:

- *- An automatic \$500 scholarship to Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.
- *- An opportunity to become a Borlaug-Ruan International Intern in Asia, Africa, Latin America or the Middle East.
- *- Further opportunity to become a paid U.S. Department of Agriculture Wallace-Carver intern.

Each teacher who attends and participates in the classes earns a full continuing-education credit.

The goal of this program is for every one of the more than 400 high schools in Iowa to participate in the Iowa Youth Institute by the centennial of Borlaug's birth in 2014. As a first step this year, the goal is to have 200 students attend April 30.

In order to get to that number on April 30, it will take the effort of many, many Iowans. Therefore, if you are a student, teacher or administrator at an Iowa high school; if you are involved in 4-H or FFA; if you are a member of a farm family, the Farm Bureau or Rotary; or if you are simply concerned about promoting the study of scientific subjects, please encourage your school to register a student.

These programs launch careers and provide endless opportunities for Iowa youth.

High school officials can contact Catherine at the World Food Prize (cswoboda@worldfood

prize.org; (515) 245-3727) for more information. Swoboda is a member of the governor's STEM Advisory Council and the director of Iowa education programs. More details are available at www.worldfoodprize.org/iowayouth.

One of Borlaug's greatest dreams was that there could be a program in every high school in America that encouraged students to focus on science, especially as it related to agriculture and food production and confronting hunger in the world and preserving our environment. I know he will be smiling down upon us if his state -- Iowa -- could be the first in the nation to achieve that 100 percent mark.

Kenneth M. Quinn is

president of the World Food Prize Foundation.

