

Prominent Maryland Firms KO Public Affairs and Sandy Hillman Communications Merge

BALTIMORE, MD (March 26, 2024) – KO Public Affairs LLC, a leading Maryland public affairs and government relations firm, today announced the merger of Sandy Hillman Communications, a full-service public relations and consumer marketing firm, into the KO family. The combination of the two well-established firms enhances and expands KO's footprint beyond public affairs into consumer marketing.

Hillman has long been a lifestyle PR leader, representing a variety of industries from Fortune 500 brands to visionary startups, restaurants, world-class museums, and travel destinations.

"Sandy Hillman is a civic and industry leader in Maryland, nationally and internationally," said Steve Kearney, managing partner and co-founder of KO Public Affairs. "After building KO for 16 years, we're thrilled to partner with Sandy and her team to take our combined firm to the next level."

"After working together for almost a decade, we are finally formally integrating our two firms," said Sandy Hillman. "This merger combines KO's local and regional expertise with Hillman's national footprint. We are seeing a growing number of businesses and non-profits needing a combination of consumer outreach and public affairs counsel. This merger provides that full complement of strategic communications services."

The combined firm will be managed by Kearney. Rick Abbruzzese, Partner, KO Public Affairs, will oversee the integration of the firms with Elisabeth "Liz" Feldman, Sr. Vice President, serving as the Head of the Consumer Marketing and Public Relations division within the combined firm.

"We are thrilled to partner with Sandy Hillman and her team of seasoned professionals," said Abbruzzese. "Sandy Hillman is a national leader building and sustaining brands. The keen consumer insights and high level of expertise brought by the Hillman team will be an invaluable asset to our combined firm and our clients."

"This partnership represents an important step in our firm's evolution as a top, consumer marketing and public relations team," said Feldman. "Our clients will greatly benefit from the expanded suite of services we can offer them by combining the expertise of both firms."

Sandy Hillman Communications' client roster includes nationally renowned tourist attractions and museums, restaurants, Fortune 500 companies, and non-profits.

Sandy Hillman was named "CEO of the Year" in 2023 by the *Baltimore Business Journal*. Prior to founding Hillman Communications, she was an executive at a major full-service advertising and public relations firm. Prior to that, Hillman founded and led the Baltimore Office of Promotion and Tourism. She was dubbed the "impresario of urban America" by *TIME* magazine for her revolutionary and internationally-recognized work in transforming Baltimore's Inner Harbor into a world-class tourism destination. She currently sits on the boards of Schaefer Center for Public Policy at University of Baltimore, Greater Baltimore Committee and Living Classrooms.

KO Public Affairs was founded in 2008 by Steve Kearney and Damian O'Doherty. The firm has represented leading corporation and nonprofits in the healthcare, energy, education, international relations, real estate, transportation, manufacturing, retail, and sports and entertainment industry. The firm's partners have served as key advisors to governors, county executives, and members of Congress. KO has been widely recognized as Maryland's "powerhouse" public affairs firm. Collectively, its leadership has run, and won, communications campaigns for Fortune 500 companies, national and local nonprofits, and political candidates. With backgrounds in government, media, coalition building and advocacy, KO offers diverse talents and extensive connections to media, as well as through its broad local, state, and national network.

In addition, KO Public Affairs recently announced Josh White, a top Maryland government relations professional, would lead the firm's government relations practice in Annapolis, Maryland. The firm's government relations clients now include Uber, Pharmaceutical Researchers and Manufacturers of America, Ports America Chesapeake, Novo Nordisk, Surescripts and Novartis to name a few.

To learn more about KO Public Affairs and the firm's newest team members, please visit www.kopublicaffairs.com.

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