

**THE FORTUNOFF FAMILY PLEDGES \$50,000 TO WJA FOUNDATION
TO HONOR HELENE FORTUNOFF'S LEGACY WITH
THE HELENE FORTUNOFF WOMEN IN RETAIL SCHOLARSHIP**

The Fortunoff family is continuing their mother's impactful legacy by providing future retail leaders with education and training to enhance their leadership and management skills

March 1, 2023 (New York, NY) – The Women's Jewelry Association Foundation (WJAF) is proud to partner with the Fortunoff family to launch a new scholarship for women in retail in honor of their late mother, Helene Fortunoff. The *Helene Fortunoff Women in Retail Scholarship* will support retail leaders by providing opportunities for them to further their careers through education and management training. The announcement comes on the eve of what would have been Helene Fortunoff's 90th birthday.

Helene's daughters, Esther and Ruth share, "continuing our mom's legacy with this WJA scholarship is very important to our family. Helene was an inspiration and a mentor to so many women throughout her career. She was committed to higher education and always encouraged our team of all female buyers to take classes, read articles and stay on top of changes in the jewelry industry. Jewelry was her passion and she loved her life in retail, traveling the world, and working with other women. Helene was a brilliant leader and would be proud to know her legacy will live on in the next generation of women in retail."

Helene Fortunoff was a trailblazing woman in the jewelry industry, and one of the Women's Jewelry Association's founding members back in 1983. She served as President from 1992 – 1995, led the organization's fashion group for 15 years, and was recognized with WJA's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Helene recognized the importance of a community for women in the industry as there were few seats at the table four decades ago for women in the jewelry business. She was named chairman of the Gemological Institute of America's board of governors. The United States Carat Club, a private and prestigious De Beers group, invited Helene to be the first woman member. In recognition of her long association with Italian jewelry manufacturers, Helene received the honorary appointment as Knight of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Italy in 1997. In 2001, Helene received the American Gem Society's Triple Zero Award, and in 2006, received Jewelers of America's Gem Award for lifetime achievement, which was presented to her by Lauren Bacall, a longtime spokesperson for the Fortunoff brand.

Helene was also an outstanding mentor, and believed in the value of supporting her team and developing talent. She carried jewelry by women designers and provided flexible schedules to the employees who were mothers and caregivers.

The \$7,500 scholarship will be awarded annually to a retail professional who wishes to develop their management skills to progress their career in a retail environment. The award will support education for soft and hard skills training, including talent management, project management, effective communication, collaboration, managing conflict and resolution, and merchandising and marketing.

"With this new scholarship, Helene Fortunoff's spirit of generosity and support for women in our industry will be commemorated and will continue to benefit the next generation of leaders shaping retail's future," shares WJA Foundation President, Gabrielle Grazi.

WJA Foundation's partnership with the Fortunoff family is significant as the organization celebrates its 40-year anniversary in 2023. The impact WJA has had on women in the jewelry and watch industry over the past four

decades would not be possible without the positive support and commitment of members like Helene Fortunoff who paved the way for women to connect, learn and shine together.

The application period for WJA Foundation scholarships is open from March 1, 2023 – April 30, 2023. Applicants that wish to apply for the *Helene Fortunoff Women in Retail Scholarship* may do so through www.womensjewelryassociation.com.

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About the Women's Jewelry Association Foundation

WJA Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization that offers a variety of scholarships and grants to support the career growth and educational endeavors of professionals in the jewelry and watch industries. To learn more and donate to WJA Foundation, please visit:

<https://www.womensjewelryassociation.com/foundation>

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