



For Immediate Release

Contact: Laura Galbraith, Venture North Funding and Development

PH: 231-995-7110

Email: laura@venturenorthfunding.org

-or-

Louise Wenzel, Bellaire Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation

PH: 313-410-5951

Email: lowenzel@gmail.com

ANTRIM COUNTY SMALL BUSINESSES CAN APPLY FOR COVID RELIEF GRANTS ON APRIL 12 **First Round of Regional Resiliency Program Grants Begins**

BELLAIRE, MICHIGAN – Businesses with nine or fewer full-time employees hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic may apply for a new source of grant funding beginning April 12 thanks to the fundraising work of the Bellaire Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation and Venture North Funding and Development that administers the Regional Resiliency Program (RRP).

“I am thankful to our Board and community members for their selfless charitable giving to support our businesses' participation in the Regional Resiliency Program,” said Foundation Chairperson, Louise Wenzel. “These are some of the most difficult, taxing times we will confront as individuals. It is all the more crucial that we support our neighbors and friends who have been and will continue to be crucial to the livelihood of our communities. And, thanks to Venture North, the program could be extended to small businesses throughout Antrim County.”

“We could not be more pleased to have Antrim County be the first grant round of the 2021 RRP,” said Laura Galbraith, President of Venture North. “Thanks to the unyielding persistence of the Bellaire Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation that raised \$24,000 from generous donors, we were also able to allocate \$20,000. Funds raised by the Bellaire Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation will be allocated to small businesses in the geographic area they serve, including Bellaire, Alden, Central Lake and Mancelona. Venture North funds will be allocated to all Antrim County small businesses. There are an estimated 1,000 businesses with 9 or fewer employees in Antrim County. To date, about 70 percent of RRP awardees have been women-owned and 12 percent owned by military veterans.

Galbraith said the Chamber Foundation also helped organize an Antrim County team to review grant applications and make funding recommendations to Venture North. Based on review team recommendations, Venture North will award grants of up to \$5,000 directly to the applicants selected for funding.

A grant application guide is available now at www.venturenorthfunding.org that outlines eligibility and prepares applicants for completing the online application that opens at 8 a.m. on Monday, April 12. “We think the grant application is simple and straightforward,” said Galbraith. “Applicants may apply for a grant for urgent needs or for adapting their business to operate within the challenges of COVID-19. If anyone has

questions or needs help with the application, we are on standby.” Questions about the applications can be directed to Venture North at 231-995-7115 or info@venturenorthfunding.org

The RRP began in 2020 to provide grants to small businesses damaged by COVID-19, resulting in nearly 200 grants of \$5,000 or less from the \$500,000 raised by Venture North. As was the case in 2020, the Consumers Energy Foundation recently awarded \$200,000 to Venture North to begin the 2021 program.

Galbraith said fund raising for the grants to small businesses is ongoing. Donations can be made online at www.venturenorthfunding.org or by contacting Tim Ervin at 231-794-0089 or timervinassoc@gmail.com. Donors may designate a specific geographic area for their contribution or donate toward the 10-county regional effort.

Venture North Funding and Development provides commercial financing and technical assistance to support business growth and job creation in their ten county region, often in partnership with other financial institutions. As a Certified Development Financial Institution (CDFI), Venture North also focuses on providing support for underserved populations such as minority, women and veteran owned businesses in low income communities.

