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***Press Release  
For Immediate release  
Park Forest Application Wins National Growth Accelerator Fund Competition***

Contact: Linda McCants Pendleton  
South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association  
1904 W. 174th Street  
East Hazel Crest, IL 60429  
708-922-4680 / [linda.pendleton@ssmma.org](mailto:linda.pendleton@ssmma.org)  
[www.ssmma.org](http://www.ssmma.org)

EAST HAZEL CREST, IL (Sept. 9, 2014)— The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has selected the Park Forest Maker Space as one of 50 winners in the first ever nation-wide Growth Accelerator Fund competition, announced SBA Administrator Maria Contreras-Sweet at a press conference in Washington on Sept 5. In May, the SBA launched the \$2.5 million competition for accelerators and other entrepreneurial ecosystem models to compete for monetary prizes of \$50,000 each.

"The SBA is empowering accelerators and startups that are on the cutting edge of successful, innovative new endeavors," Contreras-Sweet said in a prepared statement. "We've seen the enormous success of the accelerator model in communities like Silicon Valley. We believe we can export this type of sophisticated support structure across the country to help start-ups become commercially viable and create jobs more quickly."

The Growth Accelerator Fund competition attracted 800 applications from across the country, and finalists were reviewed by a panel of experts in entrepreneurship, investing and business plans from both within the government and the private sector. Besides Park Forest, The Good Food Business Accelerator in Oak Park was the only other winner in Illinois.

Winners were selected by a panel of seven judges who are experts in entrepreneurship, investing and business plans both inside and out of the federal government. The judges reviewed the applications and pitch videos submitted by the 100 finalists in the competition. Please click [here](#) to view a video that Jason Miller of Park Forest produced and submitted to SBA as part of the final selection process

The Park Forest Maker Space incubator is a resource for local inventors, tinkerers, artisans, and students to learn about new ways of making things, and to realize their dreams of starting a business or qualifying for a good paying job at an existing manufacturer; and it is a catalyst for a regional collaboration intended to strengthen and expand the Chicago Southland's manufacturing base, train a skilled workforce, and create opportunities for innovations in the making of things.

The maker space incubator will hopefully be the catalyst for a larger hub and spoke network of Makers Spaces located throughout the Chicago Southland (tentatively named the Chicago Southland Makers Lab Network). In order to create the first Maker Space, the project team will partner with Jim Newton, Founder and Chairman of TechShop, Inc., to create a prototype for a smaller version of a full-sized TechShop. Read more about TechShops [here](#). The initial “TechShop STEM Center” will be located in a 1,000 square foot space in downtown Park Forest, and include equipment such as a computer-controlled laser cutter, a computer-controlled 3-D printer, a computer-controlled desktop CNC router, and support equipment including computers, hand tools, hand-held power tools, and electronics equipment, as well as trained staff to supervise and instruct users.

Each organization will receive a cash prize of \$50,000 from the SBA. The purpose of the competition was to draw attention and funding to parts of the country where there are gaps in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The SBA is going to honor the winners at a “Fly-In” day in Washington, D.C. in November during National Entrepreneurship Month, in partnership with the Global Accelerator Network.

“Innovation and creativity are critical to advancing manufacturing in the United States,” said Herman Brewer, Bureau Chief of the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development. “A Maker’s Lab in Park Forest - and eventually a network of Maker’s Labs in the Southland area - will offer valuable experiential learning opportunities in design, prototyping, and small-batch manufacturing for students, entrepreneurs, and job seekers. I am confident that this project will stimulate economic growth and generate renewed enthusiasm for manufacturing by supporting a creative and hands-on environment in which new technology can be explored and learned.”

The South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association sends congratulations and thanks to all who helped contribute to this winning application including: The Village of Park Forest, the Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation (CSEDC), the Chicago Southland Housing and Community Development Collaborative, Cook County, the Manufacturing Communities Partnership (IMCP), OAI, Inc., the Calumet Green Manufacturing Partnership, BRicK Partners LLC, the South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium (SMHEC) and the State of Illinois. And most of all, we thank the Small Business Administration for presenting this outstanding opportunity.

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SSMMA  
1904 W. 174th Street  
East Hazel Crest, IL 6042  
SSMMA.org  
708-206-1155