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Press Contact: Elizabeth Neukirch | The Silverman Group, Inc.
815.751.5844 | elizabeth@silvermangroupchicago.com

Illinois SBDC at Rogers Park Business Alliance extends program to assist diverse small businesses on Chicago's north side and overcome "digital divide" through September 2021

Plus, GROW/PROGRESANDO 10-week entrepreneurial training from Rogers Park Business Alliance begins in April, providing classes in English and Spanish

CHICAGO (March 11, 2021)—The **Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC)** at the nonprofit **Rogers Park Business Alliance (RPBA)** is extending its small business assistance program, the Business Accessibility Toolkit (BAT), through September 30, 2021. BAT expands the SBDC's existing no-cost assistance to help small businesses in historically underserved, diverse and multilingual communities on Chicago's north side. The program provides critical resources, training and one-on-one consultations from subject matter experts, all at no cost to participating businesses—including helping businesses overcome the "digital divide" exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as they are forced to operate in an increasingly online marketplace.

"Due to the impact of the pandemic, small businesses need our help now more than ever," said Sandi Price, executive director of Rogers Park Business Alliance. "We're proud to be an advocate for diverse and bilingual businesses across Rogers Park and the north side of Chicago, and to be able to expand our no-cost assistance and consultations for these businesses at such a critical time. We encourage businesses that are struggling to reach out, so we can offer personalized and impactful solutions that will get them through this difficult time."

Since launching BAT in the fall of 2020, RPBA has worked with 16 diverse small businesses, providing expert consulting services in English and Spanish at no cost for training related to technology literacy, digital marketing, website development, business operations assessments, legal assistance, and access to small business loans and grants. For more information on the Business Accessibility Toolkit program, visit www.rpba.org/business-accessibility-toolkit.

The BAT program is funded in part through the CARES Act and a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration and the state of Illinois' Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

"What we're seeing is that the pandemic has exposed a 'digital divide' that puts small business owners at a disadvantage," said Rebeca Fernández, bilingual program manager of Rogers Park Business Alliance. "Many diverse businesses are not used to running their operations virtually or transacting online with customers. Through our no-cost consultations, we teach business owners how to move forward in this new digital environment and give them the skills they need to thrive in the future."

Additionally, RPBA's ten-session **GROW/PROGRESANDO** entrepreneurial training programs begin online starting Tuesday, April 6 (Spanish language) and Wednesday, April 7 (English language). For more information, visit www.grow-progresando.org.

GROW/PROGRESANDO is the only comprehensive small business training program of its kind on the north side of Chicago. Rogers Park Business Alliance launched its first GROW entrepreneurial training program in 2013 and expanded to GROW/PROGRESANDO in 2020, offering both English- and Spanish-language courses. Its curriculum is highly interactive and includes basic business knowledge, specialty subject education, and technical and specialty assistance consultations. GROW/PROGRESANDO is led by RPBA's staff who, along with leading business, education, marketing and legal experts, deliver a comprehensive program with the goal of each participant developing a personalized, comprehensive and implementable business plan.

About the Illinois Small Business Development Center at Rogers Park Business Alliance

Through the support of the U. S. Small Business Administration and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Illinois SBDC at Rogers Park Business Alliance opened for business in January 2020. It is part of a nationwide network of centers that promote entrepreneurship, small business growth and the U.S. economy through no-cost, confidential advising for established small businesses and entrepreneurs.

About Rogers Park Business Alliance

Rogers Park Business Alliance (RPBA) is a nonprofit organization that has served Chicago's diverse Rogers Park neighborhood for more than 25 years. RPBA works to cultivate and sustain a thriving economic environment in Rogers Park, serving businesses and residents with a variety of public events and business initiatives. RPBA programs include the GROW/PROGRESANDO entrepreneurial training program, annual Best of Rogers Park awards, Taste of Clark Street and Chalk Howard Street festivals, and the Glenwood Sunday Market farmers market. For more information, visit RPBA.org.

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