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PRESS RELEASE –

The Howard Group Inc. (HGI) has for a second time, been awarded the BBB's highest honor, the Torch Award Business of the Year, presented by the Better Business Bureau Serving Alaska, Oregon, & Western Washington.

Each year only one small business in Western Washington receives this recognition, and Howard Group president, Kevin Howard St. John noted, "Winning the award once is a great honor, winning it a second time is something we never believed would happen. There are so many companies who do such wonderful things within our community our entire team was overwhelmed with the fact that we were recognized again for our work."

In praising of the businesses like the Howard Group who win this award, Robert Andrew, President and CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving Alaska, Oregon, and Western Washington said, "The companies that win this award are the elite of the elite - they stood out above some amazing competition. These winners don't just do 'business as usual' - they strive for the highest standards of customer service and attempt to make a difference in their communities. When it comes to the Howard Group, he noted "Their business outlook towards customers, employees and their community should serve as a model for other businesses aspiring to the same level of excellence."

Businesses are nominated by the public and evaluated by non-biased, third-party judges from various organizations. The Better Business Bureau receives 300-400 nominations annually for Western Washington, and the award for Business of the Year goes to business with the highest total score in the areas of Integrity, Customer Service, Ethics and Innovative Business Practices. This year, for the second time, The Howard Group was found at the top in each of those categories.

"Perhaps above all awards we've previously received, this recognition is most significant and most meaningful," said Kevin Howard, president and CEO. "It recognizes not only the quality of our work and our ethics within the marketplace, but it is also a solid affirmation that our commitment to work openly and honestly with the families and businesses of our community is both unique and valued. Businesses are often faced with the dilemma of differentiating themselves from one another; this award takes away the rhetoric and 'salesmanship' and plainly shows what a business truly practices."

"The Howard Group is sending a strong message that business is alive and well." noted Jean Hales, President/CEO of the South Snohomish County Chamber of Commerce in echoing the sentiments of the BBB. "The Howard Group exemplifies the high quality of our business members and reflects well on the local business community. As Lynnwood celebrates its 50th Anniversary, The South Snohomish County Chamber of Commerce is pleased to add very deserved congratulations to The Howard Group."

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Local officials were heaping their praise upon the Howard Group; Lynnwood's Economic Development Director David Kleitsch believes, "The success of The Howard Group reflects well on the caliber of Lynnwood's diverse business community.

Diverse is perhaps an ideal term to describe the unusual nature of The Howard Group. An event production company, The Howard Group has been located in Lynnwood for about a quarter of a century and provides a wide range of services for special events. From weddings and graduation parties to corporate picnics and holiday events The Howard Group has what it takes to make a special event, really special.

"We have thousands of feet of warehouse space full of interesting and unusual items that includes décor, sound and lighting equipment, casino tables, inflatables, costumes and props. Our items are as diverse as a Statue of Liberty and an eight foot tall Buddha, to an undersea panorama and Monte Carlo casino" notes company president Kevin Howard St John; "If an event can be imagined, The Howard Group can make it happen."

Its five different divisions. Grad Nights, Sounds Unlimited, Events Northwest, Premier Entertainment and the Fantasy Casino, provide a very customer service driven approach to life's major milestones. Each division is directed at one specific segment of the special event market with a unifying focus of *Celebrating Life*.

"This is a huge compliment for us, and it is very humbling" says Sondra St John, Vice President of HGI, "The Better Business Bureau stands for excellence in business so just to be nominated was an honor for our team. For us to win was a testament to our mission and the values of our employees. St. John continues "We love what we do. It brings us so much joy to know we've played a part in helping the members of our community."

When asked what it was about their core values that led to The Howard Group being recognized as a Torch Award Winner, everyone seemed to agree: "Delivering more than what is promised; standing for what you believe to be right; and simply doing the right thing, especially when no one else is looking. The Howard Group lives those values."