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## Mercy Corps Northwest and the Portland Business Alliance Join Forces to Support Emerging Small Business Owners

*Partnership to foster engagement of small business entrepreneurs in Portland business community*

Portland, Ore. – Mercy Corps Northwest (MCNW) and the Portland Business Alliance (the Alliance) have formed a new partnership to help 10 emerging small business owners grow their companies. MCNW and the Alliance will each provide the business owners with a number of resources that together will enable the business owners to increase their network of contacts, provide the financial support to expand their companies and strengthen their management and marketing skills.

“Mercy Corps Northwest works with low-income and traditionally underserved populations such as immigrants, minorities, women etc. to achieve economic self-sufficiency via small business ownership,” said Brian Fassett, Loan Officer with MCNW. “We’re hoping this partnership will allow micro-entrepreneurs who otherwise may not be able to join the Alliance due to their financial constraints become engaged in and contribute to the Portland-area business community.”

“Small businesses are the foundation of not only our region’s economy but our nation’s economy, which is why this new partnership with Mercy Corps Northwest will help us reach emerging small business owners and give them the support they need to succeed,” said Sam Brooks, Chair of the Portland Business Alliance.

Currently, six low-income small business entrepreneurs are enrolled in the program with four more to join in the coming months. The program includes:

- Discounted Alliance membership for the first three years of membership;
- Waived or discounted Alliance event registration fees; and
- Commitment by the participating business owners to participate in Alliance programming.

Through Alliance networking events and professional development-focused meetings, participants will be able to expand their business contacts and identify new ways to market their goods and/or services. MCNW will also conduct a study on the impact of its clients’ memberships in the Alliance.

Listed below are brief descriptions of the participating business owners.

[Anna Cohen](#). Anna Cohen strives to “be on the forefront of moving both fashion design and the global fashion industry toward more sustainable practices that support environmental and social justice through creating cutting edge fashion apparel using globally responsible business practices.” She achieves this by creating clothes that are 75% sustainable and are described as “Italian Street Couture.” To learn more, visit <http://www.annacohen.com/>.

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Big Blue Janitorial. Charleen and Julian Martinez own and operate Big Blue Janitorial, a janitorial cleaning business based in Sherwood, Oregon that is environmentally sensitive. They focus on commercial, residential and industrial as well as pre- and post move-in move-out services. They specialize in window cleaning and stripping, waxing and buffing floors as well as re-finishing wood floors. To learn more, visit [www.bigbluejanitorial.com](http://www.bigbluejanitorial.com).

Champion Enterprises. Ramiro and Kelly Diaz are the owners of Style Cleaners in Wilsonville, Oregon. They purchased the business in May 2007 after having run their own dry cleaning delivery service. Ramiro has worked in dry cleaning for a number of years. They are planning to offer “organic” dry cleaning and being bilingual, they cater to both the English and Spanish speaking populations in the area.

Jennie Greene Designs. Jennie Richardson operates her flower design business out of a unique space on Northwest 23<sup>rd</sup> Street in Portland. There she creates bouquets for regular clients, special events, holidays and weddings. She also teaches floral design classes. Jennie is famous for her unconventional design techniques that focus on form and space. She has been known to include such things as green apples or ripe strawberries in her floral arrangements.

Spielwerk. Sonja Barclay and Stacey Wion own and operate their educational and community toy store in Sellwood, Oregon. Their toys and “werkshops” focus on cooperative, imaginative play that help children develop a sense of “responsibility and compassion for human and environmental community.” To learn more, visit [www.spielwerk.net](http://www.spielwerk.net).

Whiteley and McCloskey Construction. Seth Whiteley and his business partner Kevin McCloskey operate a residential construction and remodeling business in Northeast Portland. They specialize in professional contracting and renovation services and are both licensed contractors.

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### ***About Mercy Corps Northwest***

*Mercy Corps Northwest is the U.S. economic development office of Mercy Corps, the Portland-based international relief and development agency. Globally Mercy Corps works amid disasters, conflicts, chronic poverty and instability to unleash the potential of people who can win against nearly impossible odds. Since 1998 MCNW has supported the development of low-income small businesses, promoting self-sufficiency, healthy communities and contributing to the regional economy.*

### ***About the Portland Business Alliance***

*The Portland Business Alliance is Greater Portland’s Chamber of Commerce and represents more than 1,300 businesses in the greater Portland region, representing more than 325,000 business people in Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas and Yamhill counties in Oregon and Clark County in Washington. The Alliance is dedicated to providing value to our members and working in partnership with other organizations to build a vibrant Central City and regional economy.*

