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Springboard Enterprises Venture Forum Returns to Chicago
Springboard 2005: Midwest Launches Search for Fund-Worthy Women Entrepreneurs

CHICAGO — (BUSINESS WIRE) — April 14, 2005 — Springboard Enterprises Venture Capital Forum today announced its return to the Midwest and a call for fund-worthy women entrepreneur applicants.

Co-hosted by Springboard Enterprises and Northwestern University's Center for Women Entrepreneurs in Technology, Springboard 2005: Midwest Venture Forum will take place at Northwestern University's Thorne Auditorium, 375 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60611 on September 28, 2005. Springboard 2005: Midwest will feature a morning program showcasing women-led companies to an audience of leading venture capitalists, angel investors, and corporate investors and a special afternoon program exclusively for angel investors.

Springboard Enterprises provides women-led high growth companies with access to investment capital and entrée to a community committed to helping them build enduring businesses. Springboard has showcased 317 women-led enterprises at 14 forums across the country. Springboard portfolio companies have raised \$3 billion in equity capital, grants and strategic investments to date.

The third biannual Springboard 2005: Midwest Venture Forum will showcase the Midwest's most promising women-led companies. The Forum is a six month training and coaching program involving hundreds of investors, accountants, lawyers, bankers and business development professionals. At an August orientation Bootcamp, selected companies will be strategically teamed with experts who will coach them for their Forum presentations, advise on growth positioning, and provide introductions to colleagues. The program culminates with a venture capital forum showcasing these selected women-led companies to an audience of investors. Springboard places great importance on fostering relationships that yield benefits for both the entrepreneur and their coaches well beyond the Forum.

“While women-led ventures have lagged their male counterparts in securing venture capital, it is not because women are running businesses that are unattractive to investors,” pronounced Amy Millman, President of Springboard Enterprises. “Women simply have had limited access to the informal angel and venture networks essential to raising business capital. Springboard provides women entrepreneurs ready access to the right networks and a quality source of deal flow for investors.

The Center for Women Entrepreneurs in Technology, an incubator for women-led technology companies led by Northwestern University in partnership with ITEC-Evanston, will serve as Springboard 2005: Midwest Venture Forum co-host. Additional sponsors include the National Science Foundation and the State of Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

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“By co-hosting Springboard, we hope to unlock hard-to-access, high dollar capital markets for women entrepreneurs and help commercialize emerging technologies,” said Nancy Sullivan, Executive Director of Northwestern’s Center for Women Entrepreneurs in Technology (CWET) and Springboard 2005: Midwest Venture Forum co-host. “In addition to connecting women with capital, Springboard inspires a collaborative process of mentoring and relationship building.”

Women who participate in the Springboard Enterprises program will have the opportunity to network with women who have similar growth objectives, as well as with successful Springboard alumnae who can share their business success strategies. Throughout the program, entrepreneurs make valuable new business connections, meet investors, receive media attention, build relationships with their peer network, and become an integral part of the growing Springboard community.

Women-led companies seeking seed, first, or later round investment capital are invited to apply for Springboard 2005: Midwest Venture Forum. To qualify, companies must have a woman in a key management role with an equity stake in the business. Applicants will participate in a three-step screening process including an online application, business plan review, and in-person interviews with a committee of local investors. Entrepreneurs not selected are offered feedback and referred to other local resources.

"Midwest entrepreneurs face the grim reality of scarce or unavailable early-stage capital. Springboard provides the Midwest’s venture capital and angel investor community a unique opportunity to access quality, pre-screened and properly mentored entrepreneurs. Similarly, by connecting entrepreneurs with hard to reach venture capital and individual equity investors, Springboard creates access to early stage capital to grow their Companies which may have been otherwise unavailable." added Bob Geras, co-chairman of Springboard 2005 Venture Forum: Midwest and President of LaSalle Investments.

In addition to Geras, Springboard co-chairs include Misty Gruber and Kathleen Swan of Dykema Gossett and Ed Condon of Paradigm Capital.

Interested women business owners who would like to learn more about Springboard Enterprises or apply should visit www.springboardenterprises.org. The application deadline is June 24, 2005.

A Forum Committee Meeting and stakeholder’s reception involving Midwest business leaders, investors, and advisors will be held on May 10 at Northern Trust (50 S. LaSalle Street, Chicago 60603), to formally launch Springboard 2005: Midwest Venture Forum. Attendance is limited to accredited investors, Springboard alumnae, and sponsors. Media is warmly invited to attend.

About Springboard Enterprises

Springboard Enterprises is a not-for-profit organization that has had phenomenal success in preparing and showcasing women-led businesses seeking equity capital. The businesses participating in Springboard events across the country have raised \$3 billion. Springboard delivers its programs and services through local affiliate organizations and a national network of entrepreneurs, investors, and business development professionals. For more: www.springboardenterprises.org.

About Northwestern’s Center for Women Entrepreneurs in Technology

The Center for Women Entrepreneurs in Technology (CWET), a partnership led by Northwestern University in association with ITEC-Evanston, fosters women-led entrepreneurship to reduce barriers to equal opportunity and to address the challenges that could keep women entrepreneurs from reaching their full potential. By providing access to necessary resources, training and networks, the Center enables women to turn innovative ideas into market-leading companies. For more: www.cwet.org.

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