J. Paul Austin Selected as the 2007 Distinguished Leadership Award Recipient

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Leadership Michigan, a program of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, is pleased to announce its 2007 Distinguished Leadership Award recipient, J. Paul Austin. He will be honored at the Annual Leadership Dinner on October 25, 2007 at the Air Zoo in Kalamazoo.

The Michigan Chamber Foundation's Leadership Michigan program established the Distinguished Leadership Award in 2005 to honor individuals who have demonstrated excellence in leadership and exemplify the goals and aspirations of Leadership Michigan. Leadership Michigan has graduated over 400 professionals since its start in 1988. Jim Epolito received the inaugural award in 2005 and Patrick L. Anderson received it in 2006.

Austin was selected because of his exceptional leadership qualities; his achievement in both professional and civic activities; his ability to create and articulate a vision and effect change; and his significant contribution to the development of future leaders. He is a graduate of the Leadership Michigan class of 1992.

"Paul is a rare man who checks his ego at the door," said Kathy Elston and Ron Wood, who nominated Austin for this award. "He is a greatly respected man who inspires loyalty." Adds Marianne Udow, who supported Austin's nomination, "Paul is an engaged and inspiring leader who is both a role model with regard to leadership attributes and an advocate for good leadership among others." Karl Albrecht also supported Austin's nomination and said that "he leads with a sincere honesty and a human touch. To me that makes him a distinguished leader."

Austin has distinguished himself at both the professional and personal level. He has been a Senior Vice President for 12 years at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan directing more than 2,500 employees for eight years and now serving as the company's Chief Actuarial Officer. Under his leadership, the corporation has met its financial, membership, and customer satisfaction goals. "Paul builds respectful relationships and is highly engaged with people and the business, both internally and externally," said Elston and Wood. In addition, Austin has been involved in political campaigns and contributes to many candidates. He has led both the corporate United Way and American Heart Walk campaigns and donates generously, both with his time and money, to the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Habitat for Humanity. "Paul's passion for his professional and civic activities is driven by the philosophy of doing the right things right every day," said Elston and Wood. "It is a motto he lives by through his actions." Paul and his wife Ann have five children and seven grandchildren.

"We are very pleased to recognize Mr. Austin's outstanding achievement in leadership and to provide one more example of what excellence in leadership means," said Aimee Bahs, Director of the Leadership Michigan program. "Mr. Austin is obviously a man of principle, who leads with honesty and integrity. His efforts have positively impacted a number of individuals, organizations and causes across Michigan. We are delighted to be able to identify such a leader and provide him with the recognition he deserves."

The crystal award will be presented to Austin at the Annual Leadership Dinner on Thursday, October 25, 2007 at the Air Zoo in Kalamazoo from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. Melanie Bergeron, CEO of Two Men And A Truck is the keynote speaker. Please visit www.michamber.com and click on Leadership Michigan for details on the Annual Leadership Dinner and to register.

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