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**CREATOR OF 'ITM HOSPITALITY FUND' PUTS HER BUSINESS SUCCESS TO WORK
FOR NEEDY PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Jody Merl Inspires Charitable Program by Tapping Her Hotel Barter Resources

NEW YORK, NY - As president of Innovative Travel Marketing (ITM), the nation's leading hotel barter company, Jody Merl knows very well the good that barter can accomplish. Using barter as a marketing tool, ITM enables client hotels to exchange unsold rooms for media placements and other services, thus expanding their advertising budgets and getting maximum value for inventory that would otherwise go unused. "Barter is a strategic business tool that benefits everyone involved," says Merl.

In the summer of 2001, as the economy continued its downturn, Merl decided to put barter to use in another way: to help the less fortunate. With that goal in mind, Merl considered her company's resources - hotel rooms, and plenty of them - and how they could best serve those in need. Realizing that thousands of critically ill people travel to New York City each year for urgent medical treatment, Merl recognized that ITM's excess inventory of hotel rooms could greatly benefit "healthcare travelers" to the city who are unable to afford accommodations for themselves or their loved ones.

That idea led to the creation of the ITM Hospitality Fund, launched in

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February 2002 with an endowment of rooms from ITM's barter hotel inventory. Co-founded by Merl and Michael Stoler, a local health care philanthropist and business executive, the ITM Hospitality Fund is a program that provides free lodgings, in close proximity to treatment facilities, for needy patients and/or their families. Working in partnership with more than a dozen hospitals, medical centers and medical societies, the ITM Hospitality Fund is the only citywide program of its kind in the United States.

"New York City is a medical capital, home to many of the world's leading specialists and facilities," says Merl. "For thousands of individuals, this city offers specialized care that is literally life saving."

Merl also realized that making the trip to New York for medical necessity is an expensive, emotionally fraught, and often highly intimidating process, especially for those who have never before traveled far from home. With New York City hotel costs among the highest in the world, the prospect of paying for accommodations – on top of the financial burden of out-of-pocket medical costs and transportation expenses – is an overwhelming challenge for patients and families of limited means.

By making first-class hotel rooms available to those who could otherwise not afford them (Fund beneficiaries only pay room taxes), the ITM Hospitality Fund reduces expenses, makes travel to New York less daunting, and encourages the presence of a patient's family at a time when they are needed most.

“We pamper families who are in a very fragile state with the convenience and comfort of hotel rooms in their time of need,” says Merl. “It is an enormous help to minimize their emotional toll and expenses of travel.”

Patients are referred to the ITM Hospitality Fund through participating medical facilities. Once a referral is made, Merl scopes and coordinates accommodations at ITM client hotels, with regard to the most convenient location for the patient and/or his or her family. Beneficiaries are chosen based primarily on financial need, with geographical distance from New York also a consideration.

The ITM Hospitality Fund has so far provided more than 300 patients and their loved ones with a haven in New York City during a stressful and difficult time in their lives. Led by Merl – and supported by advisory boards of eminent physicians, and healthcare and business leaders - the Fund is a noteworthy example of a community's high-achievers coming together for the common good.

Describing her founding of the Fund as one of her proudest accomplishments, Jody Merl says, “The ITM Hospitality Fund captures the true philanthropic spirit of New York City. We feel blessed to be able to make a difference in the lives of these patients and their loved ones.”

For more information, visit www.itmhospitalityfund.com, e-mail: info@itmhospitalityfund.com, or call: (973) 331-8171, ext. 12

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