



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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CONTACTS:

Cheryle Jackson	312/814.3158 (office)
Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158 (office)
Rebecca Rausch	217/782.7355 (office)
Andrew Ross	312/814.8193 (Opp. Returns)

GOV. BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES \$40,000 IN *OPPORTUNITY RETURNS* FUNDING TO SUPPORT BUSINESS FORUM DESIGNED TO INCREASE ACCESS TO CAPITAL AND OPPORTUNITIES TO SUCCEED

CHICAGO – As part of his ongoing effort to increase access to capital and stimulate business growth, Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today announced \$40,000 in *Opportunity Returns* funding to support the Capital Access Forum 2004, an annual conference that brings together business leaders, entrepreneurs, private equity investors, and commercial lenders to facilitate and increase access to capital for minority businesses and other firms in frequently underserved markets. The conference, scheduled for Thursday, September 23rd, from 8:30am to 7:00 pm at The Westin Chicago River North, 320 North Dearborn Street in Chicago, comes as a part of *Opportunity Returns*, the Governor's comprehensive, regional economic development plan to spur growth and create jobs in the Northeast region and throughout the state.

"Too often, well-run businesses are discouraged from growing and expanding solely because they lack access to capital. Our goal is to do everything we possibly can to ensure that businesses have the full spectrum of resources they need to compete and thrive in today's economy. This forum acts as a great tool in helping us accomplish this goal because it not only assists companies in raising capital and developing practical growth strategies, but also exposes them to a network of valuable contacts that offer tremendous potential to grow their customer base," Governor Blagojevich said.

"I strongly support this effort to open doors and increase access for minority businesses and firms. The investment by the state in this program sends a clear signal that making available the tools to increase growth and opportunities for these firms is a priority in Illinois," State Senate President Emil Jones (D-Chicago) said.

The Forum is a response to the compelling dynamics of growth and diversity that domestic emerging market companies have introduced into the U.S economy. Representatives from more than 100 organizations will convene to network and build relationships. The primary goals are:

- To provide a venue for participating entrepreneurial companies to interact with lenders, private equity fund management and individual investors
- To enhance participants' knowledge of the private equity and venture capital community serving domestic emerging markets and provide insights into growing their businesses
- To enable companies and entrepreneurs to network, arrange to exchange goods and services, and form business alliances

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The 2004 Forum will cover a wide spectrum of financing needs, including traditional venture capital, private equity and buyouts, mezzanine and traditional bank financing. The panels will address key issues such as opportunities in asset management, brokerage industries and real estate, growth through mergers and acquisitions and access to private equity.

“The line between those business ventures that succeed and those that fail can be razor thin, and the ability to access capital is often the difference maker. This type of conference is so important because it puts many of the key players in the same room at the same time and fosters grassroots networking that sets deals in motion. Michael Granger and Ark Capital Management have done a wonderful job staging this conference for four years now, and, through this partnership with the state, we hope to make this effort even more successful,” said DCEO Director Jack Lavin.

The Chicago Capital Access Forum was founded by Michael Granger. Granger brings 20 years of private equity investment experience involving various venture capital, buyout, restructuring, and expansion financing deals at major firms to his role as chairman of the Access Forum. Sponsors of this year’s Capital Access Forum include Northern Trust, Fifth Third Bank, Ariel Capital Management, Citigroup, Archer Daniels Midland, Capri Capital, the University of Chicago, and Crain’s Chicago Business.

“Governor Blagojevich’s *Opportunity Returns* initiative has provided well needed inspiration and support to the entrepreneurial business community that the Forum provides this service to. It tells us that we can take the initiative to build our businesses and that we can count on the state of Illinois to create a friendly environment for growth, with the ultimate result of job creation,” said Chicago Capital Access Forum Chairman Michael Granger.

The burgeoning demographics of minorities in the U.S. economy have given rise to a new segment of the private equity market known as the domestic emerging market. Although this market has experienced significant growth in business ownership stimulating its rapidly increasing demand for investments, the capital funding available to it has been very limited. Currently, less than 2% of private equity funding flowed to business owners in the domestic emerging market. Commercial lenders have not been able to achieve significant levels of lending to minority businesses either.

For more information about the Capital Access Forum 2004, please call 312-673-7293 or visit the website: www.arkvc.com/capitalaccess

The *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. Each plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from. The Governor will announce the plan for the Northeast regions in the coming months.

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