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Cleveland Foundation Appoints Ted Howard as First Steven A. Minter Fellow

Two-year fellowship to focus on social justice, community wealth-building

RELEASE DATE: 05.20.2010

A leading national authority on community economic development helping to build a widely acclaimed model for inner-city prosperity through employee-owned businesses will continue his work in Cleveland for at least two more years.

Ted Howard of the University of Maryland made that commitment this week by becoming the Cleveland Foundation’s first Steven A. Minter Fellow for Social Justice. It is the first time the foundation’s board of directors has bestowed the fellowship, named in honor of the Cleveland Foundation’s most recent past president.

“One of the great social justice issues facing our country is the growing wealth inequality among our people, and the fact that 40 million Americans are trapped in a cycle of poverty,” Howard said. “Working with the Cleveland Foundation, I believe we can make a real contribution to addressing these issues here in Cleveland. This city can set a positive example for urban areas across the nation.”

The board challenged Howard and colleagues to create more new green jobs and wealth, mainly in six depressed Cleveland neighborhoods around University Circle, during the fellowship’s two-year term. The economic and civic revitalization of that area is the mission of a foundation-led collaboration called the Greater University Circle Initiative, and Howard is one of the principal architects of the initiative’s most ambitious element, the Evergreen Cooperatives.

The cooperatives are an emerging network of grassroots, worker-owned businesses that the foundation is helping to establish. Their primary goal is to encourage the city’s anchor institutions – especially the hospitals, museums, and other institutions in University Circle – to buy products and services from local businesses. That practice of buying local would keep Cleveland’s wealth in Cleveland and create jobs.

Those businesses that succeed will finance still more businesses by paying a percentage of their revenues into a startup fund. Organizers hope the network will eventually encompass scores of thriving worker-owned enterprises. This so-called “Cleveland Model” has drawn attention and praise around the nation and the world from news outlets such as The Economist, The Nation, BusinessWeek, and the Al-Jazeera English television network.

Howard will dedicate himself to expanding the cooperatives in Cleveland and helping to replicate the heralded model around the country. Efforts to adopt the Cleveland Model are being explored in Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, and Youngstown.

The Minter Fellowship was created in honor of Steven A. Minter, president and executive director of the Cleveland Foundation from 1984 through 2003. He now serves as an executive-in-residence

at Cleveland State University and as a fellow in its Center for Nonprofit Policy & Practice.

“Ted is the perfect choice for this fellowship,” Minter said. “With his knowledge, experience, and passion, I believe he and the Cleveland Foundation can continue to make a real contribution to strengthening social and economic justice for all Clevelanders.”

There are two Evergreen Cooperatives businesses currently in operation: a commercial laundry (Evergreen Cooperative Laundry) and a solar panel installation and weatherization company (Ohio Cooperative Solar). Others in development include a food-production greenhouse to supply hospitals, colleges, schools, and the Northeast Ohio regional produce market with fresh lettuce and herbs, and a print- and web-based news outlet with a hyperlocal focus on news in Greater University Circle.

Howard is founder and executive director of the Democracy Collaborative, a national research and policy center based at the University of Maryland that focuses on spreading community wealth-building strategies and promoting the role of anchor institutions, such as universities, in strengthening local economies. Prior to establishing the Democracy Collaborative, he was director of the National Center for Economic Alternatives and chairman of the board of Search for Common Ground, an international conflict-prevention and resolution organization.

Among Howard’s specific responsibilities as the Steven A. Minter Fellow will be:

- Structuring the cooperatives’ business network for long-term sustainability and expansion
- Attracting additional funding and other resources for the cooperatives
- Promoting the Evergreen model in other areas of the country
- Helping to develop state and national policies that support community wealth-building
- Designing a five-year study to measure the impact of the Evergreen Cooperatives strategy

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Established in 1914, the Cleveland Foundation is the world’s first community foundation and the nation’s second-largest today, with assets of \$1.8 billion and 2009 grants of \$82 million. The foundation improves the lives of Greater Clevelanders by building community endowment, addressing needs through grantmaking, and providing leadership on vital issues. Currently the foundation proactively directs two-thirds of its flexible grant dollars to the community’s greatest needs: economic transformation (including advanced energy and globalization), public school improvement, human services and youth development, neighborhoods and housing, and arts advancement.

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