

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### JANUARY RECEPTION MARKS OFFICIAL ROLLOUT OF BENNINGTON COUNTY'S NEW REGIONAL BRAND

**December 18, 2007, Bennington, Vermont.** Bennington County's Regional Branding Steering Committee announced today that it will host a champagne reception to kick off the region's ground-breaking new branding efforts.

"The Launch" will take place on January 9th, 2008 at 5:30 PM at the Arlington Inn Barn on Route 7A. Business owners and interested area residents are welcome to attend. RSVP by January 3 to 802.375.6532. Space is limited.

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Efforts to brand Bennington County began nearly two years ago when Hildene secured the services of noted branding consultant, Bill O'Neal of the O'Neal Strategy Group. Encouraged by their own successful 2005 branding exercise with Bill, Hildene initiated a similar effort to explore branding the entire county. In March 2006, Hildene Executive Director Seth Bongartz asked O'Neal to return to Hildene, this time to lead a day long meeting with leaders from the North and South Shires of Bennington County with a focus on defining a brand for the region. From the original group of 31 participants in attendance, a steering committee was formed. They were charged with further exploring the ideas generated at the meeting regarding brand identity and promoting regional collaboration on the effort. In an April of 2007 follow up meeting at the Equinox Hotel, Hildene reconvened the attendees of the original gathering for an update on efforts to define the brand identity, choose a name reflective of that identity, and begin dialogue about designing a logo. By the close of that day, consensus was reached on a brand identity that is described as authentic, creative, entrepreneurial, natural and beautiful and that is characterized by the signature line:

The Shires of Vermont  
Bennington – Manchester

The Shires of Vermont is intentionally inclusive; a name that unites, rather than divides Bennington County. Identification of the area as a larger destination increases the area's marketability exponentially. This is seen as necessary in an increasingly branded landscape. Destinations such as The Berkshires, Napa Valley, The Ozarks, The Outer Banks have successfully created an image – or brand – that comes to mind instantly when a member of their respective target markets hears mention of its name. "In a world of too many choices and too many claims, brands simplify things for people," said Bill O'Neal.

"Our research has led us to a distinct brand identity that we can now consistently communicate to our target audiences," said Joann Erenhouse, Executive Director of the Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce. "Building a successful brand takes time. Having a clear cut sense of who we are is the first critical step. Now it is up to the RMP, the Bennington and Manchester Chambers of Commerce, the Better Bennington Corporation and most importantly, area businesses to work together to promote a unified message."

"The cooperation of the BBC and the Manchester and Bennington Chambers has risen to unprecedented levels as a result of these branding efforts," said Jay Hathaway, Executive

Director of the Manchester and the Mountains Regional Chamber of Commerce. “This cooperation will not only make each marketing dollar stretch that much further, but it will significantly strengthen our voice in the outside world. When we raise visibility for Vermont’s southwest corner as a convenient getaway or place to call home, as well as a region that welcomes sustainable economic development and growth, folks living in both shires benefit.”

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The term shires is used to identify a county seat. Bennington County is the only Vermont county with two county seats; Bennington and Manchester.

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The January 9th gathering will kick off with wine and cheese followed by a brief presentation and champagne ribbon-cutting unveiling *The Shires of Vermont* logo, designed by award winning creative agency **id29**.

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*About The Regional Branding Steering Committee: The Regional Branding Steering Committee is comprised of representatives from the Bennington, Manchester and Arlington communities. While the Committee’s efforts have the strong support and involvement of the BBC, the Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce and the Manchester and the Mountains Regional Chamber of Commerce, the group is a separate entity working with distinct State grant funding under The Shires of Vermont Regional Marketing Program (RMP).*

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