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Five Small Businesses Seek to Improve Local Communities through Synchrony Financial Working Forward Small Business Awards

Winners of inaugural award program to receive \$20,000 each for business growth and community improvement

STAMFORD, Conn.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- Five small businesses today were announced as winners of the *Working Forward Small Business Awards*, a program launched by Synchrony Financial in September to recognize the big impact small businesses have in their communities.

This Smart News Release features multimedia. View the full release here:

<http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20161121005133/en/>

Over the next several weeks, the winners in Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Washington will each be awarded \$20,000 by Synchrony Financial; half of the award will go toward growing their business and half for bettering their local community.

The contest, which ran through October 20, builds on Synchrony Financial's commitment to small businesses. Contest entrants – partners of Synchrony Financial's Payment Solutions business platform with less than 30 full-time, year-round employees – were asked to submit responses to questions including: What makes their business unique and why customers choose to do business with them; their greatest challenge; the impact \$10,000 would have on their business; and how they would use \$10,000 to make their community a better place to live, work or play.

Synchrony Financial, which partners with thousands of small businesses nationwide to offer financing programs for their customers, finds many companies don't have access to resources they may need to grow. At the same time, these businesses are frequently asked to support local initiatives and community projects through sponsorships, donations and volunteerism – sometimes at great expense. The award gives these winners the unique opportunity to invest in strengthening both their business and their community.

Synchrony financial received more than 1,100 entries in just six weeks, and a panel of judges determined the winners based on the criteria outlined in the [Contest Official Rules](#). The winners, which represent a spectrum of Synchrony Financial partners, are:

- **Country Stitches, Ltd., East Lansing, Michigan.** Owners Anita Covert, Ann Covert Fuller and Brian Ladson plan to use the award money to improve their sewing business' website and social media presence to keep up with rapid changes in digital commerce. To improve their community, they want to assist in an annual project this

winter that provides quilts for the homeless and veterans. The quilt project also helps refugee women in the community learn how to sew, a skill that can help them provide clothing for their families and build self-esteem.

- **Bryson City Bicycles**, *Bryson City, North Carolina*. Owner Diane Cutler plans to use the award money to establish an e-commerce platform for her bicycle shop, allowing customers to shop online. To improve her community, she plans to purchase a fleet of mountain bikes for the local high school, where many families cannot afford bicycles, as part of an outdoor recreation program.
- **Cincinnati Transmission Specialists**, *Cincinnati, Ohio*. Owner Richard Lamping plans to use the award money to provide new equipment and training to his staff and technicians at the automotive repair center to help them stay ahead of advances in technology. To improve his community, Lamping wants to put the award money toward a nonprofit foundation he recently established, The Lamplight of Hope, which raises money and necessities for families affected by illness, disability and other hardships. Lamping wants to establish a resource storehouse with medical equipment and household goods available to families in need.
- **Cliff's Carpet One**, *Latrobe, Pennsylvania*. Owners Kristy and Kevin Ridilla plan to use the award money to rebrand their business to "Cliff's Flooring Solutions" to more accurately reflect the many floor coverings offered there. To improve their community, the Ridillas want to donate their award winnings to a local center that helps babies born addicted to drugs. The center provides support, care and counseling for the babies, and their mothers.
- **Downtown Auto Specialists**, *Spokane, Washington*. Owner Ken Wanless plans to use the award to purchase equipment and provide training for employees to keep up with rapid changes in technology. Additionally, Wanless wants to remodel the store's waiting and reception area to reflect his dedication to state-of-the-art technology. To improve his community, Wanless wants to establish a scholarship fund for children of fallen service members from a nearby military base that would allow them to learn a skilled trade, such as auto repair or plumbing.

"We were so moved by the response to this contest, and by the passion that our partners have in wanting to make a positive impact on the people in the communities where they do business," said Glenn Marino, executive vice president and CEO, Payment Solutions, Synchrony Financial. "These stories were inspiring, and truly shined a bright light on the importance of small businesses in local communities and the commitment these owners have to improving lives, a value also shared by Synchrony Financial in our Purpose Statement. We applaud not only the winners, but small businesses everywhere that are quietly making a difference. Congratulations to these business owners; we hope the award helps their business grow and stay relevant for years to come."

About Synchrony Financial

Synchrony Financial (NYSE:[SYF](#)) is one of the nation's premier consumer financial services companies. Our roots in consumer finance trace back to 1932, and today we are the largest provider of private label credit cards in the United States based on purchase volume and receivables.* We provide a range of credit products through programs we have established with a diverse group of national and regional retailers, local merchants, manufacturers,

buying groups, industry associations and healthcare service providers to help generate growth for our partners and offer financial flexibility to our customers. Through our partners' over 350,000 locations across the United States and Canada, and their websites and mobile applications, we offer our customers a variety of credit products to finance the purchase of goods and services. Synchrony Financial offers private label and co-branded Dual Card™ credit cards, promotional financing and installment lending, loyalty programs and FDIC-insured savings products through Synchrony Bank. More information can be found at www.synchronyfinancial.com, facebook.com/SynchronyFinancial, www.linkedin.com/company/synchrony-financial and twitter.com/SYFNews.

* Source: The Nilson Report (May 2016, Issue # 1087) – based on 2015 data.

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Editor's Note: Photos of winners available upon request.

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Synchrony Financial

Cristy Williams, 855-791-8007

media.relations@synchronyfinancial.com

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