



Business Leaders Linked to Encourage New Directions
P.O. Box 3505
Grand Rapids, MI 49501

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 8, 2010

Maxine Gray
BL²END Professional Development Chair
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Farmers/Foremost Insurance sponsors BL²END professional development event featuring keynote speaker, Birgit Klohs, President & CEO, The Right Place, Inc.

Young professionals of color impacting the Greater Grand Rapids community

Grand Rapids, Michigan – BL²END is an acronym for *Business Leaders Linked to Encourage New Directions*, and is a grassroots organization focused on creating monthly event opportunities for young professionals of color between the ages of 21 to 35 to engage in the organization's three strategic initiatives of social networking, professional development and community outreach. The November event has a professional development focus and will take place on Tuesday, November 16 at 6:00 p.m. The event is hosted and sponsored by Farmers/Foremost Insurance, and will take place at 5600 Beech Tree Lane, Caledonia, MI 49316. 150 guests are registered to attend the event which is free and open to the public.

The 2010 professional development initiative theme is "Unconventional Leadership Experiences and Opportunities," and has provided timely, insightful information through the experiences of business and community leaders who have taken unconventional paths to careers in higher education, supplier diversity and economic development. The third and final professional development event of the year will feature a candid dialogue with Birgit Klohs, President & CEO of The Right Place, Inc., a regional economic development nonprofit organization. Birgit will engage participants in a dialogue about *A Life in Development*, and the educational, professional and community leadership experiences and opportunities which have shaped her life journey.

Kerri Popowich, Human Resources Business Partner at Farmers/Foremost Insurance, says *"At Farmers, we are excited to be hosting this professional development event with BL²END. I've been impressed by the level of energy and commitment of the BL²END participants! BL²END has opened doors for young professionals; especially young professionals of color, to jump start their careers. The participants are making a positive impact in the Grand Rapids area - making West Michigan an even better place to live and work. Birgit Klohs is a dynamic woman who has had a very successful career in West Michigan. The theme of her presentation should be of interest to those starting their own careers. As we complete our new buildings and prepare to hire more talented people, we hope members of BL²END will consider a career here at Farmers!"*

The Right Place, Inc. became a BL²END Charter Partner at the "Diversity Supporter" level this year, and joined an innovative group of pioneering organizations who are contributing to the financial stability of the organization. Tim Mroz, Vice President, Marketing and Communications at The Right Place, Inc., says *"We commend BL²END's work to create an environment in which young professionals, regardless of ethnicity, are able to make an impact in West Michigan."*



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About Birgit Klohs

Birgit Klohs is President & CEO of The Right Place, Inc. a regional economic development organization which promotes the economic growth of Greater Grand Rapids, Michigan. A native of Germany, Birgit graduated from Western Michigan University with a B.A. in Corporate Finance. She has served as President & CEO of The Right Place since 1987. She is a graduate of the Economic Development Institute of the University of Oklahoma; and completed the professional economic development finance program through the National Development Council. She also attended Harvard University's program on negotiation. Ms. Klohs is a frequent speaker at national and international economic development conferences and seminars. She has lectured in France, Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, China, Australia and Israel. She is involved in numerous local and state-wide activities.

About The Right Place

Serving West Michigan since 1985, The Right Place, Inc. is a regional non-profit economic development organization supported through investments from the private and public sector. Our mission is to promote wealth creation and economic growth in the areas of quality employment, productivity and innovation in West Michigan by developing jobs through leading business retention, expansion and attraction efforts. The Right Place believes a thriving West Michigan economy requires the commitment and engagement from a diverse range of voices. We're committed to creating an inclusive business culture in the region, where everyone's resources are recognized and used to achieve economic success.

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The mission of BL²END is to foster an environment of growth and belonging, where young professionals of color can connect with each other, develop professionally, and contribute to the local community. For more information regarding BL²END and upcoming monthly events, visit www.grblend.org.