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**AMERICAN HOME FURNISHINGS HALL OF FAME FOUNDATION  
ENTERS NEW ERA BY TRANSITIONING TO FULL-TIME STAFF**

**HIGH POINT, N.C., March 21, 2017** — As it moves toward the goal of establishing a permanent home with a living, working museum worthy of the industry, the American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame Foundation Inc. has taken the historic step of hiring a full-time staff.

Karen McNeill, whose agency McNeill Communications Group has served the Hall of Fame for 10 years, continues as chief executive officer. Lauren Estep, formerly vice president of media relations for McNeill Communications, is now executive vice president. An additional staff member will be named soon.

“Karen and Lauren have faithfully guided the Hall of Fame with professionalism and vision,” says Michael Amini, Foundation Board chairman. “Largely due to their leadership and commitment, the Foundation has grown substantially. Banquet attendance and revenues have increased five-fold. The Foundation has changed its name, updated its branding, created a new Wall of Fame and formalized its procedures with updated bylaws, policies and procedures, board member term limits and fully accountable financial reporting systems.”

“Most visibly, the selection process was transformed from an election contest to a points-based ballot based on specific professional and personal attributes that is cast by a diverse selection committee,” he says. “Ultimately, the changes have established greater integrity, created growing value to our industry and provided a solid foundation for us to grow.”

“They have had the vision to understand that the Hall of Fame could grow only if we became more than a banquet and started to genuinely fulfill the first part of our mission – to preserve our history for future generations in new and relevant ways,” adds Robert Maricich, Foundation president. “The Foundation has conducted 60 oral interviews, started work on a timeline history, and has professionally stored and digitally catalogued our memorabilia. We have established a transactional website, and we are videotaping interviews with all inductees or their families. Significantly, we have gained the top IRS classification, which enables us to pursue new funding needed to achieve our goals.”

“Karen and Lauren are equipped to produce a world-class induction celebration that has become the industry’s must-attend event that is incredibly meaningful for the inductees, their families and their friends,” Amini says. “The bottom line is that they have strategically worked with the board of directors with great professionalism and always with full disclosure and responsiveness to board requests. They have created tremendous visibility for the Foundation and established a sound platform for future growth.”

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Prior to joining the American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame, McNeill served as founder and CEO of McNeill Communications Group Inc., a leading strategic communications, public relations and marketing agency, representing clients in all categories of the home furnishings industry for 30 years. The firm was acquired by Steinreich Communications last year. In 1988, she founded McNeill Lehman Inc., a marketing/public relations agency, which is now Creative Services Inc. McNeill began her long association with the home furnishings industry in 1982 when she was appointed director of marketing and later director of the Design Center at the Southern Furniture Market Center, known today as the International Home Furnishings Center (IHFC). She has served on more than 30 nonprofit boards, including managing the fledgling organization and a term as president and chair of Women in the Home Industries Today (WithIt).

Estep joined McNeill Communications Group as media counsel in July of 2004 and was promoted to Vice President of Media Relations in 2013. She guided the firm's media relations from strategic positioning to media placement and events that garnered greater visibility for her clients. Estep played an instrumental role in the American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame Foundation, including support for the board of directors, orchestrating the organization's preservation initiatives and organizing the annual induction celebration, the industry's most prestigious gathering. Experienced in a wide variety of business sectors, Estep also has particular expertise in case goods and youth home furnishings. With a passion for non-profits, she previously worked with the High Point Chamber of Commerce and the Volunteer Center of Durham and served on the board of her local Relay for Life.

"Lauren and I have long been passionate about the Hall of Fame and this industry. It has always been so much more than just a client to our whole team at McNeill and it is an amazing opportunity to be able to take it into the future," McNeill says. "This is a very special industry with stories that must be told and preserved for future generations in relevant new ways, and as an organization of leaders it is our responsibility to attract and retain the best and the brightest new leaders."

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Founded in 1989, the American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame Foundation, Inc., is an international, industry-wide organization founded to preserve the home furnishings history and to celebrate exceptional individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to the U.S. home furnishings industry. Membership includes eligibility to nominate candidates for consideration by the Selection Committee, and the opportunity to help preserve the history and heritage of the industry. The organization is based in High Point, North Carolina at 202 Neal Place, and can be reached at 336.882.5900.

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