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## **Local Entrepreneurs, Lisa Johnson and Farzad Shamsavarani, Inducted into the Chicago Area Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame**

**CHICAGO, March 2, 2009** – On March 19, 2009, Chicago residents, Lisa Johnson and Farzad Shamsavarani, will be inducted into the Chicago Area Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame. Farzad and Lisa, founders of Gourmet Kitchens, Inc. (GKI), are being recognized for their entrepreneurial achievements and making a lasting impact on Chicago's business landscape. The Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago will host the event at the Chicago Hilton and Towers.

Husband and wife team, Farzad and Lisa founded GKI as a corporate catering company in 1989 with only 7 employees. With a flexible, innovative business plan, GKI began making fresh food for retail in 2001 when the economy slowed. This new focus created a thriving company. Now with over 300 employees, GKI achieved over \$40 million in sales last year. GKI's extensive growth is due to Lisa and Farzad's innovative and optimistic management which includes traveling around the world to research future trends in products, packaging and machinery.

"As an entrepreneur, you pour your life into making your business succeed, so it is a great honor to be recognized by the Chicago Area Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame and the Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies," said Lisa. "In tough economic times like these, it's nice to be a part of a positive event and news story that lets current and future entrepreneurs understand that they can make it with hard work and perseverance."

Gourmet Kitchens, Inc. is a fresh food manufacturer on Chicago's Nearwest side. GKI's value-driven prepared meals, salads and other fresh products are sold to retailers nationwide under private labels or the Last Minute Gourmet® brand. Lisa and Farzad started GKI as a way to help consumers prepare good, quality food with no artificial ingredients at economical prices. Each recipe is tasted by Lisa and Farzad, so they stand behind their motto of never making any product they wouldn't be proud to serve their own friends and family.

The 2009 Chicago Area Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame Class also includes:

- **Aurora, Ill.**
  - James A. Sikich, CPA, CEO, Sikich, LLP
- **Burr Ridge, Ill.**
  - John Malec, Founder, Information Resources, Inc. and CEO TAP.tv, Inc.
- **Carol Stream, Ill.**
  - Edward K. Miller, Owner, Prince Industries & Prince Shanghai
- **Chicago, Ill.**
  - Mark Youngberg, President, AAA Painting Contractors
  - Brian K. Barkley, CEO, Access One, Inc.
  - Mark A. Jozwiak, President, Access One Inc.
  - Robin Beaman, President, Beaman Inc.
  - Marc Schulman, President, Eli's Cheesecake Company
  - Colleen Kramer, President, Evergreen Supply Company
  - Kevin Chern, President, Infra-Strategy
  - Ed Scanlan, Founder/CEO, Infra-Strategy
  - Charles Norwesh, Principal/Co-Founder, Norcon, Inc.
  - Jeff Jozwiak, Principal/Co-Founder, Norcon, Inc.
  - Alex Campbell, CEO, Vibes Media
  - Jack Philbin, President, Vibes Media
  - Nicole P. Loftus, CEO, Zorch International, Inc.
- **Gurnee, Ill.**

- Shelly Sun, Founder/CEO, BrightStar Healthcare
- **Lake Buff, Ill.**
  - Frank Mariani, CEO, Mariani Landscape
- **Lincolnwood, Ill.**
  - Nancy Garcia Sharp, CEO, Food For Thought
- **Naperville, Ill.**
  - Thomas F. Harter, Sr., Chairman of Board, Microdynamics Group
- **Libertyville, Ill.**
  - A. Michael Heimert, President/CEO, Ceteris
- **Oak Brook, Ill.**
  - Bruce Leon, President, Tandem HR
- **Skokie, Ill.**
  - Talia Mashlach, CEO, Eved Services
- **South Elgin, Ill.**
  - Russell P. Majewski, Owner, Kris Dee & Associates Inc. and Wildcat Investments, LLC.
  - Hermann J. Schneider, Owner, Kris Dee & Associates Inc. and Wildcat Investments, LLC.

"Our college is incredibly proud of its affiliation with the Chicago Area Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame," said Stefanie Lenway, dean of the UIC College of Business Administration. "During these challenging economic times, the Hall of Fame epitomizes the spirit of optimism that continues to resonate throughout our business community. More important, it celebrates the accomplishments of men and women whose imagination and hard work have created many new jobs for the local economy and help to ensure that the U.S. economy remains globally competitive. They are an inspiration to our future business leaders. On behalf of the CBA, I congratulate this year's remarkable group of inductees."

Since 1985, the Chicago Area Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame has recognized innovative business leaders in Chicago's seven-county area. Each year, the Hall of Fame inducts distinguished entrepreneurs who have demonstrated entrepreneurial spirit and business talent by founding or growing their respective business.

Past inductees include: Michael Golden and Thaddeus Wong, co-founders of @properties; Robert J. Abt of Abt Electronics; John W. Baird of Baird & Warner; Gian M. Fulgoni, Chairman and Co-founder of comScore, Inc; Robert W. Galvin of Motorola; Michael P. Krasny of CDW Computer Centers, Inc.; Stuart R. Paddock, Jr. of Paddock Publications (*Daily Herald*); Gordon Segal of Crate & Barrel; and Charlie Trotter of Charlie Trotter's.

This year's event partners include: American Chartered Bank, Crain's Chicago Business, Grant Thornton and the University of Illinois at Chicago Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies.

For more information or to obtain event photos, please call (312) 255-3078.

#### **About Gourmet Kitchens, Inc.**

GKI manufactures a diverse line of fresh, grab and go and microwaveable products; service case salads and center of the plate entrees and sides; a full Hispanic product line and a full line of food service solutions for sale at retail stores. GKI's products can be found nationwide in various chain and independent retailers under a private store brand or GKI's Last Minute Gourmet® brand. GKI's goal is to provide meals made from premium ingredients without preservatives at economical prices. To learn more about Gourmet Kitchens, Inc., please visit [www.lastminutegourmet.com](http://www.lastminutegourmet.com).

#### **About the Institute of Entrepreneurial Studies**

Founded in 1982 by Professor Gerry Hills, Coleman Chairholder in Entrepreneurship, the University of Illinois at Chicago Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies is one of the leading entrepreneurial research and professional organizations in the United States. Today, the institute has expanded its scope and depth with innovative programs serving students, business owners and the international research community. The institute commemorated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008.