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December 19, 2007

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CHICAGO, IL -- The world of sustainable design and the one-of-a-kind gift phenomenon have now taken on another partner: up-and-coming design students. There are 21 Columbia College undergraduate students who have been selected to present their sustainable, or "green," gifts at *The Chicago Market: Living and Giving* – a gift and home accessory trade show at The Merchandise Mart, January 19-22, 2008.

"I didn't know what to expect when I asked the students to submit sketches of their designs," said Brooke Sagalowsky, Buyer Relations Manager for The Merchandise Mart. "Their ideas and their skills just blew me away. Consumers want to be part of the sustainable design movement and we wanted to give these students a chance to make the business connection of a lifetime."

This is the first student exhibition at The Merchandise Mart's Chicago Market and Columbia College is the only participating educational institution. After researching various schools, the show's organizers decided to focus on Columbia because of the school's strong product design program.

"Once we received such positive feedback from Columbia, we decided to pursue only their students," continued Sagalowsky.

"It is a great opportunity for student work to actually get picked up for production," said Kevin Henry, product design faculty at Columbia.

The student product and gift designs will be exhibited alongside professional vendors at the Living and Giving Show. Some of the potential buyers looking for items to stock their shelves are Wickes Furniture, Walter E. Smythe Furniture, The Great Indoors, Hallmark Stores and Crate and Barrel.

Of the 21 participating students, one will be chosen by a panel of design experts to receive a \$1,000 prize as part of the Merchandise Mart's Beckman Competition. The Beckman Competition jury is comprised of four industry professionals: ASID Illinois President Hilary Sopata; Chicago Home magazine editor Jan Parr; Home Décor Buyer magazine editor Jim Carper; and local Chicago designer Mick Santiago. The Beckman winners will be announced on Monday, January 21.