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CREW CT holds annual public forum on the State of the State

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Business leaders and real estate professionals from across Connecticut gathered recently for CREW CT's annual public forum on the State of the State. They heard compelling insight from Catherine Smith, the commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, and two experts in the finance and healthcare industries. "We have an administration right now in Connecticut that is very anxious to do all that's possible within the means of the state to really get our economy revved up and growing," said Smith. She provided an overview of the administration's recent state-wide jobs tour, adding, "Connecticut can compete with any place in the world for work that requires skilled labor." Moderator, Linda Spevacek, president of The Launch Companies LLC, provided a framework for the discussion that focused on Connecticut's uniqueness and potential.

Commissioner Smith kicked off her keynote by providing a realistic picture of the economic challenges faced by the state, ranked 47th in the country in jobs creation. Based in part on feedback gathered from businesses of all sizes included in the jobs tour, she said, "The state is focusing on removing barriers to job creation and developing new programs to help businesses in specific market sectors grow, invest, and relocate." She noted that part of the Connecticut's challenge is perception. While there are other regions of the country with a slightly lower cost of doing business, the state is on par with other states within the region, and has significant advantages over those other regions. Connecticut's highly skilled and highly productive workforce ranks second in the country. In fact, many companies in the state are actively looking to add more knowledge-based workers right now, so education and training are high priorities. In fact, the state has more than 20 programs targeting its growth industries from insurance, defense, manufacturing, and high technology to financial services, healthcare, bioscience, entertainment, and tourism.

Following the commissioner's keynote, Spevacek presented the Celebration of Deals highlighting important recent transactions in each of Connecticut's key growth industry sectors. These included deals in the areas of financial services/insurance, healthcare, high-tech manufacturing, aerospace/defense, and education. They demonstrated that real estate activity is occurring throughout Connecticut's diverse economy. She concluded with an emphatic, "Yes, deals are happening here."

Mike Goman, president of Accubranch, LLC, provided insight into the state's financial industry, focusing on regional and community banks, and credit unions. Largely avoiding the sub-prime mortgages that have hurt the larger, national banks, he showed that many of Connecticut's banks are actively adding depositors. Sound financials and superior service are proving to be key advantages. Recently enacted regulation and online technologies are challenging them to adapt and to find new revenue streams, but branch locations are still the primary and most successful means to attracting new depositors. Like retail, these branches need to refine their locations, to close some

and add new ones, and to be built significantly smaller, with drive-throughs now handling the majority of volume.

Robert Falaguerra, vice president of facilities, support services and construction for Saint Francis Care, gave an overview of healthcare reform and its impact on the state's healthcare industry, and the many ways the hospital is managing and growing its facilities. The fundamental drivers are regulation, changes in the relationships between physicians and hospitals, and the need to drive down the overall costs of care. One solution is Saint Francis' ongoing construction of regional Access Centers that require new real estate development and add many construction jobs, as well as permanent healthcare positions. Another exciting initiative is a high-technology simulation and training center to be operated in partnership with regional colleges and universities.

Overall, the forum provided a glimpse into the challenges faced by businesses and institutions in the state. But, it's a picture with many bright spots that provides hope that the combination of government and business leadership can work together in an unprecedented way to raise Connecticut's real and perceived national position as a business-friendly place and quality jobs creator.

For additional insightful industry news, don't miss CREW CT's next public forum, The Changing Landscape: How Demographics Will Shape the Future of Real Estate, featuring Michael Gately and Tony Pierson from Cornerstone, and Mark Hickey from PPR. The forum will be held on Tuesday, November 15 at the Hartford Club. Check crewct.org web site for registration and program details.

Shown (from left) are: program moderator, Linda Spevacek, president, The Launch Companies LLC; keynote, Catherine Smith, commissioner, Connecticut Dept. of Economic and Community Development; panelist, Robert Falaguerra, vice president, facilities, support services and construction, Saint Francis Care; and Mike Goman, president, Accubranh LLC.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540