



# NEWS RELEASE

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### **Outstanding Lenders Honored at SBA Expo '04 for Their Commitment to Helping Small Businesses**

#### ***Top Export Lenders Also Recognized***

**ORLANDO, Fla.** – Bank of America of Charlotte, N.C., was recognized with the *National Outstanding Lender Award* by the U.S. Small Business Administration today at the SBA Expo '04, held at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla. Ten other financial institutions from across the United States, large and small, were honored by the agency with its *Regional Outstanding Lender Awards*.

Two other lenders, a large financial institution listed on the NYSE and a small district bank, were presented with the *SBA Export Lender Award*.

The awards were announced at an evening reception sponsored by MBRT.

The winners of the *Regional Outstanding Lender Award* were: Citizens Financial Group of Providence, R.I.; NY Business Development Corporation of Albany, N.Y.; Virginia Asset Financing Corporation of Fairfax, Va.; Surrey Bank & Trust of Mount Airy, N.C.; Wells Fargo Bank of Minneapolis, Minn.; Texas State Bank of McAllen, Texas; Bank First of Norfolk, Neb.; Zions First National Bank of Salt Lake City, Utah; EDF Resource Capital of Citrus Heights, Calif.; and Capital Matrix, Inc. of Boise, Idaho.

CIT Small Business Lending Corporation of Livingston, N.J., and First Financial Bank of Carthage, Miss., were the winners of the *Export Lender Award*.

While the criteria for selecting the winners included number and dollar amount of SBA-backed loans made, the SBA primarily wanted to recognize lenders large and small, from across the country, that have shown steadfast commitment to helping the SBA advance its mission of being America's Small Business Resource.

The awards were presented by SBA Administrator Hector V. Barreto.

"I am proud of the work that our winners have done to assist the small businesses of America," Barreto said. "We at the SBA are passionate about serving the needs of these businesses. President Bush has asked us to create an environment where small businesses can be successful, and our partnership with our lenders is a key factor in creating that environment. Providing the needed capital to start and grow a company is essential to our continued strength as a country."

Criteria for selecting the winners of the *Export Lender Awards* followed the same principles, as applied to SBA-backed export loans. CIT and First Financial combined made 50 SBA small business export loans for more than \$28 million.

"Exports account for 10 percent of our nation's economic output, and 30 percent of all U.S. exports - some \$300 billion a year - is generated by small businesses," Barreto said. "Helping compete in the global market is a key ingredient of their success and helps fuel the nation's economy. That's what these

financial institutions have done in an outstanding manner, and I'm proud to present them with this award in recognition of their commitment."

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