WASHINGTON, D.C., May 21, 2013 — Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation recently hosted students from Manitowoc County, Wisconsin in Washington D.C. for the national debut of their new “Jobs First!” campaign video. The video, produced by students with developmental disabilities from Lincoln High School, is designed to encourage employers to focus on providing community-based, integrated employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities in Manitowoc County.

Fifty-seven students, staff and parents, supported by the University of Wisconsin-Manitowoc Transition Programs, traveled to Washington, D.C. from Lincoln, Holmen, New Auburn, and Reedsville High School. They presented the video, a commercial, and personal testimony in Senate Rooms at the U.S. Capitol Building on May 3rd. The event, organized by the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation, was attended by representatives from U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin’s Office, U.S Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Community Living, and other organizations focused on disability policy.

The Jobs First Campaign of Manitowoc County is part of the national U.S. Department of Labor-Office of Disability Employment Policy Employment First initiative. It is supported by the Manitowoc County Transition Advisory Committee, The Chamber of Manitowoc County, and the Association of People Supporting Employment First. Students from Lincoln High School got involved in the campaign as part of their student-run business, called “Step’nStones.”

Bradley Lucia, the student leader of Step’nStones and student advisor on the Manitowoc County Transportation Committee, said at the conclusion of the Capitol Hill presentation, “I have a disability and I want to work hard. If I can do it, then others will know they can do it, too!”
According to the U.S. Department of Labor, only 20 percent of people with disabilities participate in the workforce, compared to 69 percent of the population without disabilities. “The Foundation is proud to support efforts like the ‘Jobs First!’ campaign,” says Kevin R. Webb, director of the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation. “By empowering young people to speak for themselves, and focusing on providing employment opportunities first—rather than depending on supported living—we hope to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities so they can lead independent lives.”

The Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation supports Step’nStones through a national grant to the UCLA-Tarjan Center working in partnership with SAGE Global. Its goal is to encourage students with disabilities to develop student-run businesses to learn entrepreneurial skills. The Step’nStone students manufacture and sell key chains and other products as they learn what it takes to run a small business enterprise. In addition, the students learn about “giving back” to the community by engaging in socially responsible activities. The Step’nStones students do this through their Jobs First! public education and awareness campaign. In addition to their presentation in Washington, D.C., the Step’nStone students have presented the campaign at various locations in Wisconsin and northern Illinois, including visiting with employees at the Mitsubishi Electric Automation, Inc. plant in Vernon Hills, Illinois.

Based in the Washington, D.C. area, the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation was established in 1991 by Mitsubishi Electric Corporation and the Mitsubishi Electric U.S. companies, which produce, sell and distribute a wide range of consumer, industrial, commercial and professional electronics products. The foundation has contributed more than $11 million to organizations that are empowering young people with disabilities to lead more inclusive and productive lives.

View the Jobs First Campaign of Manitowc County video at http://youtu.be/z4Jl5t0P0fI.

To learn more, visit Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation’s website at www.MEAF.org.

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