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**WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS IN BALTIMORE
GET BOOST FROM NEW ATHENAPowerLink® PROGRAM*****PNC Bank Sponsors Resource for Expert Advice and Support
to Accelerate Business Growth***

BALTIMORE, September 23, 2013 – The ATHENAPowerLink® program has officially come to Baltimore, bringing valuable advisory services to boost the achievement of local women business owners. Lead sponsor PNC Bank has joined forces with community business leaders to launch the national program here in support of the growth and profitability of local women-owned businesses.

ATHENAPowerLink® is a non-profit, volunteer-run organization that started in 1992 in Pittsburgh and has been expanded throughout the country. Women business owners, who are paired with a customized board of advisors, benefit from financial advice, business best practices, networking skills and services and technical assistance necessary to help them reach their business goals. According to ATHENA International, participants achieve an average 88.5 percent increase in sales, a 37.6 percent increase in business income and 56.6 percent increase in personal income after one year with the program.

For the program's first year in Baltimore, one woman-owned business will be selected to participate. A panel of professional advisors, chosen based on the specific needs and growth objectives of the selected business, will work with the business owner on her business goals at no charge for a year. The panel of advisors may include an attorney, accountant, banker and marketing or human resources specialist. The participant and panelists meet a minimum of once a quarter.

"Baltimore was lacking a business mentoring program of this caliber for women business owners, and we wanted to change that," said Laura Gamble, PNC Bank regional president in Greater Maryland. "As part of PNC's commitment to supporting women entrepreneurs, the introduction of ATHENAPowerLink® to Baltimore will link women to resources and advice that can make a measurable impact on their business and our local economy."

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PNC has a longstanding tradition of offering financial resources to women-owned businesses. Currently, more than 1,100 PNC-Certified Women’s Business Advocates in 19 states and the District of Columbia – including more than 50 in Greater Maryland – are actively engaged in supporting the achievement of female financial decision-makers.

Women entrepreneurs are the fastest-growing segment of U.S. small businesses. According to the National Women’s Business Council, Maryland (32.6%) ranks second among states with the highest percentage of women-owned companies and Baltimore (36.9%) ranks second among cities nationwide with the highest percentage of women-owned companies.

“I’m extremely pleased to be involved with this program as there are many opportunities for local women business owners, and with dedicated guidance and mentoring, more businesses will increase their growth capacity,” said Alvin Katz, Founder of Katz Abosch and ATHENAPowerLink® Baltimore Governing Body member. “Having heard the success stories from other communities, this should prove to be an exciting program that empowers Greater Baltimore women business owners and helps them aspire to new heights.”

Women business owners in Greater Maryland are invited to apply for the program. Applications will be accepted from September 22 through October 20, 2013. A Governing Body representing a diverse mix of Baltimore business leaders will administer the program and select one candidate for the 2014 program. The business will be chosen based on its potential to effectively benefit from the guidance of the advisory panel and ATHENAPowerLink’s® ability to assist the company’s growth. There is a \$250 program fee for the selected candidate. For additional information or to apply online, visit athenapowerlinkbaltimore.org.

To be considered for the ATHENAPowerLink® program, companies must:

- Be owned at least 51 percent by a woman
- Have been in operation for at least two years
- Have a minimum of two full-time employees
- Generate annual revenues of at least \$500,000 if in manufacturing or retail, or \$250,000 if a service business.
- Have clearly defined company objectives/goals with explicit reasons for seeking assistance through the program.

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