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Fellow Role Model Jennifer Rizzotti Headlines Recognition Breakfast Highlighting Business Support for Youth Mentoring

EAST HARTFORD, CT—As role model to players and fans, University of Hartford women's head basketball coach Jennifer Rizzotti urged Connecticut's business community to take a larger role in preparing our students for a successful future at a recognition Wednesday of businesses that support youth mentoring.

The Governor's Prevention Partnership, which leads the state's network of mentoring programs, honored 111 businesses at its "Innovations in Mentoring" breakfast. Ranging from Fortune 500 corporations to small businesses, these businesses mentor students in more than 40 communities. They earned the recognition as business leaders in mentoring by providing employees release time from work to volunteer as mentors, who often include top managers. Many of the companies have formed mentoring alliances with local schools or school districts.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell, who co-chairs The Partnership, said that mentoring plays a crucial role in preparing youth for the highly skilled workforce and that Connecticut needs to stay globally competitive.

"Connecticut's economic vitality depends on the success of our students to develop the skills necessary to thrive in a knowledge-and innovation-based economy," she said. "The recognition that these companies and their employees are receiving today for their investment in mentoring is well deserved. Volunteering their time, resources, knowledge and experience to guide a child on the path to success in school and in life is a noble and important endeavor - important not only for the future of our young people but our economy's future as well."

Serving as honorary chair of the recognition event, Rizzotti spoke of the impact that mentors and coaches made in her life, and the responsibility she feels to give back by helping young people develop their talents and abilities. Rizzotti won legions of fans as point guard on the first University of Connecticut women's basketball team to win a national championship. She went on to a successful professional career before taking the head coach position with the University of Hartford Hawks.

"I believe that mentoring is my responsibility as a woman, a basketball coach, and a known figure in the community," Rizzotti said. "My goal is to share my enthusiasm so that those I teach are excited about what they are doing. If everyone can take some accountability to share their expertise, their time or their money, the future of our youth will be very bright."

With all the challenges that the United States is facing, Carlos Figueroa, director of acquisition/university relations at Travelers, stated that this is no time to step back from mentoring. Travelers, which has been a longtime supporter of mentoring in the state and runs a one-on-one tutoring program in Hartford, sponsored Wednesday's recognition.

"Travelers believes in the important work of The Governor's Prevention Partnership, including its support and assistance to mentoring programs throughout the state to increase and sustain the number of matches," Figueroa said. "Like The Partnership, we are committed to building a strong workforce for

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tomorrow and know that mentoring is an important component contributing to young people achieving academically and successfully entering college and the work force. Students benefit and employees develop a sense of pride in knowing that they are helping to shape the future of a child.”

President Barack Obama last week signed a national bill vastly expanding the AmeriCorps program. Mentoring is among the areas of volunteerism that the bill targets.

Wednesday’s recognition event also highlighted innovative ways that companies and their employees are participating in mentoring. At East Hartford Middle School, Pratt & Whitney employees are helping students develop a keen understanding of math, science and technology through “The Quest to Fly” program, created by The Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology. In Bridgeport, Wi-mentor, run by the United Way of Coastal Fairfield County, connects professionals from area businesses to public high school students through e-mail. Employees at Waterbury Hospital have mentored one school’s entire ninth-grade class as part of the Smaller Learning Communities program.

Jill Spinetti, president of The Partnership, said that numerous studies have shown that children who have mentors are more likely to get better grades, stay away from high-risk behaviors like drugs or gangs, and continue their education.

“The result of our combined efforts will be stronger mentoring programs, more mentors and hundreds of more Connecticut youth benefiting from having a caring adult – a mentor – as a positive influence in their lives,” Spinetti said.

Celebrating 20 years with a focus on Connecticut’s youth, The Governor’s Prevention Partnership is a statewide public-private alliance, building a strong, healthy future workforce through leadership in mentoring and prevention of violence, underage drinking, alcohol and drug abuse.

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*Keeping Connecticut’s youth safe, successful and drug-free today
for a stronger workforce tomorrow*