

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kansas City, MO (December 9, 2011) — Last week, the Greater Kansas City Business Leadership Network (GKC-BLN) awarded its second annual “DisAbility Champion Awards,” which were presented to Rose Estates (medium employer) and Children’s Mercy Hospitals & Clinics (large employer). The luncheon was held at the Ritz Charles in Overland Park, Kansas and emceed by John Holt, co-anchor and investigative reporter for Fox 4 News.

“Our two award winners, Rose Estates and Children's Mercy Hospitals & Clinics, have shown how inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce can be a true win-win scenario. Their leadership inspires us all to go beyond mere legal compliance.” said Keith Wiedenkeller, senior vice president and chief people officer, AMC Theatres, and president, GKC-BLN.

Wiedenkeller went on to explain that according to a 2010 Department of Labor Study, the employment rate in the US for persons with disabilities -- a demographic that represents approximately 19% of the population -- was a disappointing 18.6 percent. “So clearly it’s going to take more than legislation to improve this situation. It’s going to take champions like these companies.”

“We are honored to be recognized for doing the right thing”, said Stacey Koenig of Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. “We have support for Project RISE (Reaching for Independent Successful Employment) - starting with our CEO. It is part of our culture. It is truly humbling to be nominated.”

"It is such an honor to receive this award," said Christie Brooks, Administrator of Rose Estates. “On behalf of my staff, we are overwhelmed that GKC-BLN would recognize our efforts for doing what we see as the right thing. It’s my hope that other businesses will be inspired to also hire individuals with disabilities.”

The Awards recognized employers who have implemented programs or practices that promote and/or support the employment of individuals with disabilities in the following areas: Employment Practices (including recruitment, retention and job design); Leadership (including communication, employee resources, and training); Community Support (including charitable donations, organizational support, and supplier diversity) and Work Environment (including accommodation practices, environmental design and adaptive practices).

During the program, the nearly 100 guests in attendance learned about best practices among national employers such as AMC Entertainment and Walgreens, and from the DisAbility Champion winners. Participants came away with useful inclusion ideas for implementation in their own companies. The event was sponsored by AMC Entertainment, Society for Human Resource Management of Greater Kansas City (SHRM-KC), Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, UMB Bank, NA and Spencer Fane Britt & Browne, LLP.

Two additional awards were given in recognition of ongoing efforts and work in the community on behalf of individuals with disabilities. The GKC-BLN President's Award was given to UMKC Institute for Human Development for exemplary community leadership in enhancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities through their support of the national “Add-Us-In” DOL inclusion campaign. The Volunteer of the Year award was given to Brenda Perkins, CEBS for advocating disability inclusiveness in the workplace and furthering GKC-BLN's mission and vision.

-more-

DisAbility Champion Awards, p. 2

About the Greater Kansas City Business Leadership Network (GKC-BLN)

The Greater Kansas City Business Leadership Network is a network of business owners, leaders and decision makers who deal with the day to day issues of commerce and industry. What sets us apart is our commitment to improve the employment outlook for this largely forgotten labor pool. GKC-BLN provides support and education in the areas of recruiting, accommodations, the "business case" and countless other issues. GKC-BLN was the recipient of the "2011 Affiliate of the Year Award" by the USBLN®. www.BLN-GKCCorg.

About the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN®)

The US Business Leadership Network (USBLN®) is the national disability organization that serves as the collective voice of over 60 Business Leadership Network affiliates across North America, representing over 5,000 employers. The USBLN® promotes the business imperative of the preparation and inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace, marketplace, and supply chain while supporting the development and expansion of its BLN affiliates. The USBLN® recognizes and supports best practices in hiring and advancing employees with disabilities, marketing to consumers with disabilities, and encourages contracting with vendors with disabilities through the development and certification of disability-owned businesses. www.usbln.org

For photos of the event, click here http://www.flickr.com/photos/umkc_ihd/6500181961/in/set-72157628390171009/.

###