



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **SBA Honors Top Export Lenders at National Entrepreneurial Conference and Exposition**

### *Awards Recognize Lenders for Helping Small Firms in International Trade*

WASHINGTON – Three financial institutions in the continental United States and one in Puerto Rico are the winners of the U.S. Small Business Administration’s 2003 Export Lender Award, presented by the SBA during the National Entrepreneurial Conference and Exposition Sept. 17–19 in Washington, D.C., as part of the agency’s celebrations of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Recognized for their role in providing financial assistance to small businesses involved in exporting, the winners are Citizens Financial of Providence, R.I.; Fifth Third Bank of Cincinnati, OH; Center Bank of Los Angeles; and Banco Popular of Puerto Rico.

“These banks have been actively involved in helping small businesses with their export financing needs locally and nationally,” said SBA Administrator Hector V. Barreto. “Their willingness and commitment to lend their financial backing and technical expertise to small exporting firms have often made the difference between failure and success, and that’s why we are recognizing them.”

The winners were selected largely on the basis of the number of loans made for the last five years, with emphasis on fiscal 2002, in two of the main SBA export loan programs: the Export Working Capital Program and the Export Express Program. Other criteria, including the performance of the loans, also were taken into account. This is the first time the SBA has recognized lenders with the Export Lender Awards.

Small businesses that have shown outstanding performance, sound business practices and longevity, are recognized annually by the SBA as part of the celebrations of the National Small Business Week, which this year coincides with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the agency

Accepting the awards on behalf of the banks were Gary J. Heidel, national director for Small Business-Government Program Services of Citizens Financial Group; Carlos Sosa, manager of the Trade Finance Desk at Fifth Third Bank; Paul Lee, portfolio and marketing manager at Center Bank; and Emilio E. Piñero, executive vice president and supervisor of the Commercial Banking Group of Banco Popular.

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*For more information about all of the SBA’s programs for small businesses, call the SBA Answer Desk at 1-800 U ASK SBA or TDD 704-344-6640, or visit the SBA’s extensive Web site at <http://www.sba.gov> in English, or [www.negocios.gov](http://www.negocios.gov) in Spanish.*