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Southwest Michigan First's two *Catalysts for Success* are working to make the world a better place

KALAMAZOO, Mich. – Southwest Michigan First will host its quarterly Catalyst Awards Luncheon Thursday, November 15 from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm at the Radisson Plaza Hotel. The two honorees, AZON USA Inc. and PharmOptima, are both working to make the world a better place in their own ways.

AZON USA Inc., a technology and chemical company with international operations on three continents, is contributing to making the world a *greener* place. With the need for energy conservation at their foundation, the company has improved the energy efficiency of aluminum windows and doors. As a world leader in the manufacture of thermal barrier aluminum fenestration products and with sales around the globe, AZON is playing a major part in the reduction of the world's energy emissions. The company's patented polyurethane chemistry has allowed them to produce a variety of specialty chemicals and equipment for variety of industries.

"AZON's products are so highly regarded that the word 'AZON' has come to be an acronym for its own products in certain parts of the world," said Ron Kitchens, Chief Executive Officer of Southwest Michigan First. "We are proud to have one of the best of the rest located in our community."

PharmOptima, a pre-clinical research and discovery company that provides consulting and laboratory services with a goal of discovering antibiotic treatments for infectious disease, is working to find cures for those suffering from cardiovascular, CNS, cancer, dermatology, and infectious diseases. Developing customized solutions for drug discovery, formulation and *in vivo* profiling problems, the company aims to identify problems and authenticate leads for their client's drug candidates early in order to optimize animal and, later, human testing. Started in 2003, with 10 employees at the Southwest Michigan Innovation Center, the

company has more than tripled in size and graduated to its own location in Portage, Michigan.

“PharmOptima personifies the success of the southwest Michigan start-up environment. The continual clinical successes achieved by PharmOptima and the respect that they have garnered in the life sciences industry exemplify the extraordinary scientific capital available in the Kalamazoo Region,” said Kitchens.

About AZON USA, Inc.

Founded in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1977, AZON is a global technology and chemical company, with base operations in North America (Kalamazoo), Europe (United Kingdom) and Asia (South Korea and China). Established with the world community in mind, the company has concentrated its efforts on energy conservation. More specifically, it has focused on improving the energy efficiency of aluminum windows and doors through the manufacture of thermal barrier aluminum fenestration products. The company’s patented research on polyurethane chemistry has allowed it to explore its application in numerous other industries. In addition, AZON designs and manufactures special multi-component chemical metering, mixing and dispensing machines used in recreation, construction, agriculture, manufacturing, grouting and mass finishing. More information about AZON USA, Inc. can be found at www.azonintl.com/azonusa.asp.

About PharmOptima

PharmOptima provides clients with multidisciplinary input to solve research and development issues. PharmOptima focuses on the mid to late phases of drug discovery between target identification and selection of lead compounds, helping clients choose the best candidates to accelerate drug development and increase chances for clinical success. They also provide consultation and laboratory support for target selection and HTS assays. They help their clients save time and money by selecting the best drug candidates and identifying potential problems early. PharmOptima's scientists have a successful research and development track record in cardiovascular, central nervous system, cancer, dermatology, and infectious diseases. To learn more about PharmOptima, go to www.pharmoptima.com.

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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