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PAUL MULLER, BRUCE KATZ AND KARL TOOSBUY INDUCTED INTO NSRA HALL OF FAME

TUCSON, ARIZ. (May 23, 2023) – The National Shoe Retailers Association (NSRA) inducted Paul Muller, Bruce Katz and Karl Toosbuy into its Hall of Fame during NSRA's Leadership Conference held May 3-4, 2023 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The Hall of Fame honor is NSRA's highest, given in recognition of an individual's years of dedication, leadership and outstanding service that has contributed to the independent footwear community and to NSRA.

Paul Muller of Mullers Shoes in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a longtime NSRA board member, was inducted into the Hall of Fame by NSRA President Mark Denkler. "I have the honor of introducing retailer Paul Muller. I first met Paul in 2000 during a NSRA shoe-buying group that he started as Chairman. It was my first time meeting the Chairman of the NSRA and was impressed he took the time to talk with a single-store operator. Paul became one of my first shoe mentors."

Paul Muller has spent his entire career in the retail footwear industry, beginning as a third-generation member of his family's business and then branching out to aid other independent retailers with their inventory management systems and to work with NSRA to establish international footwear trade relationships. He is currently the President of Retail Data Consultants, which assists clients with retail technology and merchandising.

In 1975, after receiving his B.A. in Business, Paul began his full-time career at Mullers Shoes, the business his grandfather founded in 1913. He became president of the four-store business in 1985, and in 1992 his brother Wayne retired and sold his holdings to Paul. From 1980 to 1986, Paul served on the board of the Pedorthic Footwear Association (PFA).

Paul has been involved with the NSRA Board of Directors since 1990 and headed the board as Chairman from 1999 to 2001. He served on the NSRA Technology Committee and played a role in developing the first inventory management system for shoe retailers called FRAME. In 1993, Paul played a key role in setting up the first EDI ordering program called Shoe & Sport Talk (SSTI), a service for NSRA members to send orders to vendors using EDI.

While on the board, Paul led NSRA in establishing international trade delegations to Italy, Germany, Brazil, and Spain. As chairman, he helped establish the North American Footwear Group, a buying cooperative in the U.S. In 2000, he signed agreements of cooperation with Nord West Ring (NWR), Europe's largest buying cooperative, and also with the Italian Trade Commission. Paul was named as an Honorary NSRA Board Member in 2019.

In 2007, Paul organized a footwear distribution mission to a remote village in El Salvador as part of his support of Soles4Souls, and distributed close to 1,000 pairs of shoes there.

"I'm truly grateful for this honor," Muller said in accepting the award. "This is the capstone of My Shoe Dog career. I have enjoyed spending a lifetime in the shoe business, and I always enjoyed helping people in the industry. Your most valuable asset is the people that you're working with and the relationships that you build in the industry. I say God put me in a big sandbox called the footwear industry. And He said, contribute the skill sets that you have, and help others. And I thank God for the opportunity that I've lived a full life with all of my special friends. And thank you so much for this honor."

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Bruce Katz was a third-generation designer and shoemaker, and grandson of Samuel J. Katz who founded The Hubbard Shoe Company in 1930. In 1970, Bruce's father, Saul L. Katz, formed the Highland Import Company and began importing shoes from Brazil for a variety of branded American shoe companies. To help his father, Bruce began traveling from town to town selling off closeouts from his father's import business.

Bruce Katz co-founded The Rockport Shoe Company in 1971 with his father, and served as its CEO until it was sold to Reebok International in 1986. They developed their own unique brand of shoes engineered for comfort and created the first lightweight casual shoe with light orthotics that had never before been offered in conventional leather shoes – RocSports. The shoe was a success and the company's annual sales reached nearly \$100 million by 1986, in part due to Rockport launching a public awareness campaign in 1983 about the aerobic benefits of what became known as Fitness Walking. The company sponsored walking clubs, events, films, medical research, and books about walking. In 2013 *Footwear Plus* inducted the Rockport "ProWalker" into its Style Hall of Fame, noting that the shoe was introduced before "walking shoes" had even been established as a footwear category.

In 2013, after 26 years away from the shoe industry, Bruce returned as founder and CEO of The Samuel Hubbard Shoe Company, named as an homage to his grandfather. He merged comfort with classic and stylish shoe design – making a range of high-quality styles for casual, business, and outdoor wear.

Bruce Katz passed away in 2022. He was posthumously inducted into the NSRA Hall of Fame by John Luck (Lucky Shoes, Fairlawn, Ohio), who presented the award to Roger Katz, who accepted the award in honor of his brother.

"I know that if he was standing up here Bruce would want to express his deep gratitude to the National Shoe Retailers Association for the support that this organization, this group of people gathered here today, has shown him throughout his career in the shoe business," said Roger Katz.

"When my father and my brother launched the Rockport Company, they shared an innovative idea about manufacturing comfortable, lightweight walking shoes. Bruce brought to the table the notion that wearing shoes could enhance one's feeling of well-being. My father Saul had the knowledge of manufacturing and material procurement. They combined their strengths and built a team that allowed The Rockport Company to become a leader in a newly minted walking shoe industry. Bruce had the insight and the unwavering determination to start a movement that grew to support a host of both shoe manufacturers and shoe retailers."

"There is, however, another component to the success story. And that component is all of you. A good or even a great idea is of little commercial value without the ability to bring it to market. It was the belief and support from the retail industry that allowed the walking shoe phenomenon to see the light of day. You all had to make a leap of faith in partnership with my brother and my father that the concept of walking as a fitness sport would succeed in a world captivated by the advent of running shoes. I'm here in part to thank you for taking that leap."

Roger Katz added, "On behalf of my brother, I want to thank you wholeheartedly, I know that if he were here today to accept this prestigious award, he would want you all to feel the depth of his appreciation for you staying the course and continuing to sustain the footwear retail business in America."

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Karl Toosbuy, an icon in shoe manufacturing, was a trained shoemaker and ran a shoe factory before he founded the Danish shoe company Venus in 1963. By the 1970s the company was rebranded as ECCO.

ECCO's expansion exploded in 1978 when they reimagined the classic moccasin. Fusing form-fitting design with premium materials, the ECCO Joke was the right shoe at the right price at the right time and sales skyrocketed. Karl also had the ingenious and industry-first idea of advertising his trademark on the outsoles.

In the 1980s, to ramp up production, Karl brought direct injection technology into his company. In the next decade, ECCO redefined the technique to create FLUIDFORM Technology™, a process in which lightweight fluid materials transform into soft solid soles. This allowed ECCO to fabricate everything from performance runners to golf shoes and even high heels. Innovation has always been a cornerstone at ECCO.

Throughout the 1980s, the company expanded its operations internationally. By 1982, sales reached 1 million pairs of shoes annually. By 2000, ECCO owned every step of the production process, from design and leather production to branded retail sales.

Karl passed away in 2004. His wish was that the company he created would continue as a family-owned and family-run business. Today, Karl's daughter Hanni Toosbuy Kasprzak is Chairman and Co-owner of the ECCO Group.

Sam Spears, President of Ara Shoes North America and former ECCO Deputy Brand Director, reminisced about his years working alongside Karl Toosbuy, and spoke fondly of him.

NSRA Board Member Loren Martin (E.L.M Shoes, Greencastle, Pennsylvania) posthumously inducted Karl Toosbuy into the NSRA Hall of Fame by stating that "footwear manufacturing has been forever changed by this man."

Martin presented the award to ECCO's Senior Sales Manager, Eric Smith. Smith accepted it on behalf of Toosbuy's family, saying that Hanni, Karl's daughter, on hearing of the award, was absolutely floored and humbled that her dad was being honored. "All she wants to say is 'Thank you.'" Smith added, "this year ECCO is celebrating their 60th anniversary. It's a big milestone for us – a small company in a little town in Denmark. We take it very seriously and we love what we do. Again, on behalf of the family, we couldn't be here without you guys. You guys made that happen."

About NSRA

NSRA was founded in 1912 to represent independent shoe retailers and provide their companies with business services, education programs and information resources that help them remain profitable and on the leading edge of retail. For more information, please visit www.nsra.org.

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