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Lt. Gov. Jari Askins Receives Personalized Soccer Ball

OKLAHOMA CITY – Lt. Governor Jari Askins was surprised with a unique gift from a woman business owner from Afghanistan. In 2007, Amir Taj Sirat attended an *Institute for Economic Empowerment of Women (IEEW)* entrepreneurial business training course entitled *Peace through Business®*, which brought her to Oklahoma City for a week of mentorship with Oklahoma women business owners.

Taj owns a soccer ball manufacturing business in Afghanistan called *Green Way*, where she employs over 250 women who otherwise would not have a means to provide support for their families. The Lt. Governor's soccer ball gift was personalized to show Taj's respect for the Lt. Governor's support of women business owners.

"As Oklahomans, we know the integral role small businesses serve in our communities. They are the backbone of our economy, and IEEW is teaching this important lesson to small business owners like Amir Taj Sirat," Askins said. "I appreciate this thoughtful gift and am proud to accept it."

Terry Neese, President of IEEW and prominent woman business owner in Oklahoma, created the *Peace through Business* program in 2006 at the request of the US State Department and the US Afghan Women's Council. "Empowering women business owners has been my passion and my work for the past 30 years," Neese said. "It has naturally extended to include the international women in Afghanistan and Rwanda who are in the most need of American education and mentorship."

As the largest population demographic in Afghanistan, women have the greatest capacity to generate economic stability for their country. As statistics prove, economically sound countries have a much greater capacity for peace.

"By providing intensive, long-term business education and training, these women are helping to strengthen the economy in their community and their country. I hope my support inspires the Afghan women to set personal goals for themselves as they help to improve the conditions of their communities and country," Askins added.