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June 29, 2012

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MAYOR EMANUEL ANNOUNCES THINKCHICAGO TO DOUBLE IN SIZE

Innovative Program Will Bring 100 of the Best and Brightest to Chicago This Fall

CHICAGO - Mayor Emanuel announced today that ThinkChicago, a program established last year to introduce top students from Midwest universities to cutting-edge companies in Chicago, will double in size in 2012.

Founder Brad Keywell of Lightbank, University of Illinois President Dr. Robert Easter, Kevin Willer of 1871, and Neil Gupta, a student who participated in the Think Chicago program last year, joined Mayor Emanuel for the announcement.

"ThinkChicago is exactly the sort of program that we're looking to have in Chicago. It is essential that we attract young people and get them excited about our city," said Mayor Emanuel. "Every student that comes to Chicago for this program will see firsthand the tremendous companies that the city has. There is nothing more important than attracting young leaders to our city.

"We are excited to be partnering with the City of Chicago and the University of Illinois to make ThinkChicago an even more powerful platform in its second year," Chicago Ideas Week Founder and Co-Chairman Brad Keywell said. "Our collective vision for CIW and ThinkChicago is to showcase Chicago as a hub of innovation and ideas that encourages the incredible talent in our local and regional academic institutions to choose Chicago to work and build new ventures."

ThinkChicago had 50 students in 2011. This year, 50 outstanding juniors and seniors from the University of Illinois will join their peers from throughout the Midwest for the program. Applicants can come from Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin, and both juniors and seniors are invited to participate in ThinkChicago. ThinkChicago Applications are online at <http://www.chicagoideas.com/thinkchicago>. Applications are due by September 7.



“Illinois is home to thousands of bright young people, many of whom are college students,” said Dr. Robert Easter, president of the University of Illinois. “Showcasing the creativity and innovation of Chicago for these students and their peers around the Midwest will provide a strong example to our future leaders of the opportunity that awaits them if they choose to come to Chicago.”

Results from the first year of ThinkChicago were outstanding. Approximately 50 students attended, enjoying formal programs and exploring Chicago’s cultural and nightlife scene. This year, students will again visit leading companies, meet with business leadership, and have the opportunity to attend Chicago Ideas Week in October 2011.

Each student attending ThinkChicago will have a chance to attend information sessions at Chicago-based businesses. Companies participating include: Excelebrate Labs, Groupon, Google, Grubhub, Accenture, Coudal Partners, Threadless, 37 Signals, Microsoft and Classified Ventures.

Mayor Emanuel made the ThinkChicago announcement at 1871, in Merchandise Mart, a new startup center that provides resources to entrepreneurs, including access to mentors, investors, partners and peers.

“The mission of 1871 to bring together the vibrant and growing entrepreneurial community here in Chicago is perfectly in sync with what the ThinkChicago program is striving for,” said Kevin Willer, president of the non-profit CEC, who manages 1871 a co-working center for digital startups. “There is an incredible amount of technology and business innovation coming out of our city with successful startups launching every day. This is an exciting time for Chicago.”

Supporting entrepreneurship and fostering innovation in Chicago is a key focus of the Emanuel administration, and is additionally one of the ten strategies highlighted by World Business Chicago in that organization’s comprehensive Plan for Economic Growth and Jobs, released earlier this year. The strategy is focused on leveraging Chicago’s core assets – ease of transportation, talent, business climate, and infrastructure – to attract entrepreneurs and emerging industries to locate in the city, creating jobs and additional economic growth. ThinkChicago is a perfect path towards achieving this goal.

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