



Creating a Community that Works!

NORTH LAWDALE EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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North Lawndale Employment Network to Hold Fifth Annual Sweet Beginnings Tea to Benefit Westside Employment Programs *Scott Baskin, President of Mark Shale boutiques, to Present Keynote Remarks*

(Chicago, IL) Jan.26, 2010 – The North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) will hold its Fifth Annual Sweet Beginnings Tea on Friday, February 12, 2010 at the Park Hyatt Hotel, 800 N. Michigan Avenue, from 3:30 - 5:30 p.m. A pre-Valentine's afternoon tea, the annual fundraising event benefits the organization's employment and training programs in North Lawndale and surrounding communities. The Honorable Mayor Richard M. Daley is the honorary chair of the Sweet Beginnings Tea. Zoraida Sambolin, NBC5 co-anchor and reporter, will return as mistress of ceremonies for the third consecutive year. Scott Baskin, president of Mark Shale boutiques, will provide the keynote remarks.

NLEN, a 501©3 non-profit organization, is the parent company of Sweet Beginnings, LLC, a for profit company created to provide transitional jobs training and work experiences for formerly incarcerated individuals and other low income residents of Chicago's Westside neighborhoods. Employees of Sweet Beginnings participate in a transitional jobs training program that grows and harvests natural, chemical-free honey. Program participants receive training in beekeeping, food handling, retail sales, inventory, and distribution. In addition to the manufacture and sale of table honey, Sweet Beginnings markets a line of honey-based bath and body products under the beeline® label and sells them at such diverse locations as the Mark Shale boutique located on Chicago's Magnificent Mile, in 11 Chicago area Whole Foods Markets®, various specialty boutiques, local farmers markets and online at www.beelinestore.com.

Beeline honey is being used by the Park Hyatt Hotel's executive pastry chef in several of the food items served at the Sweet Beginnings Tea. Urban honey is reported to be of a higher quality and has a more desirable taste than rural farmed honey due to the high diversity and density of the flowering plants typically found in large cities.

A social enterprise, the North Lawndale Employment Network is the recipient of numerous awards and citations for the quality of its creative programs that provide environmentally sustainable business practices while helping to create green collar jobs for people of all income levels. "NLEN is committed to providing job training, literacy programs and referrals to specialty resources that assist in the social adjustments needed to make the transition from prison to the workforce," said Brenda Palms Barber, CEO of the North Lawndale Employment Network.

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NLEN Holds Fifth Annual Sweet Beginnings Tea/2

“More than 42,000 inmates re-enter Illinois society every year. Organizations such as the North Lawndale Employment Network fill a very real void by creating opportunities for this population to resume a place in society through honest work that provides a living wage,” she added.

The keynote speaker for this year’s Sweet Beginnings Tea is Scott Baskin, president of Mark Shale, a Chicago-based men’s and women’s clothing retailer carrying quality designer lines that focus on superior fabrics and impeccable attention to detail. The 70-year old high-end boutique opened its first store in 1929 in Joliet, Illinois. Mr. Baskin’s commitment to social enterprises like Sweet Beginnings is reflected in his service on various Boards of Directors, including WBEZ (Chicago Public Radio) and the Chicago Maternity Center.

Mark Shale is a business that was built on a simple promise: to bring together the best in men’s and women’s clothing from around the world with a high level of personal service. In addition to maintaining the integrity of the stores, Mr. Baskin has also brought in many local designers that provide a Chicago flavor to its retail offerings. It is with great pleasure that *beeline®* products were introduced to Mark Shale’s patrons in 2008 in three of its boutiques, including the Magnificent Mile location, and have enjoyed good sales.

During the tea, NLEN will confer the *Creating a Community that Works Award* on Heather Steans and Phil Adams. Ms. Steans became a 7th District Illinois State Senator in 2008 and is a trustee of the Steans Family Foundation, a major supporter of the North Lawndale community and NLEN’s innovative programs. Mr. Adams is a strategic partner at PS&A Communications, a company specializing in creative branding and strategies, and a member of the Sweet Beginnings LLC Board of Managers. NLEN presents this award annually to community allies who are committed to improving the quality of life through access, capacity building, economic development, and providing opportunities for residents to grow businesses and community programs.

Sweet Beginnings sponsors include the Pritzker Pucker Foundation, The Boeing Company, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Steans Family Foundation, Exelon, Jim & Kay Mabie, The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, Sinai Community Institute, Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream, Wilbur Wright College, Deer Rehabilitation Services, Inc., Mary Kania and William Blair & Company, Fifth/Third Bank, The Joyce Foundation, J.T. Stinnette and the Billionaire Club, Net-Telligence Group, Chicago Urban League, NextOne, Solution Associates Consultant Group, and Esther Franco-Payne & Associates. In addition, Ambassador Organics, owned by former Ambassador and U.S. Senator Carol Moseley Braun, will provide samples of her company’s organic tea as gift giveaways for each guest.

For information on the Sweet Beginnings Tea or to purchase tickets, please call 773-638-7060 or visit <http://sweetbeginningstea.eventbrite.com>.

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About NLEN

The North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) was established in 1997. NLEN’s mission is to improve the earnings potential of North Lawndale residents through innovative employment initiatives that lead to economic advancement and an improved quality of life. NLEN is a membership organization that is made up of over 100 partner agencies that form a referral network and program committees that enable NLEN to help economically isolated individuals, especially former offenders, secure jobs with family-supporting wages, assist employers in recruiting and retaining workers, advocate on behalf of low-income job-seekers, and build the capacity of partner organizations.