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MetroHartford Alliance rallies the Hartford region around a new strategic plan

March 15, 2012 - Connecticut

An Indiana Jones themed program culminated and celebrated the launching of the MetroHartford Alliance's 2012 - 2015 strategic plan. As the Hartford region's economic development leader, business, education and government collaborated for months, producing a plan that builds upon the Alliance's significant accomplishments over the past four years and outlines five core strategies:

- * Ensure that the Capital City is the dynamic urban core of the region
- * Market the region's assets to retain and attract businesses
- * Promote the stability and expansion of specific industry sectors with a link to support small business growth
- * Retain, develop, recruit and engage a diverse and talented pool of employees and entrepreneurs
- * Foster a climate for job creation and infrastructure investment

Unveiled during the Alliance's Annual Celebration at The Bushnell in Hartford, which convened more than 200 Hartford area investors representing real estate, insurance, professional services, government and other industries, the strategic plan supports the Alliance's mission to ensure that the Hartford region competes aggressively and successfully for jobs, capital and talent. The plan also provides continued support for the economic growth of Hartford and the Hartford region.

In support of the area's infrastructure, the Alliance will continue its efforts to increase the availability of mass transportation throughout the region. In addition to its support of increased service at Bradley International Airport, the Alliance supports the development of the New Britain Busway. Complementary to these efforts is its advocacy for a commuter rail line along the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield corridor.

Central to the continued economic growth of Hartford is the iQuilt initiative which seeks to link the city's assets and attract new investors. Already home to such venues as The Bushnell Theatre, XL Center and Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford is poised to continue its expansion as a thriving cultural center.

In 2012 and beyond, the Alliance will take an active role in nurturing relationships between education and business to grow the region's pool of qualified talent. By aligning the region's education programs with the skills important to employers, businesses can gain access to qualified candidates within the region. This will provide a framework for the continued growth of businesses throughout the region and assist with talent retention.

Further, the recent Connecticut Manufacturing Job Match Initiative is helping to cultivate skilled workers to fill job vacancies across the state. Connecticut looks forward to continued growth of its manufacturing industry, with the Alliance advocating for public policy to secure tax credits and other tools to support industry growth. In 2009, CNN Money named Hartford among the best places to launch a small business, citing its assets for manufacturing and technology firms. Additionally, the

city, home to such corporations as Travelers and Aetna, was recently identified by The Brookings Institute as the most productive city, ranking #1 in Per Capita GDP among the top 200 metropolitan markets in the world.

The Hartford region is poised for continued healthcare expansion in 2012 with The Jackson Laboratory coming to Farmington. In addition, the Alliance will support the health care industry by engaging in the development of a model for in-home health care systems, helping establish the region as a BioScience leader, supporting the creation of an Accountable Care Organization and supporting the marketing of medical tourism.

In addition to supporting local industries, the Alliance offers extensive resources for international businesses seeking to establish a presence in the Hartford region. Through its International Business Center, the Alliance provides relocation support, site selection assistance and counsels organizations throughout the setup process.

Central to the successful completion of the Alliance's strategic plan is continued support of policies that encourage business formation, growth and retention in Hartford. Its efforts to enhance development incentives, promote adaptive reuse of vacant properties in the city's central business district and explore private funding that can support business are all paramount to the continued growth of Hartford.

Entrepreneurs will also play a significant role in accelerating the growth of Hartford's business infrastructure. Hartford hosted its first StartUp Weekend in 2011 and will continue to offer programs and resources to nurture start-up innovation. By promoting business and technology incubators, convening forums to determine future innovation opportunities and hosting entrepreneur roundtables, the Alliance will support the establishment and growth of start-ups throughout the region.

In addition, the Alliance supports entrepreneurs through its HYPE initiative - Hartford Young Professionals and Entrepreneurs - which seeks to engage the young business community in the growth and success of the region.

Through its continued efforts to compete for jobs, capital and talent, the Alliance will play a vital role in ensuring Hartford and the surrounding region continues to grow established businesses and attract new investors.

R. Nelson Griebel is the president and CEO of the MetroHartford Alliance.

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