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Eight Connecticut Companies Earn ‘Connect-Ability’ Top Employer Status for Removing Workplace Barriers

*Annual Employment Summit Discusses Promoting People with
Disabilities and the Changing Workforce*

HARTFORD, Conn., (June 12, 2008) -- Governor M. Jodi Rell and the state’s Connect-Ability initiative recognized eight companies as recipients of the second annual Connect-Ability Top Employer Awards at its annual employment summit, attended today by over 400 employers, workers and advocates for citizens with disabilities.

Governor Rell joined Department of Social Services Commissioner Michael P. Starkowski and Brenda Moore, director of DSS Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, to deliver Connect-Ability Top Employer Awards to **AETNA, Deloitte LLP, Pfizer** and **Mohegan Sun** for their leadership and accomplishments in removing barriers to hiring and promoting people with disabilities.

The group also bestowed Special Recognition Honors upon **Valassis, Henkel, The Travelers Insurance Company** and **ING** for their continued dedication to workforce diversity, which includes people with disabilities.

“You are helping to build and strengthen our economy,” Governor Rell told the coalition of employers, workers and advocates. “We know that a diversified workforce means a stronger, more resilient work force. And a more resilient workforce means greater opportunity for economic growth – for individuals and families, for businesses and for our entire state. You are taking the lead right

now in developing more opportunities for our citizens and in breaking down barriers. By doing so, you are also helping us make Connecticut's workplace the most inclusive in the nation."

Commissioner Starkowski underscored the Connect-Ability theme of 'See the ability—see how we can work together.'

"The summit and our employer recognition is a great example of how Connecticut is bringing together employers and the abilities of all job-holders and job-seekers. We've made great progress over the year, starting with state agencies themselves. Governor Rell has encouraged agency heads to do all we can to make and plan accommodations for employees with disabilities, and make our workplace practices as inclusive as possible."

The Top Employer Award recognizes the kinds of efforts the initiative is encouraging among companies and organizations statewide.

"These Top Employers are shaping the way we should see the abilities of our Connecticut residents," said Ms. Moore, the rehabilitation services director. "By recognizing and sharing the best practices currently in place we hope we can encourage employers statewide to learn more about recruiting, hiring and retaining employees with disabilities in a changing workforce."

Connect-Ability Top Employer Award recipients were nominated by peers, employees, the companies themselves and from the Department of Social Services Bureau of Rehabilitation Services. Examples of efforts made by Connect-Ability Top Employers include:

- Collaboration with Connect-ability in designing and developing on-line employer and co-worker toolkits.
- Commuting arrangements for people who do not drive.
- Selection by Diversity Inc.'s Top Ten Companies for people with disabilities
- Creation of a CT Chapter of the Abilities First Business Resource Group
- Membership in the CT Business Leadership Network
- Participation in job fairs that include people with any disability.

- Inclusion of a diverse workforce within internal publications and established internal website network groups for raising awareness for people with disabilities
- Work with Connect-Ability and Agencies such as the Board of Education and Services for the Blind, New Beginnings for Life, Easter Seals, Southeastern Employment Services and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services to ensure finding employees with the right skills to do the job.

The annual Employment Summit agenda featured a review of achievements during the past year including the launch of a new employer toolkit, (accessible by visiting www.connect-ability.com/employertoolkit), two new commercials and online videos highlighting hidden disabilities, a youth blog and recognition of 10 organizations and non-profit agencies that received funding of up to \$200,000 each for the development and implementation of local-level strategic plans.

The Employment Summit, organized by the DSS Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, is part of the Connect-Ability initiative, a statewide effort to facilitate connections between employers and people with disabilities and put their focus on ability.

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Connect-Ability is a federally-funded initiative connecting Connecticut employers with the state's talent pool of people with disabilities. Connect-Ability is intended to open minds by helping employers see the ability, not the disability. The initiative is bringing together more resources than ever to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Addressing the fundamental barriers to employment, it is one of the first initiatives of its kind in the nation and a model for other states planning similar efforts. Connect-Ability is funded by a four-year federal grant from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and managed by the Connecticut Department of Social Services. Visit at **www.Connect-Ability.com** or call toll-free **1-866-844-1903**.