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**CROWNE PLAZA RICHMOND DOWNTOWN
RECEIVES 2016 VABLN B2B RISING STAR AWARD**

Richmond, VA, April 16, 2016 – The Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown was one of two recipients of the 2016 B2B Rising Star Award, presented by Virginia Business Leadership Network (VABLN). The award was announced at the third annual Access Virginia Auction and Gala, held at the SunTrust Center in downtown Richmond.

Through General Manager Scott Jones' leadership, the Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown was selected based on its work with the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBI), and through its employment of persons with disabilities.

"We are humbled by Scott's commitment in working with DBVI, and elated to be able to honor him and the Crowne Plaza with this award!" stated Cindy Roberts, Coordinator of Workforce Services of the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired.

"We are grateful for Scott's involvement with DBVI and with Crowne Plaza's support of the LIFE* Program!" added Raymond E. Hopkins, Commissioner of Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired.

Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown had partnered consistently and effectively with the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) in the process of helping individuals with vision impairments and blindness find opportunities for work experiences and employment. Through local leadership, understanding, dedication to the community, and competitive wages and benefits, this hotel has created a culture of excellence for individuals of all abilities to grow and advance through employment with the company.

In the spirit of hospitality, community inclusion, and advocacy, the Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown has opened its doors by assisting individuals with disabilities find meaningful work. Partnerships in the community include speaking to community agencies on panels about working with individuals with disabilities, providing informational interviews to clients, hiring and training workers into competitive employment, and opening doors to DBVI's LIFE* (Learning Independence, Feeling Empowered) Program.

As a result of these tireless efforts, VABLN is proud to acknowledge Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown for providing training and employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities in the Richmond Metro area.

About Virginia Business Leadership Network

The Virginia Business Leadership Network (VABLN) is a branch of the US Business Leadership Network, originally established in 1994 through the President's Committee on the Employment of People With Disabilities. The goal of VABLN is to assist businesses in providing solutions for increasing workforce and marketplace diversity by including people with disabilities.

About Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired

The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) is the Commonwealth's agency solely dedicated to empowering individuals who are blind, vision impaired, and deafblind to achieve their maximum level of employment, education, and personal independence. DBVI services include vocational rehabilitation, education, independent living skills, orientation and mobility, deafblind services and a comprehensive statewide low vision program.

About Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown

Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown is located at 555 E. Canal Street, Richmond, VA 23219. The property has 13,000 square feet of flexible event space and 298 graciously appointed guestrooms, featuring magnificent views of the James River and the downtown Richmond skyline. The hotel is owned and operated by SMI Hotel Group, headquartered in Richmond, VA.

About Crowne Plaza Hotels and Resorts

When traveling, you need a partner that makes both work and relaxation easy. At Crowne Plaza® Hotels & Resorts, we focus on one thing and do it well: making your stay a success. With more than 400 properties worldwide, our premium accommodations, business-ready services and spaces, and fast and fresh meal options are designed to keep you productive, connected, rested, and restored during your stay. Whatever your business or personal needs, our expert staff is on it.

About SMI Hotel Group

Founded in 1997, Richmond, VA based SMI Hotel Group is an owner and operator of award-winning upscale, full-service hotels in Virginia and Texas. Privately owned, the company strives to deliver memorable hospitality experiences that exceed the expectations of every guest that stays, meets or dines in their properties.

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