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**Junior Achievement of Central Maryland Unveils New Youth Workforce and Innovation Center**

*New facility features 40,000 square feet of unmatched, interactive learning space for early workforce development*

More than 200 educators, state officials and students joined Junior Achievement (JA) of Central Maryland, an organization dedicated to inspiring and preparing young people to succeed in a global economy, to celebrate the grand opening of its new Youth Workforce and Innovation Center in Baltimore.

Attendees toured the facility’s 30,000 square feet of unmatched, interactive learning space designed for early workforce development. This real-world establishment enables elementary, middle, and high school students to engage in JA’s proven Capstone curriculum, teaching them the skills needed to be competitive in the workplace, how to demonstrate financial responsibility, and start businesses.

“Often times, students in our region must overcome significant challenges when preparing themselves to enter the future workforce and maximize their career potential,” said JA Central Maryland President, Paul Kappel Jr., “Our new Junior Achievement Youth Workforce and Innovation Center is a vital resource that will help Maryland students prepare meet the increasing and evolving demand for high-skilled workers today and well into the future.”

The space also will provide multi-use opportunities to support additional community programming and bring business and education leaders together—bridging K-12, post-secondary, and adult talent development initiatives. The facility aims to serve over 40,000 students annually, as well as thousands of parent and community volunteers, educators, and business leaders.

The opening of JACMD comes during a time when Maryland’s workforce development challenges are significant. Research shows that high school student engagement stands at a dismal 40%. It’s no surprise that only 11% of business leaders believe graduates have the needed skills and competencies to enter the workforce. Moreover, students from Baltimore born into poverty only have a one in 10 chance to reach the top fifth percentile of income.

“Over the past five years, thousands of Baltimore City school students have benefitted from our close relationship with Junior Achievement, which has supplemented our curriculum by offering real-world experience in financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and work readiness,” said Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises, CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools. “JA’s Youth Workforce and Innovation Center will build on this partnership, reaching even more students and helping prepare them to enter and thrive in a changing workforce that will require new skills and knowledge.”

With its new facility, Junior Achievement will be able to expand its proven impact. Compared to the general population, JA students secure employment at a higher rate, earning 20 percent more. JA Alumni are also 2.5 times more likely to start a business, are 30% more likely to be college graduates (and 67 percent more likely to have an advanced degree), and ultimately be better off than their parents.

**Partners:**

Aerotek, Allstate Foundation, Baltimore County Public Library, Bank of America, BGE, Brown Advisory, CCBC, Chick-fil-A Foundation, First Financial Federal Credit Union, GEICO, HomeTown Lenders, Institute of Museum and Library Services, Johns Hopkins, MACPA, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, MD MEP, Maryland State Library, Merritt Properties, Northrop Grumman, Toyota Financial Services, Travelers, Wells Fargo, and Whiting-Turner.

**About JA of Central Maryland**

Junior Achievement of Central Maryland is part of the largest organization dedicated to inspiring and preparing young people to succeed in a global economy. Through a dedicated volunteer network, JACMD provides hands-on programs that show more than 30,000 K-12 students each year the realities of how careers, money, and business ownership work. JA experiences are proven to give students the edge in college completion, career readiness, earning potential, and business start-up. For more information, visit www.centralmaryland.ja.com