



# opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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## GOV. BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES CRITICAL *OPPORTUNITY RETURNS* FINANCING TO HELP PEORIA START-UP INCREASE COMPETITIVENESS

CHICAGO - As a part of his historic, regional plan to spur economic growth and create jobs throughout the North Central region, Governor Rod Blagojevich today announced the awarding of **\$300,000** in *Opportunity Returns* low-interest state financing, along with an additional **\$350,000** in equity investment, to help a Peoria start-up firm purchase new equipment that will increase its competitiveness at a critical stage in its lifecycle. Firefly Energy Inc. is an early stage technology company that is developing new battery technologies, which significantly enhance the performance of battery power for use in a variety of industries, including the automotive and heavy equipment industry. The infusion of capital will allow the firm to purchase equipment needed to develop that battery power technology.

“I’m proud to announce our support for Firefly Energy in Peoria. We’re committed to doing everything we possibly can to stimulate the growth and development of young businesses in the North Central region. This financing will allow Firefly to forge ahead in its efforts to pioneer new technology that could position the company for major long term growth and prosperity, while it also further diversifies the impressive portfolio of dynamic tech companies in the region that are strengthening the vitality of this local economy,” Governor Blagojevich said.

The \$300,000 in *Opportunity Return* financing, which is coming from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), will help leverage another \$200,000 in debt financing provided by the Peoria County Revolving Loan Fund and Peoria Citizen’s Committee for Economic Opportunity, Inc.

“Governor Blagojevich’s *Opportunity Returns* plan is designed to use innovative partnerships to help businesses grow and thrive, even in challenging economic times. This partnership between Illinois Ventures for Community Action, Peoria County, the Peoria Citizen’s Committee for Economic Opportunity, and the state shows that we are working together at the grassroots level to accomplish that goal. This is a great investment in the local economy and its enterprising spirit,” DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

In addition, the Illinois Finance Authority (IFA) contributed \$350,000 in equity to Firefly Energy, funding that follows an earlier-stage investment from the IFA of \$300,000. “As the State’s investment banker, one of our key goals is to support innovative Illinois companies with seed capital. Firefly Energy shows great promise and we are glad to support their growth,” IFA Executive Director Ali Ata said.

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Firefly Energy Inc. is in the business to produce and license advanced lead-acid battery technologies. Firefly Energy's technology was created by Caterpillar Inc. as part of its \$600 million annual research and development operations. Firefly has developed a next generation lead-acid battery technology that has the opportunity for a major impact in the \$30 billion worldwide battery market. The technology can deliver a combination of high performance, extremely low weight and reduced cost in a battery utilizing traditional, but non-corrosive, lead-acid chemistry. Firefly's technology delivers a performance associated with advanced materials (nickel metal hydride & lithium) at a cost similar to lead acid batteries. The company was launched as a spinout from Caterpillar on May 1, 2003, and is headed by co-founders Edward Williams (CEO), Mil Ovan (Senior Vice President), and Kurtis Kelley (Chief Scientist).

Governor Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois' history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn't work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region. This grassroots effort for the North Central region is a product of significant outreach over several months throughout each region, with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. Each plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

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