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WOMEN'S INITIATIVE ANNOUNCES EXPANSION AND RESTRUCTURE

Bay Area nonprofit expands to help more than 3,000 low-income women start businesses in 2009

San Francisco, CA – Women's Initiative, a Bay Area non-profit offering training and support to help low-income women start and grow their own businesses, announced today a new regionalized structure as a result of the agency's substantial growth in response to increased client demand. Established in 1988, Women's Initiative has had a hand in the start-up or expansion of more 12,000 businesses.

Women's Initiative has training centers in San Francisco and Oakland and in the past year, added additional centers in Novato, Concord and San Jose in order to better meet the needs of women throughout the Bay Area. The organization now has a regional structure with an executive director in each region – North Bay, East Bay and Silicon Valley – to oversee local program and fundraising efforts. The organization has promoted three of its top executives to executive director. Julie Castro Abrams remains as CEO.

Thais Rezende has been promoted to Executive Director, North Bay, overseeing San Francisco and Marin counties. Rezende has been with the organization for four years and most recently held the role of Program Director. Her accomplishments include the launch of *SuccessLink*, a robust catalog of services that offer ongoing support and resources to graduates of Women's Initiative's business training program. A native of Mexico, Rezende brings a diverse background in journalism, international relations, and diplomacy to Women's Initiative.

Lorrie Williams, now Executive Director, Silicon Valley, oversees the organization's presence in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. Williams has been a small business trainer and coach with the organization for 2 years and she contributes more than 15 years of experience in entrepreneurship, business development consulting, sales and marketing, advertising, and production management. Williams is also a certified Core Energy Coach, a small business columnist for the Globe Newspaper, and is an active member of International Coach Federation and San Francisco Coaches.

Karuna Jaggar, now Executive Director, East Bay, oversees Women's Initiative's work in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Jaggar started with Women's Initiative in 2003, and has directed the Research and Public Policy department since late 2004. In addition to conducting her doctoral research on women's microenterprise in Tanzania, Jaggar designed outcome evaluation systems for a microenterprise organization in India. Jaggar has managed the evolution of Women's Initiative's outcome evaluation system design and data cycles and contributes a rich perspective in social science research and program evaluation.

"We are thrilled to promote these three expert women and are confident that their unique experience and expertise will help grow our program in each region," said Julie Castro Abrams. "Our increased

capacity and regional focus will ensure that our services reach more women when and where they need it most. The women who go through our program start businesses, create jobs and give back to the community, providing a true economic stimulus package for the Bay Area.”

Almost two years in the making, the transition to a regionalized structure was prescribed by the organization’s strategic plan, calling for Women’s Initiative’s rapid and substantial growth through 2010. This new structure will streamline decision-making and support the regional growth strategy that was formulated in collaboration with AT Kearney, a valued partner of Women’s Initiative in providing pro bono consulting throughout the strategic planning process and its implementation.

The organization’s expansion resulted in nearly 50% more women served in 2008 than in 2007, and the distribution of more microloans than ever before.

Abrams commented that the organization’s expansion would not have been possible without the help of the incredible team of volunteers that serve Women’s Initiative. “While we are thrilled to help more and more women, we are humbled that this only begins to scratch the surface of need as our economy continues to shed jobs and create hardships. We expect demand among low-income women to increase in line with the recession, and we can only meet this need with the ongoing help of more volunteers.” Members of the community who are interested in getting involved with Women’s Initiative may visit www.womensinitiative.org or contact volunteer coordinator Elizabeth Russell at vcoord@womensinitiative.org for more information on volunteer and internship opportunities.

Women who are interested in starting or expanding a small business are encouraged to visit www.womensinitiative.org or call 415-641-3460 to learn more about how to qualify for Women’s Initiative’s services.

ABOUT WOMEN’S INITIATIVE:

Women's Initiative for Self Employment in a Bay Area non-profit providing high-potential, lower-income women with the training, financing and support to start and grow their own businesses. The organization focuses on women because women are often those in the lowest-paid sectors of our economy. And it is women who, with the start of a successful business, spend more of their increased income on their families and provide higher paying jobs and better economic development opportunities for their communities. For 20 years, Women's Initiative has provided uniquely tailored training, financing, technical assistance, and ongoing support services – in English and Spanish – to improve the quality of life for the women, their families and their communities. Visit us at www.WomensInitiative.org.