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**Geraldine Plato Named as New Executive Director of HandMade in America:**

**Plato to Assume Leadership Effective March 1, 2008**

ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA – A carefully executed transition process has culminated in the hiring of Geraldine Plato as the new Executive Director of HandMade in America. Unanimous approval by HandMade’s Board of Directors on Monday, January 28 brought the executive search to a close with Plato assuming the position effective March 1.

Currently a resident of Penland, North Carolina, Plato is a native of Elyria, Ohio, and first moved to Western North Carolina in 1984. Her notable career includes two periods worked with the Penland School of Crafts. The first, in the 1980’s when she was responsible for oversight of the scholarship program, the coordination of all services, and the management of numerous special events including developing the blueprint for the first Annual Benefit Auction – which has become a sell-out event; the second, in the 1990’s, when she returned to Penland to oversee operational phases of the School’s management as Assistant Director. Prior to that, Plato was Public Information Director for the Mississippi Arts Commission, developing and implementing communications for the state-wide arts organization. Most recently, Plato served as Head of the Spruce Pine Montessori School where she developed programs and curriculum, donor relationships and fundraising strategies, while managing school staff and hundreds of volunteers in the four-county service area.

Altogether, Plato brings over twenty years of professional experience to her management role with HandMade. Her considerable expertise in arts and crafts administration and education, and her network of community relationships are especially well suited to the mission, programs, and services of HandMade in America. “It’s rewarding to see how the skills I have developed over the years translate so well into my responsibilities at HandMade. My passion for the advancement of crafts, community development in WNC, and hands-on education will find a great home at HandMade,” Plato said. Furthermore, she will bring a new emphasis to the nonprofit for the identification and development of added revenue streams, such as the licensing of intellectual properties, fees for services, and individual and corporate gift giving.

Last year, the change in leadership was advanced by Becky Anderson – HandMade’s founder – together with the Board of Directors, through a strategically phased action plan over a ten-month period. Initially, the Board and staff established priorities for the new director through a combination of candid interviews and

surveys. That feedback served as the basis for a position announcement prepared by the Transition Committee, which was posted on the nation's leading nonprofit career-search websites. During the one-month response period, the notice drew over 100 letters of interest from potential contenders living in Virginia, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Texas, California, Washington, and North Carolina. After an initial review of all the respondents' resumes, the Transition Committee conducted ten telephone interviews, narrowing the field to three candidates who were invited to Asheville for personal meetings. Ultimately, two finalists were asked to return for further discussions to assist the Transition Committee in making their final decision, and the leadership position was offered to Plato.

“One of the goals of the HandMade in America organization is to promote Western North Carolina as *the* center for the handmade object,” said David Erickson, Chairman of HandMade's Board of Directors. “In keeping with this objective, it is quite fitting that our thorough nationwide search for the best possible candidate brought us right back to our own neighborhood.”

Becky Anderson, who founded HandMade in 1993 will leave at the end of March, to become fully engaged in working with nonprofit communities across the county, through a private consulting practice. The torch she passes to Plato is a strong organization – one that has earned an exceptional reputation across Western North Carolina and beyond.

HandMade in America's success is due, in large part, to its solid fiscal position, and a staff of dedicated, motivated individuals who hold a common vision – that of advancing the nonprofit's clear-cut goals over the next eighteen months. “The staff deeply appreciates Becky's thoughtful preparation for her career change, and the engagement of both the Board and staff in the process,” said Betty Hurst, staff representative on the Transition Committee. “It has been a constructive time for everyone. We look to the future with an even greater loyalty to the HandMade organization, and know there will be a continuity of strength in our programming.”

“Our Transition Committee is delighted that Geraldine Plato has emerged as the best of the best,” Erickson added. “We are anxious to get started in the next chapter of HandMade's rich history with Geraldine at the helm as our new Executive Director.”

HandMade in America is a nonprofit organization promoting craft and culture for community and economic development in Western North Carolina. For more information, call Donna Abranches, Director of Operations, at 828-252-0121, or go to [www.handmadeinamerica.org](http://www.handmadeinamerica.org).

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