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## News release

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### Laying the foundations for a charitable year

The chief priority for David Hersey this week is to put the final touches to a business plan.

Never one to let the grass grow under his feet, the new chief executive of the Birmingham Community Foundation is devising a strategy to tackle the undoubted challenges that the next 12 months will bring.

“We need to hit the ground running this year,” he says from the Foundation head office of a converted Victorian Baths, part of the acclaimed Nechells regeneration project, “these are tough economic times for business and the charity and voluntary sector alike and I am sure 2010 will not get any easier.

“We need to ensure the correct priorities are in place to enable us to do our job serving our donors, supporters and disadvantaged communities in the very best, most efficient and effective way we can. The local community groups we support need help now more than ever. ”

David Hersey is no stranger to helping businesses develop and grow and is especially in tune with those with a Midlands bias. This well known quietly spoken but very determined character retired

last year from a top role at RBS after 35 year service, the last six of which as the regional director for corporate banking for the West Midlands.

During his long career David held a number of senior management positions and worked throughout the UK. His final stint in Birmingham was his second in the region after a period working in the city of London. He commends the Regions professional and finance sector as being the strongest outside London and believes that it will continue to be a powerful asset in helping to support the Regions future prospects. "We have an exceptionally talented pool of professionals in the Region who support businesses nationally and internationally. It's a tremendous asset in a competitive world where added value and innovation is crucial".

He started working two weeks after reaching sixteen years of age. With a head for figures but no fixed ideas on a career, the banking world seemed a good place to start. So after one job interview and one job offer he started a journey that spanned many different locations and fascinating assignments including running the group chairman's office in the early 1990s.

The eldest of 20 grandchildren his first wage packet was spent on a present for each for his grandparents who David describes as key mentors in his life.

"They headed a very close family and provided advice on all aspects of life without us really being aware of it, as only grandparents can do". By the way he talks you can see how important deeply rooted strong family values continue to be to David.

Born in Buckinghamshire David and his wife Jenny 25 years married this year, moved to the West Midlands 12 years ago where they have brought up their three children after falling in the love with the region. Even when David accepted a London-based role, the family agreed that he would commute daily rather than uproot them from somewhere they enjoyed living so much. He did so for more than two years.

"The reputation of Birmingham and Black Country does get a serious grilling from outside the region mostly very misguided and a legacy of the distant past but you cannot beat the warmth and

friendliness of those living here. People make places and both Jenny and I felt instantly at home from day one.

“From a work perspective I have always admired the hard working ethos and determination that exists here in Birmingham. I am constantly amazed at what can be achieved and never stop learning from the many individuals, small businesses and large multinational clients I have been fortunate to work alongside.

“The region has some very talented people running some brilliant businesses in manufacturing, services, construction, retail, IT in fact right across the spectrum and we need to make our voice heard more widely that this is a great place live and develop thriving businesses with strong links around the globe”.

Education and learning is clearly a great passion of David's. Recent experience has been gained as governor of a local school, as chairman of the Birmingham and Solihull Employment and Skills Board and playing a keen role in developing Birmingham City Councils prospectus for the future.

“Helping people of all ages to learn or improve their skills and gain qualifications is massively important. I left school with modest qualifications that were reasonable but not outstanding. Personality, initiative and a commitment to hard work are all very important but good qualifications are a must have in today's competitive workplace.”

“I was given a second chance. Joining a large company that encouraged personal development meant I could study further which I did with a fervour I never had at school! As qualifications were gained I then had the opportunity to work with world class business schools, Insead, Harvard and IMD, which was invaluable and experiences I will never forget”.

“I am passionate that people get every chance to improve their lot in life through formal education, apprenticeships or on the job training. Giving people right across the age spectrum and right across the region the opportunity to improve their skills is vitally important in a fast changing world and I am encouraged that this is a key priority for Government.

“From a regional perspective having a highly skilled workforce is crucial. Companies looking for a home have a lot of choice in the UK and around the world. We need to make Birmingham and the Black Country an attractive and viable long term option by demonstrating we have the skills to attract investment and create highly skilled jobs for the future.”

His decision to retire from the banking world when he did was based on a yearning to experience something different. “I enjoyed a fantastic career in the commercial world but was ready to do something different. I had always known I wanted to work in the charity or voluntary sector at some point in my life and that point had arrived. I really wanted to start giving something back and the chance to work at the Foundation was simply perfect timing.

“I knew little about the charity but did some research both into the UK Community Foundation network and elsewhere around the world particularly the United States where Community Foundations are long established and very much a part of community life”.

“The Foundation is designed to bring together donors and philanthropists with communities in need by largely supporting small grass roots community projects, over 800 last year alone in Birmingham and the Black country. The impact on local communities and groups from what is often quite modest funding can be simply amazing. I am really just learning of the brilliant work that many thousands of volunteers do each day around our region often in very difficult circumstances. Frankly it is truly inspirational and a real eye opener.

“As I learn more about the Foundations work I find the knowledge of the team and their understanding of communities needs across our Region really impressive.

“Many firms and individuals often want to give to ‘worthy’ community causes and have great difficulty in actually getting their money through to the right people where it can be put to best use. This is where the Birmingham Community Foundation comes into its own.”

The Foundation supports very many areas, education and IT, Sports clubs, music, youth groups, dance groups, exercise classes for the elderly, readers for stroke victims, environmental projects and so on. The list is endless and thousands benefit thanks to our donors support.

This is just touching the surface of what the Foundation does David explains but he is determined to spend the next few months meeting up with the hundreds of contacts he has throughout the region and telling them more, in particular about plans to build the Foundations endowment with support from the Government backed grass roots matching scheme “an opportunity not to be missed” he says.

What’s on the agenda on more personal level for the next twelve months? Well losing a little weight which is long overdue, travel more widely and take time to watch a little more sport and hopefully seeing Arsenal lift some silverware! I would love to see our local teams continue their good form but being a gooner is in the blood.

“On a more serious note I feel I have been given a great opportunity to help shape the Foundations future. We will have many challenges but I want to make sure that our strong message gets out to every philanthropist and every firm in the Birmingham and Black Country that has CSR on its agenda. I do not want the Birmingham Community Foundation to be the Regions best kept secret!

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