



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PROSPERA BUSINESS NETWORK NAMED MONTANA 2009 WOMEN IN BUSINESS CHAMPION OF THE YEAR

Bozeman, Montana, March 30, 2009 – Prospera Business Network announced today that the organization has been named by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) the Montana 2009 Women in Business Champion of the Year. The organization will be honored with other award winners at the SBA's annual Small Business Week Awards Luncheon in Missoula on June 5, 2009.

"We are pleased to recognize Prospera's long record of promoting opportunities for women in business. Through their WNET women's network, loan program, professional training, and procurement assistance center, Prospera has increased training, financial, and procurement opportunities for countless women entrepreneurs throughout southwestern Montana," said SBA Montana District Director Michelle Johnston.

"The Montana Women in Business Champion of the Year award is a great honor for Prospera and our team of 5 staff members who have each contributed to the organization's efforts for women entrepreneurs," said Bob Hietala, Prospera's Chief Executive Officer. "I would also like to recognize the financial support from our member businesses and federal granting agencies, without which our many programs and services could not be offered."

"This recognition is well-deserved for Prospera and its 23-year record as an advocate for women in business," said Kathleen Tonkovich, Vice President of First Security Bank in Bozeman, who nominated Prospera for the award. Prospera will be recognized at the 2009 Small Business Week Awards Luncheon in Missoula on June 5, 2009.

Other 2009 award winners include: Tim and Suzy O'Leary of Kettlehouse Brewing Company in Missoula – *Montana Small Business Persons of the Year*; Morrison-Maierle, Inc. of Helena – Montana and Region VIII *Entrepreneurial Success Award* and National First Runner-up *Entrepreneurial Success Award*; The Milky Whey, Inc. of Missoula – Montana and Region VIII *Small Business Exporter of the Year* and National Second Runner-up *Small Business Exporter of the Year*; Alpine Plumbing, Heating & Cooling of Billings – *Family Owned Small Business of the Year*; James Drummond of Stockman Bank in Bozeman – *Financial Services Champion of the Year*; Mike Leinen of Independence Bank in Poplar – *Minority Small Business Champion of the Year*; Tom Howard of Billings Business – Montana and Region VIII *Small Business Journalist Champion of the Year*; Shelley Lighter, SAL Design in Great Falls - *Home-based Business Champion of the Year*; and the City of Sidney – *Small Business Community of the Year*.

For additional information about the SBA's 2009 Small Business Week Awards, please contact Rena Carlson at the SBA Montana District Office at 406-441-1081 or by email at lorena.carlson@sba.gov.

ABOUT PROSPERA BUSINESS NETWORK

Prospera Business Network is a private, non-profit, member supported economic development organization in southwestern Montana. Originally established in 1985 as the Gallatin Development Corporation, Prospera plays a leading role in economic development serving a region that is one of the fastest growing areas in the northern Rocky Mountains. The organization's mission is to support the continued growth and diversification of the area's economy, and the creation of more high-paying jobs. Prospera is dedicated to encouraging and supporting business expansion, retention and relocation by providing access to business consulting, capital, professional development, and research. To learn more about Prospera Business Network, visit: www.ProsperaBusinessNetwork.org

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