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**Gov. Blagojevich Announces 27 Northern Illinois Regional Finalists Selected for *INNOVATE Illinois 2006*;
Applications Triple for Second Year of Statewide Business Plan Competition**

13 Statewide Finalists Will Emerge to Compete for \$175,000 in Cash and In-Kind Awards

Chicago, IL. – March 22, 2006 – The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Chicago West Side Entrepreneurship Center, a partnership between Chicago Community Ventures and the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a member of the Illinois Entrepreneurship Network, announced the selection of 26 regional finalists for the **INNOVATE Illinois 2006 Challenge**. **INNOVATE Illinois** and the Chicago West Side Entrepreneurship Center are funded by Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* economic development program. More than 100 companies submitted applications and brief business plans from the northern, central and southern regions of the state – tripling the number submitted for last year's competition.

Regional Finalists were selected based on their business models, innovation and potential uses of an INNOVATE Illinois award. They will be asked to prepare and submit a Business and Innovation Plan and will have access to a variety of resources to help them compete in the final round. Of these 27 companies, 13 statewide finalists will advance to the final event on June 15th to present their business plan and compete against state finalists in the southern and central regions for a total of \$175,000 in cash and in-kind awards (\$25,000 for each award). Visit www.innovateillinois.org for more information.

This competition highlights the outstanding products, processes or services that are vitally important to the economic health and growth of Illinois. Awards will be given to the most innovative high-growth companies in five of the most economically productive industries – manufacturing, agriculture, technology, environmental and business or health services – based on the strength of their business and the potential impact of their innovation. Additional awards will also be given to the top minority-owned business and women-owned business in those industries, for a total of seven awards.

"Gov. Blagojevich and I are proud to host **INNOVATE Illinois** for its second year and to expand it from a regional business challenge to throughout the state after last year's impressive results," said DCEO Director Jack Lavin. "The sign of a great program is that it gets better each year, and the wide range of diverse and interesting companies that we reviewed in this year's applications was evidence of that. These 27 regional

finalists have been recognized for their innovation in their respective industries and have the potential to become the next great companies in the state. We must continue supporting our entrepreneurs and small business because they are Illinois' greatest engine of economic growth and are critical to creating more good jobs for our working families across this state."

"Chicago Community Ventures, through the Chicago West Side Entrepreneurship Center, works to support high-growth, innovative companies. We created **INNOVATE Illinois** to highlight these exciting businesses and to reinforce that Illinois is the state for innovation," said Stephen Maduli Williams, President of Chicago Community Ventures. "The strong response to **INNOVATE Illinois** that we have seen this year bears that out."

Other sponsors of **INNOVATE Illinois 2006** include: Citigroup, Microsoft, Hill & Knowlton, Administaff, Chicago Community Ventures, Advanced Profit Technologies, ComEd, Illinois Ventures, Gardner Carton & Douglas, and Prairie Business Credit.

Northern Illinois Regional Finalists:

Agriculture

Great Lakes Biodiesel LLC	Jun	Yoshitani	West Chicago
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Business or Health Services

CorDynamics, Inc.	Michael	Gralinski	Chicago
Application To Admission, Inc.	Mary	Wayman	Chicago
HealthIntell LLC	Patricia	Riskind	Evanston
Errand Solutions	Marsha	McVicker	Chicago
Elite Exterior Restorations	Kenneth	Knudson	Addison
DW Group LLC	Patricia	Kothe	Chicago
T.A.G. Properties, Inc.	Angela	Ford	Chicago
Vantage Solutions LLC	Vanessa	Smith	Chicago

Environmental

Solvent Systems International	Steve	Rundell	Elk Grove Village
Horigan Urban Forest Products, Inc.	Erika	Horigan	Glenview
Greenmaker Supply Co.	Ori	Sivan	Chicago

Manufacturing

Nu-World Amaranth	Susan	Walters - Flood	Naperville
We Love Soy, Inc.	Ryan	Howard	Lombard
World Scientific Development	Joseph	Fairless	Aurora
zuChem, Inc	Gina	Berardesco	Chicago
Whitney Woodworks Inc.	Christine	Parkinson	Chicago
Optimal Fire Protection	Cassie	Luckinbill	Aurora
Artistry by Design	Susan	Lambert	Freeport

Technology

Optical Engines Inc.	Al	Eggleston	Crystal Lake
All Cell Technologies LLC	Robert	Anderson	Chicago
Lummos, Inc.	Pascal	Yammine	Chicago

10x Technology	Robert	Pricone	Libertyville
3 Olive Solutions, LLC	Steve	Chamberlin	Elmhurst
Stealth Light Corporation	Vic	Kral	Hickory Hills
Option-C, Ltd	Yvette	Chanco	Lakemoor
Freerain Systems Inc.	Joshua	Karp	Chicago

About Gov. Blagojevich's Illinois Entrepreneurship Network

Gov. Blagojevich is providing, for the first time, a formalized structure for coordinated services to small businesses and entrepreneurs throughout the state: the Illinois Entrepreneurship Network (IEN). Further, DCEO has a truly statewide network, where the resources in one area (e.g., venture capital in the Chicago area) can be coordinated to the benefit of network partners throughout the state. There are varying levels of expertise and access to services in the various regions, and it ties these all together to equalize this expertise and access through the following IEN partners: Entrepreneurship Centers, Small Business Development Centers, Procurement Technical Assistance Centers, International Trade Centers, NAFTA Opportunity Centers, Manufacturing Extension Centers and Illinois Technology Enterprise Centers. The IEN Web site, www.ienconnect.com, features a free business needs assessment and a referral within 24 hours for personalized, face-to-face assistance. Entrepreneurs, who call toll-free to the IEN information center (**800-252-2923**), can also connect with service representatives who will assess their business concerns and direct them to the local resources that best meets their needs.

About Chicago Community Ventures

Chicago Community Ventures (CCV), a not-for-profit organization founded in 1999, provides financing, business advisory services and critical resources to small, high-growth businesses. Although CCV helps businesses throughout Chicagoland, we are passionate about building businesses in the region's underserved markets. These markets include businesses located in low- and moderate-income areas and businesses owned by minorities or women.

CCV works with companies that have tremendous potential for revenue generation and job creation, but are still building their track records. Whether companies seek financing or business advisory services -- CCV has diverse products and services to help them reach the next stage of growth.

About The Chicago West Side Entrepreneurship Center

The Chicago West Side Entrepreneurship Center (CWSEC), funded by Governor Blagojevich's Opportunity Returns Program administered by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, leverages resources available in the marketplace to promote the entrepreneurial development of high-growth potential businesses. The CWSEC works with entrepreneurs and businesses (regardless of industry or stage) that demonstrate the ability to achieve growth through revenue generation and job creation and to contribute to the economic development of Illinois. Through our services the CWSEC helps high-growth potential businesses achieve significant milestones to take their businesses to the next level.

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