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Southwest Michigan First Receives Two More Economic Development Awards for Excellence

KALAMAZOO, Mich. (September 18, 2007) – Southwest Michigan First has been honored with two economic development awards for excellence from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC).

The IEDC, the world's largest membership organization serving the economic development profession, announced today at its Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona that Southwest Michigan First was the recipient of its Overall Marketing award AND its Multi-Year Economic Development Programs award.

Competing in the category of Overall Marketing by organizations serving areas with populations between 50,000 and 200,000, Southwest Michigan First was a clear standout. Citing its ability to combine tried-and-true marketing techniques with innovative marketing campaigns, the IEDC praised Southwest Michigan First for greatly improving its visibility in its target industries – the life sciences, advanced manufacturing, customer care center and logistics industries.

Highlighted initiatives included Southwest Michigan First's autographed book club and its "Cutting Edge" mailer of a knife storage block, chef-quality knives and sharply phrased postcards to targeted prospects. The organization's aggressive media relations campaign earned it repeated positive press in such outlets as The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Washington Post, ABC News and CNN. A community video, polished and informative website and numerous special events honoring regional businesses, educating investors and sponsoring such community events as Football Fest with Western Michigan University truly differentiated the organization from its competitors.

Winning also in the Multi-Year Economic Development Programs area, Southwest Michigan First was credited with the creation of a corporate network that redefined the region's economy and stimulated its human capital assets when it was faced with steady job losses and limited growth potential. In four years, Kalamazoo has seen 27 new life

sciences companies founded, 1000 new students in its public schools and an increase in home prices and sales for the first time in a decade.

“Economic development efforts have always played a vital role in shoring up the nation’s economy, one locality at a time,” said Ronnie L. Bryant, IEDC chairman. “As our population grows exponentially and as we continue to overcome challenges, both new and longstanding, these efforts have taken on an even greater importance. These awards serve as a salute to pacesetting organizations like Southwest Michigan First for leading the charge.”

“To be honored as one of the best of the best in your field by the best of the best is the highest honor,” said Ron Kitchens, Chief Executive Officer of Southwest Michigan First. “The excellence of our organization and its commitment to the community that it serves truly make it second to none.”

Other awards garnered by Southwest Michigan First this year include CoreNet Global’s Economic Development Leadership Award and Fast Company magazine’s recognition of Southwest Michigan First and Kalamazoo as number 18 on its list of the country’s “Fast 50.”

About the International Economic Development Council

The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the economic development profession. Headquartered in Washington DC, its mission is to provide leadership and excellence in economic development for communities, members and partners. For more information, visit www.iedconline.org.

About Southwest Michigan First

Southwest Michigan First is the catalyst stimulating growth across the Kalamazoo Region. Whether you’re a site selector, an investor, an entrepreneur or part of an existing company looking to grow, Southwest Michigan First has the resources and expertise to assist you in identifying and surpassing your goals. For more information, visit www.southwestmichiganfirst.com.

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