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Subject: BIG Council helps Charlotte-area companies navigate stormy economy

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BIG Council helps Charlotte-area companies navigate stormy economy

by Fred Tannenbaum

Dolan Media Newswires

CHARLOTTE, NC -- Like the reassuring signal from a lighthouse in stormy seas, the Business Innovation & Growth Council is sponsoring an event Tuesday to guide entrepreneurs through today's business challenges.

BIG, which supports fast-growing Charlotte-area companies, is partnering with PlazaBridge, a Raleigh consulting firm that helps entrepreneurs grow and raise investments. They will host "How to Navigate Through This Tough Economy" on Feb. 24 from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Global Medical Imaging, 222 Rampart St. in Charlotte's South End.

The event will feature three two-hour sessions, starting at 8:30 a.m., 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. In each session, up to five small business owners will pose questions and seek advice from a panel of four experts.

The goal is to facilitate a discussion about strategies and experiences in the current economy, said Terry Cox, president and CEO of the BIG Council.

Panelists include:

* John Owens, CEO of Charlotte-based AmeriTrust Equity Services, one of the country's largest privately-held mortgage banks.

* Taffy Williams, CEO of Colonial Technology Development Co. in Concord, who serves as a consultant to small- and medium-sized biotech companies.

* Teresa Spangler, managing partner of PlazaBridge.

* Terry Cox of BIG.

Organizers hope attendees will leave the event knowing how to help their companies survive and even thrive during the next few months, hear solutions to top challenges from other entrepreneurs, receive advice on weathering tough times, and learn about funding trends and growth resources.

The event could benefit companies that are doing well as well as those that may be struggling, Cox said. It's just as important to ask advice before something goes wrong, she pointed out.

"Clearly, we haven't hit the bottom of the market yet," Cox said. "There's a tremendous amount of uncertainty right now. Staying in the game right now will ensure you're going to be in good shape when this is over."

Williams describes the forum as a "real-time, get-me-out-of-this" event. Companies that can hang on now by cutting costs will be in terrific shape when the economy improves, he said.

Money to support growth has become scarce now that banks and investors are afraid to take lending risks, Williams said. To get around that, some of the biotech companies he advises are funding themselves by earning research grants. Other companies are surviving by partnering with larger corporations.

Now is the perfect time for a company to clear up its finances, "make sure you're whistle-clean" and take care of your customers, Spangler said.

"Don't lose your customer base, because everyone's out there trying to get them," she said. Spaces are limited.

More information is available from Cox at terry@bigcouncil.com.

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