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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**ROBUST M&A MARKET IN 2008 AHEAD FOR SMALL TO MID CAP COMPANIES,
SAYS MERCANTI GROUP**

MINNEAPOLIS, MN, December 17, 2007 – A robust merger and acquisition market for small to mid cap companies is in the offing for 2008, says Jim D’Aquila, managing director of The Mercanti Group, the boutique investment banking firm focused on mid and small cap corporations. Among the factors he sees as driving the trend:

- Capital, which moved to the sidelines as assets got pricier, is now poised to return;
- More realistic leverage ratios, debt pricing and equity return expectations;
- High quality companies will continue to be highly in demand;
- A new class of investors – business development corporations, SBICs, special purpose debt funds – that are unaffected by the subprime meltdown; and
- Continued liquidity in the financing markets albeit at slightly reduced leverage ratios.

“We have a situation now where we have a tremendous amount of capital on the sidelines waiting to be put to work,” Mr. D’Aquila says. “The deal outlook for healthy and well run companies has not diminished in any material fashion. Transactions are getting done for less than stellar companies, sometimes at multiples that make you scratch your head.” Mr. D’Aquila adds that these types of deals will have a difficult road ahead of them in 2008 but added that this will actually be healthy for the market.

“We were getting things done at debt levels which were greatly in excess of some lenders comfort levels. While we have likely lost 0.5 to 1.0 times leverage, we believe that a more rationale leverage market will actually maintain a healthy deal pace and a very liquid market,” Mr. D’Aquila says.

Following an over heated market in 2006 and earlier this year, there is a new class of investors and lenders that have been waiting for rationalization in the market, and are now ready to engage in transactions, he says. “Current returns can still work and are quite attractive relative to other alternative investments and relative to the volatile and often compromised public equity markets” Mr. D’Aquila says.

About The Mercanti Group

The Mercanti Group is a results-oriented boutique financial advisory firm that embraces a fierce commitment to client service and provides creative Merger & Acquisition, Capital Raising and Strategic Advisory solutions to small and middle market companies, private equity firms and individual business owners in the consumer, health care, technology, business services and manufacturing industries. Mercanti offers companies the expertise and capabilities of a large investment bank with the focus, attention and energy of a small entrepreneurial firm. Mercanti has offices in Minneapolis, Los Angeles and New York. Mercanti also is strategically affiliated with Marquette Financial Companies, a diversified financial services company which is a part of the Pohlad family holdings. If you would like more information on The Mercanti Group, please visit the Web at www.mercantigroup.com, or contact a Mercanti professional at 612.333.0130 (Minneapolis); 310.444.0130 (Los Angeles); or 212.883.0130 (New York).

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