

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 30, 2012

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**Southwest Michigan First draws merger & acquisition presence:
The Charter Group and Michigan Accelerator Fund I announce regional office hours**

KALAMAZOO, Mich. – The Charter Group, one of Michigan’s premier merger and acquisition advisory firms with a concentration on middle market transactions ranging from \$5 million to \$50 million, is pleased to announce the expansion of its operations to Kalamazoo, Michigan. The Charter Group will be taking space within the Southwest Michigan First offices as the two organizations work together to aggressively pursue investment opportunities in Southwest Michigan. The Charter Group will be holding office hours at least three days a month as part of the formalized partnership.



Principals at The Charter Group manage Michigan Accelerator Fund I (MAF-1), which will similarly be represented during office hours. MAF-1 is a venture capital fund that provides early stage capital to transition investable Michigan-based ventures to commercially viable businesses that can drive our economy forward.

Founded in 1989 and based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, The Charter Group has guided clients through more than 400 business sale transactions. It offers expertise in a broad range of manufacturing and distribution industries, as well as specific niches within the life sciences and office and contract furniture. The Charter Group has additional offices in Mishawaka, Indiana.

"We are excited to formalize our partnership with Southwest Michigan First, which will enable us to provide the surrounding business community with easier access to M&A services. We're looking forward to extending the reach not only of Charter, but also of our venture capital fund, MAF-1. Together, we provide companies with the right combination of resources and funding that will enable them to thrive and help grow our regional economy," said John Kerschen, Managing Director, The Charter Group / MAF-1.

"This partnership is a natural progression of Southwest Michigan First's efforts to expand the region's capital investment options. Our relationships with regional employers and investors have made evident in the current economy the need for the types of services offered by The Charter Group. This partnership will help us to match, better serve and produce successful outcomes for strong companies and qualified investors," said Ron Kitchens, Chief Executive Officer of Southwest Michigan First and General Partner of the Southwest Michigan First Life Science Fund.

Southwest Michigan First formalized its investment arm in 2005 with the formation of the [Southwest Michigan First Life Science Fund](#). Currently valued at \$65 million, this limited partnership venture fund focuses on early stage life science opportunities that

are committed to establishing a presence in Southwest Michigan. The organization also administers [First Angels](#), an angel network making financial and intellectual capital available for emerging companies based in the region.

This is not the first collaboration based on capital investment for Southwest Michigan First. A similar partnership was formed in March 2011 with [Open Prairie Ventures](#), a leading venture capital firm headquartered in Effingham, Illinois, with offices in Kansas and Kalamazoo, Michigan in March 2011.

About The Charter Group

The Charter Group is a merger and acquisition firm specializing in middle market transactions ranging from \$5 million to \$50 million. With offices in Indiana and Michigan, The Charter Group has access to some of the Midwest region's top companies. For more information, visit www.charter-group.com.

About Michigan Accelerator Fund I

MAF-1 is an investment partnership headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This venture capital fund is driving forward the new economy of Michigan by providing a path to funding and partnerships for the commercialization of new regionally developed opportunities in the areas of advanced manufacturing, life sciences technology, homeland security, alternative energy technology, information technology, and agriculture. For more information, visit www.maf-1.com.

About Southwest Michigan First

Southwest Michigan First is an organization of privately funded economic development advisors who act as the catalyst for economic success in Southwest Michigan. Founded in 1999 on the principle that jobs and wealth creation exponentially affect the region's future sustainability, the organization works across all industries throughout the eight counties making up the Southwest Michigan Region. For more information about Southwest Michigan First, please visit us at www.southwestmichiganfirst.com or call 269.553.9588.



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