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**WMEF increases its capability to foster economic opportunities
in Western Massachusetts by adding new staff.**

Holyoke, Mass – The Western Massachusetts Enterprise Fund, Inc. (WMEF) is expanding its service team and has added two professionals in their respective fields. This move to expand its team was sparked by marked increases in demand for tailored financing and technical assistance services to business owners and entrepreneurs as they face new challenges in a difficult economy.

“We are delighted to have a community development team with such a strong and diverse background. These individuals bring assets to our team that are essential to creating and supporting economic opportunities, as well as young and emerging industries vital to the prosperity of Western Massachusetts and its residents” commented Christopher Sikes, Executive Director and Founder of WMEF.

Laurie C. Breitner, Lender, has worked in corporate management, consulting and education since 1977 in a wide range of settings. Breitner has helped clients in insurance, financial services, pharmaceuticals, shipping, manufacturing, retail, education, the arts, and community service. As a WMEF Lender, Breitner will work directly with partner organizations to develop customized business training and support services for Western Massachusetts business owners and entrepreneurs. In addition, Breitner will work closely with applicants to ensure well thought out business plans, coordination with business partners who may also be providing business support and underwriting financing requests. To ensure success, Breitner will also work with the borrower through the life of the loan.

Natalie N. Georges, Marketing/Grant Writer, has over ten years of marketing experience focused on branding, communications, product management, and resource development. Georges has worked with local, national and international corporations, and not-for-profit organizations to find innovative approaches to connect with targeted audiences. Georges will work to strengthen the WMEF brand throughout the community, as well as across Massachusetts and nationally in an effort to shed light on the impact of the work WMEF and its partners are doing in community development. In addition, Georges will work with WMEF staff, business partners and other community organizations, to secure additional funding and business development resources.

Mission: The Western Massachusetts Enterprise Fund, Inc. is a private nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution working to strengthen communities by creating economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income people in western and central Massachusetts.