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## NEWS RELEASE

### Young Professionals Organization Marks Fifth Anniversary

GRAND RAPIDS – BL<sup>2</sup>END, Business Leaders Linked to Encourage New Directions, is heading in a new direction of its own next month with a gala celebration of its fifth anniversary on **Monday, August 15 at DeVos Place** in downtown Grand Rapids. **The innovative networking group was created to meet the needs of 21 to 35 year old young professionals of color in Greater Grand Rapids, but it quickly became a magnet for professionals of all ages, races and backgrounds.** The theme for the anniversary celebration is *Passion. Leadership. Legacy.* The anniversary committee selected the theme because BL<sup>2</sup>END started with the passion of its founders, grew with the diverse leadership of its volunteer board, community advisors and event participants, and is committed to creating a lasting legacy for future generations in Grand Rapids.

“BL<sup>2</sup>END is all about facilitating connections, building community, and making people of all walks of life feel welcome,” said Maxine Gray, executive board president and 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee co-chair. “We have worked so hard to keep BL<sup>2</sup>END going; it’s important to celebrate this five-year milestone.” Floriza Genautis, founder and CEO of Management Business Solutions, BL<sup>2</sup>END advisory council member and 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee co-chair says, “BL<sup>2</sup>END is a grassroots organization which has done an incredible job of creating social, professional and community outreach opportunities for participants, enriching the community, and adding value to the business case for diversity in an unprecedented way. The business community should support the organization as they take the time to reflect on a rich history of grassroots volunteerism and community collaboration, to ensure a future of strategic, sustainable growth.”



The anniversary event will feature a keynote address from Ingrid Jacobs, diversity and inclusion manager at Whirlpool Corporation. Ms. Jacobs is an experienced leader with excellent communication skills and a proven track record of managing and executing key strategic diversity initiatives. At Whirlpool, she is charged with implementing a corporate-wide inclusion initiative for 67,000 employees.

Ms. Jacobs will speak under the theme “To be a leader of the future, mediocrity simply won’t cut it.” Highlights of Ingrid’s address will include insights on the role of diversity and inclusion

in advancing workplace and business strategies domestically and abroad concept of diversity and inclusion, social media and young professionals, business resource groups, and proven ways to engage in networking with impact. Jacobs will also discuss importance of recruiting and retaining young, diverse talent to advance business strategies in the global marketplace, especially in geographic areas like

Greater Grand Rapids and West Michigan. Ms. Jacobs will also comment on how grassroots, nonprofit organizations like BL<sup>2</sup>END positively impact commerce and business, while helping us build better communities for all to live, work and play.

The anniversary celebration is presented by three event partners under the theme of *Passion. Leadership. Legacy.* As the *Leadership* partner for the event, Warner, Norcross & Judd, LLP will introduce Ms. Jacobs. As the *Legacy* partner, Varnum, LLP representatives will present awards based on the event theme. The *Passion* partner, Priority Health, will host the VIP reception before the event. Each event partner has generously committed financial support to the event at the \$7,500 level.

Table Partnerships are available and uniquely designed to facilitate a unique mixture of table partner guests and BL<sup>2</sup>END participants, to create an intentional atmosphere of networking. Three levels of Table Partnerships are available; *Access* (\$750), *Success* (\$1,000) and *Excellence* (\$1,250). Each Table Partnership includes event tickets and at least one ticket to the VIP reception. Businesses, organizations and individuals interested in Table Partnerships, should visit [www.grblend.org/five](http://www.grblend.org/five) for details.

“BL<sup>2</sup>END leaders represent the next generation after Civil Rights taking up our responsibility,” said Mercedes Barragan, 5th anniversary committee member, and board member, who co-leads the organization’s marketing and communications efforts. “We all have grown up with the powerful stories of generations past. BL<sup>2</sup>END leaders continue the work of generations that have followed the Civil Rights Era, taking up our responsibility to continue the progress they began.”

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Founded in August 2006, BL<sup>2</sup>END is a 501c7 nonprofit organization, led by young, passionate and innovative leaders of color who volunteer their time, treasure and talents. Guided by three strategic initiatives of professional development, community outreach and social networking, the organization creates monthly opportunities for young professionals of color between the ages of 21 and 35 to engage in Greater Grand Rapids, and invited professionals from throughout the community to join in. BL<sup>2</sup>END values collaboration, community, education, integrity and professionalism, and is committed to leading positive change in Greater Grand Rapids. Visit [www.grblend.org](http://www.grblend.org) for more information.

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