Dearborn, Mich. — Academy Award-winning director Steven Spielberg and Ford Motor Co. Executive Chairman Bill Ford announced Thursday they are partnering to expand a multimedia program for Detroit-area students designed to foster tolerance.

The program is an extension of the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation, which was founded by Spielberg and uses visual testimonies from survivors to educate people about the Holocaust and other genocides.

The Shoah Foundation runs IWitness, an educational website that provides access to more than 1,500 full life histories and testimonies of survivors and witnesses of genocides. Ford Motor’s $180,000 gift will help expand IWitness to more schools in the Detroit area.

The donation also will sponsor for the next two years USC Shoah’s IWitness Video Challenge, which invites students to produce a video inspired by the survivors’ testimonies that tells the story of how the students have contributed to making their communities a better place.

“My dream, through the USC Shoah Foundation, is someday to have programs like IWitness become prerequisites for graduating high school — for tolerance education to be folded into the social science study program in public high schools and private schools everywhere around this nation,” Spielberg said.

About 450 teachers in Michigan already use IWitness, said Kori Street, USC Shoah Foundation’s director of education. The testimonials are “absolutely riveting, and the stories are unparalleled. And yet it’s incredibly relevant to the next generation,” Ford said at a news event before introducing Spielberg, who has directed dozens of movies, including “Schindler’s List,” the 1993 Oscar-winning Holocaust drama.

Spielberg and Ford made the announcement following a meeting with students and teachers from Henry Ford Academy in Dearborn, a Detroit suburb. Henry Ford Academy, which already uses IWitness, was named after the auto pioneer. Bill Ford is his great-grandson.

Later Thursday, Spielberg was to present Ford with the Shoah Foundation’s Ambassador for Humanity Award during the organization’s annual gala.

The filmmaker told reporters and students Thursday that “Schindler’s List” spurred the formation of the Shoah Foundation. Ford Motor was the sole sponsor of the 1997 NBC broadcast of the film.
Steve Carell, Halle Berry among top celebs at Ford gala

By Robert Allen

Hollywood stars Steve Carell and Halle Berry joined other A-list celebrities at an exclusive gala Thursday night at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, hours after an announcement to expand a program encouraging teens to learn tolerance and respect.

The University of Southern California Shoah Foundation tweeted from the event photos of James Taylor performing and Bill Ford Jr. receiving a humanity award from the foundation.

Hours earlier, Ford and film-maker Steven Spielberg announced a $180,000 donation by Ford Motor Co. to the IWitness program, part of the Shoah Foundation. The foundation, created by Spielberg in 1994, uses visual testimonies from survivors to educate people about the Holocaust and other genocides.

Carell hosted the gala, and Berry spoke on educational outreach, according to the tweets.

Holocaust survivor Paula Lebovics was quoted speaking at the gala:
“Through our testimonies we will be able to teach the future.” She is among survivors featured in videos on the Shoah Foundation website.

IWitness is an educational website that provides more than 1,500 testimonies from survivors and witnesses of genocide. It already is being used by 450 teachers in Michigan, including in about two dozen schools in metro Detroit. Henry Ford Academy is one of those schools.

Ford’s contribution will help expand the program to more schools and sponsor the program’s annual video challenge. That challenge gets students, inspired by the voices they hear in the testimonies, to build videos about how they contributed to making their communities a better place.

Carell, best known for starring in TV comedy series “The Office,” has been in numerous popular films including “The 40-year-old Virgin” and “Anchorman.” Berry received an Academy Award for the 2001 film “Monster’s Ball” and has been in numerous popular films including more recently, “X-Men: Days of Future Past” and “Cloud Atlas.”

Spielberg directed such legendary films as “Schindler’s List,” “Jaws” and “Jurassic Park.”