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**\*\*\*MEDIA RELEASE\*\*\***

## **Durham businesses and organizations honored at Business Excellence Awards**

**DURHAM, NC** – The Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce presented several awards to local businesses and organizations at its Business Excellence Awards dinner held last night at the Hilton Hotel Durham near Duke University. More than 200 business and community leaders attended the event that honored small, medium and large businesses as well as non-profits and business leaders. Tisha Powell, news anchor for ABC 11 served as mistress of ceremonies.

Student U, Riley Life Industries, Inc., The American Dance Festival, The Art Institute of Raleigh-Durham and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) were recognized with Business Excellence Awards for a company program or initiative that made an impact in the community - making Durham stronger.

The Chamber presented the first ever Connector of the Year Award to two individuals who have dedicated their time and expertise in furthering the Chamber's mission. Susan Adams (Vocational Rehabilitation Services), a 10-year Chamber Ambassador and volunteer and Yolanda Rabun (IBM), a Chamber board member and economic development champion, were recognized for the work they do on behalf of the Chamber for its members and the business community.

The Chamber also presented the Alfred P. Sloan Awards for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility to CrossComm, Inc., Durham's Partnership for Children, Expedite Group, Shodor Education, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and WorkSmart. This national award is a program of the U.S. Chamber's Institute for a Competitive Workforce, the TWIGA Foundation and the Families and Work Institute that recognizes businesses and organizations that use workplace flexibility as a way to meet business and employee goals.

The participants of the Chamber Fit Challenge, an initiative of the Chamber to encourage employers to promote a healthy work environment, were also recognized. Durham's Partnership for Children, Forrester Associates Insurance Agency, Inc., Infuzion and Rapid Results Fitness participated in the program which began in March 2009 and have seen positive results from employees and in overall operations.

In addition to presenting the awards, the Chamber recognized Lisa Pinero of Technical Services, Inc. Pinero was named the Small Business Person of the Year for North Carolina by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

About the winners:

**Non-Profit Category:**

**Student U** - The mission of Student U is to empower students in Durham Public Schools to take ownership of their education by developing the academic and personal skills they need to realize their full potential in school and beyond. Student U has two main components: The first is a free, 6-week academically intense summer enrichment program in which Durham middle school students are taught and led by college students from North Carolina. The second component sustains the summer academic growth through weekly academic enrichment and remedial support and monthly mentoring outings also led by the college-age teachers. All middle school students participate in Student U for three consecutive years after which time students will have improved their academic skills, gained confidence in their academic ability, and become motivated to challenge themselves throughout high school. Many Student U students will be the first in their family to attend college.

**Sustainability Category:**

**Riley Life Industries, Inc.** - Riley Life is the first company in Durham to receive Green Plus Certification. In an effort to use their business as a mechanism for positive change in the world and in the local community, Riley Life pursued this certification. Since the company began, they have sought to more fully achieve their core value of sustainability which states "We seek to understand the future implications of our actions by focusing on the economic, social, and environmental impacts of our business." Sustainability requires Riley Life to look deeper at its entire sphere of influence rather than just the financial profits of business operations.

**Small Business Category:**

**American Dance Festival (ADF)** - The American Dance Festival has presented the very best in modern dance in the heart of Durham for over 32 years and just celebrated its 76th Anniversary. The ADF has consistently sought to deepen its connection to the Durham community by increasing awareness of and participation in America's indigenous art form, modern dance. The ADF's history and the history of modern dance have remained closely synonymous and as a result Durham residents have been the first to see the world premiere of hundreds of seminal dance works. During the 2009 Festival, the ADF offered four educational outreach programs to Durham's underserved citizens, enabling those in our community the opportunity to experience ADF programs and performances. Previously offered during the summer only, ADF's Community Movement Workshops are now being offered year-round, enriching the lives of more youth than ever before. Partnerships and collaborations with Durham area organizations abound, including El Centro Hispano, Hayti Heritage Center, Rogers-Herr Middle School, and Walltown Neighborhood Center just to name a few. The ADF reaches populations that are typically underserved, yet most deserving. Filling a void, the ADF celebrates its home in Durham by connecting people of all ages to the extraordinary world of the performing arts.

**Medium Business Category:**

**The Art Institute of Raleigh-Durham** - After establishing a market demand for a higher-education institution focused on applied arts education, The Art Institute of Raleigh-Durham (AIRD) opened its doors in the summer of 2008, completing a \$7 million renovation of 37,000 sq. ft. at the American Tobacco Campus. While established to provide career-focused education in design, fashion and culinary arts, the school is also becoming an integral part of the community — a key factor in its ongoing economic and social growth. Beginning with its launch, AIRD wanted to become a vital part of the community and connect not only with potential students, but with local citizens, government officials and business leaders as well. They began outreach efforts with a grand opening campaign emphasizing corporate citizenship and contributing to the overall welfare of the community and its residents. They exceeded their 2009 enrollment goals



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and successfully collaborated with the local business community while supporting many local nonprofits and organizations. Their employee base has nearly tripled to 55 faculty/staff. With students already applying real world education to their lives and jobs in Durham, they expect their impact on the city to increase when the first class graduates in 2010.

**Large Business Category:**

**American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA)** – The AICPA has partnered with Durham Public Schools (DPS) to provide an updated and invigorated, self-sustaining curriculum for the high school Business and Finance Academy (BFA) program. The objective is to enhance the BFA students' learning by adding valuable real world experiences. Goals of the program are met through the organization and execution of interactive projects that dive into an issue or case study facing the finance and accounting profession today, presentations from community professionals who represent a wide variety of businesses, ages and ethnicities and the strengthening of the program's brand recognition in the community. Results of their efforts show that BFA students are more engaged in the program and also are increasingly seeking post-secondary education options, most notably in the areas of finance and accounting. There has also been an increase in both Hillside High and non-Hillside High districted students entering the program. The AICPA's partnership with the DPS' BFA positively impacts Durham by increasing volunteerism, encouraging students to work hard and focus on their futures.

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