

ADVANTAGE CAPITAL FINANCES EXPANSION OF LIFT FOR LIFE ACADEMY

Missouri New Markets Development Program funding supports campus growth for charter school

ST. LOUIS, August 29, 2008 - Advantage Capital Partners, a leading venture capital and small business finance firm, today announced that it has provided \$3 million in financing to Lift for Life Academy, a charter school located in St. Louis' Soulard neighborhood.

Advantage Capital partnered with Southwest Bank on the financing, made in connection with the federal New Markets Tax Credit Program and Missouri New Markets Development Program. The funding enables Lift for Life Academy's expansion from middle school grade levels to include high school grade levels. The inaugural ninth grade class will join the Academy for the 2008-2009 school year.

"Education is the cement that builds strong communities," said Marshall Cohen, founder and executive director of Lift for Life. "This financing will allow more than 300 additional students to attend the Academy; students who will have a greater likelihood of completing high school, attending college, and becoming productive, active St. Louis citizens."

The Academy, which is sponsored by Southeast Missouri State University, will gradually expand over the next few years to offer high school level education, starting with the addition of ninth grade. The funding will allow the Academy to acquire and build additional classrooms in the adjacent property. Planned expansion will create multiple temporary construction jobs, in addition to permanent teachers and support staff. The Academy expects to create a total of 21 new permanent jobs from this expansion.

Established in 1988, Lift for Life began as a weightlifting gym and later grew to include free year-round after-school care for children ages 8 to 18. In 2000, the organization opened an Academy, becoming the first independent charter middle school in the city of St. Louis. Last year, the Academy and weightlifting gym became independent, non-profit organizations. The school, currently comprised of 350 students, is free and open to all St. Louis students in grades six through nine. Today the Academy holds a 93 percent attendance rate and its students have surpassed their St. Louis Public School peers in standardized testing scores in a number of areas.

"Through innovative leadership and a solid commitment to education, the Academy has grown and evolved from a one-room classroom to a major educational force in the city today," said Mark Lewis, principal at Advantage Capital. "This investment will allow students who thrive in the Academy middle school to continue their studies through their high school years in an environment committed to their growth and learning."

Advantage Capital's investment in Lift for Life Academy was made possible in connection with the federal New Markets Tax Credits and Missouri New Markets Development Programs. Both programs are designed to stimulate economic growth in communities that historically have been underserved by traditional sources of capital.

About Advantage Capital Partners

Advantage Capital Partners (www.advantagecap.com) is a leading venture capital and small business finance firm focused on early stage companies and other investments supporting state and local economic development efforts. With offices and partners in St. Louis, New Orleans, Austin and other U.S. cities, Advantage has raised more than \$950 million in institutional capital since 1992 and invested in companies located in geographic areas underserved by traditional venture capital.

About the New Markets Tax Credit program

The New Markets Tax Credit program, administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, encourages private-sector investment in economically distressed communities through tax incentives. In a highly competitive allocation procedure, the Treasury Department awards the tax credits based on applications submitted for each tax year. Advantage has participated in the New Markets program since 2003, raising private capital for investment in low-income communities. These investments have spurred economic growth through innovative business ventures and job creation throughout the United States.

About the Missouri New Markets Development program

Enacted in 2007, the Missouri New Markets Development program encourages investment in promising small businesses located in distressed communities throughout the state. The program enables up to \$186 million of capital investment in Missouri's small businesses. The state program attracts investment in low-income communities through a state tax credit modeled after the federal New Markets Tax Credit. The goal of the program is to attract large, long-term investors to Missouri's low-income communities, promoting new expansion, creating new job opportunities and building on existing growth in the state.

About Southwest Bank

Southwest Bank, an M&I Bank (mysouthwestbank.com) serves customers and businesses throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area. Operating in its 87th year, the bank offers a full range of retail and commercial banking products and services through 17 branch offices in St. Louis, St. Charles, O'Fallon, Arnold and Belleville, Ill. Southwest Bank is an affiliate of Marshall & Ilsley Corporation (M&I).

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