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ASTRA TO HONOR INDUSTRY LEADERS AT MARKETPLACE & ACADEMY

***DANCING BEAR TOYS OF ASHEVILLE, NC, MARKY SPARKY, CARLE
WUNDERLICH, KATHERINE HODGES AND STEVE STAROBINSKY
TO BE RECOGNIZED***

Chicago, IL (May 21, 2018) – The American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA) announced the 2018 winners of ASTRA’s coveted Excellence Awards today.

Selected by the ASTRA membership, the awards recognize leading retailers, manufacturers, sales representatives, and young professionals who represent the best of the specialty toy industry. The 2018 awardees are:

- **Retailer of the Year**
Dancing Bear Toys, Ltd.
Erika Evers and Sarah Evers, Owners
Asheville, NC

- **Manufacturer of the Year**
Marky Sparky
Escondido, CA

- **Sales Representatives of the Year**
Carle Wunderlich
WundeReps
Lisle, IL

Katherine Hodges
Sandy Ruben & Associates
Garner, NC

- **Young Professional Rising Star**
Steve Starobinsky
Diverse Marketing
Dallas, TX

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“Our annual gathering at Marketplace & Academy is an appropriate time to pause and recognize those leaders who have had a big impact on growing the specialty toy industry,” said Kimberly Mosley, President of the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA). “Our honorees exemplify what makes the specialty toy industry *special*: an appreciation for the role of play in healthy child development; a commitment to top-notch service; and a willingness to help others in the industry succeed.”

The award ceremony will take place on Monday, June 11, 2018 at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, LA during ASTRA’s annual Awards Breakfast and Business Meeting. The event begins at 8 AM Central time.

About the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA)

Founded in 1992, the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA) is an international not-for-profit trade organization that develops and supports a membership of independent retailers, manufacturers and sales representatives in the toy industry. Inspired to change the world through the power of play, ASTRA is a community of dedicated professionals committed to providing children with healthy, quality play materials that have a high play value and are designed with a focus on what the child can do, rather than what the toy can do. Through certification programs, educational resources and networking opportunities, ASTRA equips and empowers members to make a positive impact on the economy and culture of the communities they serve. For more information, visit www.astratoy.org/.

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