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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Erie, Pennsylvania – August 26th, 2021

The Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator Builds a Supportive Ecosystem to Launch and Grow Black Businesses

Bridgeway Capital has graduated 10 entrepreneurs from the program and welcomes 7 entrepreneurs for its 3rd cohort, beginning in late August 2021.

The Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator, led by Bridgeway Capital and financed by the Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority (ECGRA), has been valuable for early-stage entrepreneurs as they navigate the pandemic. During a time of uncertainty, the Accelerator program offered a supportive space to develop, test, and launch new business ventures with a trusted network of advisors and peers.

Sierra Williams, a graduate of the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator, came into the program with a dream she's had since junior high school to open a children's boutique where Erie parents could find affordable and stylish clothes. Through the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator, she was able to turn that dream into a reality to launch Star Kids Boutique. The program helped her pivot to consider changing market conditions and adapt her business model to incorporate an online retail store in response to the pandemic.

"Participating in the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator took my business to the next level. The access to professional mentors and workshops on marketing and business strategy helped me build the brand and bottom line of Star Kids Boutique," said Sierra Williams, Owner of Star Kids Boutique.

In the nine-month program, Sierra worked alongside fellow entrepreneurs and learned vital concepts that would help them succeed, such as customer discovery, market validation, and financial management. The program's business coaching sessions fostered meaningful relationships that Sierra maintains to this day. Now, Sierra's Star Kids Boutique is a growing online retailer poised to serve Erie in style.

"Star Kids Boutique is just one of the exciting new minority- and Black-owned businesses bolstered by the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator," said Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA. "ECGRA's investment is helping unlock access to resources that support emerging entrepreneurs."

The accelerator has graduated 10 entrepreneurs from the program and welcomes 7 entrepreneurs to begin the program in late August 2021. Participants will engage in nine months of extensive mentoring and one-on-one tailored assistance focused on business planning and strategy.

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“The business support offered by the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator was there for entrepreneurs at a crucial time during the pandemic when communities of color faced barriers in accessing resources to sustain small businesses. As the pandemic evolves and businesses are looking to reposition and grow, the Erie-Minority Business Accelerator will be there again for entrepreneurs to welcome its 3rd cohort,” says Cathryn Easterling, Director of Bridgeway Capital’s Erie Office.

The supportive ecosystem the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator provides comes at a time when increased business ownership is needed to help communities recover from the pandemic. Bridgeway looks forward to working with this next cohort of entrepreneurs to help them build successful businesses that strengthen Erie.

Introducing the 3rd COHORT

- Terri Pacley, **Galaxy Beyond Walls Childcare**
- Julie Barry, **JMB & Associates**
- Natika Lofton, **Beautiful Kurve LLC**
- Juanita Smith, **The Lamad Group LLC**
- Sharonda Jones, **Blink with Flyness**
- Caraneesha Morris, **Xstrawdonairy Treats**
- Starla Speed Starocci, **StarBerry's Juice Box Fresh Fruit Smoothies**

To learn more about the Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator, visit Bridgeway Capital’s website www.bridgewaycapital.org/entrepreneurship-hub/erie-minority-owned-business-accelerator/.

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About the Minority-Owned Business Accelerator at Bridgeway Capital

The Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator seeks driven entrepreneurs of color that are ready to set a vision for business growth and take action to achieve it. The 9-month accelerator program selects entrepreneurs to learn as a cohort, build their networks, and develop plans for business growth. Seminars and networking events focus on customer discovery, market validation, financial management, business development, and professional network development.

Bridgeway Capital

Since 1990, Bridgeway has been at the forefront of community and economic development in western Pennsylvania. We work to combat injustices and advance opportunities by building capacity, investing capital, and developing underserved areas to grow businesses and revitalize places. Bridgeway is a nonprofit and Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) certified by the U.S. Treasury Department. For more information, visit www.bridgewaycapital.org.

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