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**Media Contact:**

Naomi Salad, Dialogue

678.429.2369

naomi@dialogue.marketing

**National Kitchen & Bath Association**

**Launches NKBA NextUp Workforce Initiative**

*Multi-Tiered Program Aims to Recruit and Empower the Next Generation of Talent*

*to Fill Urgent Need of Jobs in the Design and Construction Industry*

**LAS VEGAS, KITCHEN & BATH INDUSTRY SHOW (January 22, 2020) ―** The National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA), the authority on all things residential kitchen and bath, today launched NKBA NextUp, an initiative which aims to recruit and empower a well-prepared workforce for the kitchen and bath industry.

Through 2026, 750,000 jobs are expected to open up in the design and construction industry, with hundreds of thousands of construction jobs currently going unfilled each month in the U.S. A stagnant workforce adversely affects the kitchen and bath industry as projects take longer to finish. NKBA members reported in 2019 that 30 percent of their upcoming projects might experience long delays. Longer timeframes, in turn, mean that fewer projects can be completed.

“Unfilled jobs in the design and construction industry may be attributed to consistent messages to students and their parents that the most accessible path to success starts with a four-year college degree. Four-year college degrees are one way, but not the *only* way,” said Bill Darcy, NKBA chief executive officer. “To attract the best talent, NKBA NextUp will engage with a wide network of students who have interest, curiosity, or an entrepreneurial drive that is more compatible with a hands-on career in the kitchen and bath industry, so they are aware of the many paths to success.”

NKBA NextUp will approach this in three ways:

* Create hands-on experiences that introduce high school students to the craft of design and construction.
* Change the dialogue about career paths, raising awareness that there are many pathways to lucrative and stimulating work creating safe, beautiful and functional spaces in the heart and soul of the home.
* Connect interest to action through our chapters, building strong networks of local talent that will deliver an exceptional experience to all homeowners who want to improve their kitchens and bathrooms.

**1. Create a Hands-On Experiences**

The cornerstone of NKBA NextUp is BridgeYear/NKBA Career Tour, bringing six interactive kitchen and bath career simulations to high schools. Through exercises in finish carpentry, installation, kitchen and bath design, plumbing, electrical and showroom sales set up as stations around the school gym, high school students are active participants in “trying on” various careers. Students gain valuable insight into potential vocational pathways they can pursue after graduation that are alternatives to the traditional four-year college degree path.

“With the elimination of shop classes, most of today's high school students never get a chance to experience the craft and design involved in home building and remodeling,” Darcy said.

NKBA partnered with BridgeYear, an innovative non-profit that enlightens students about career options that require less than a four-year degree. After launching in Houston BridgeYear/NKBA Career Tours will expand outside Texas and expects to impact more than 24,000 students by year three.

In addition, NKBA launched a philanthropic community restoration endeavor to encourage its local chapters to engage the next generation of construction and design talent in the hands-on process of renovating a public building that delivers vital services to its community. The NKBA Rocky Mountain Chapter submitted the winning proposal to renovate the kitchen at a non-profit community center in Colorado. The Mountain Resource Center provides food-pantry access, nutrition education, cooking classes and a wide variety of other health and human services for its community. “This experience will help students see the real-life impact of skills-based kitchen and bath careers and how it makes a tangible difference in people's lives,” Darcy said.

In a third hands-on experience, NKBA NextUp is facilitating a “Kitchen of the Future” and a STEM Kitchen Robot competition at a middle school near NKBA’s N.J. headquarters. The purpose is to illustrate the intersection of technology and robotics with design, building and practical applications in everyday life.

**2. Change the Dialogue About Career Paths**

NKBA will launch a national awareness campaign this spring targeting young adults, their parents, educators and other influencers about kitchen and bath industry careers. The campaign builds on Darcy’s extensive advocacy about kitchen and bath careers to date, which has included appearances on FOX Business, CNBC and other outlets.

“NKBA NextUp is not anti-college; it is pro-career,” Darcy said. “We seek to change the dialogue to ensure that kids and their parents know that there are many paths to career and financial success after graduation.”

The campaign will include original NKBA research to assist in identifying questions and concerns that teens may have about the industry.

**3. Connect Interest to Action Through the NKBA Chapters**

As more students demonstrate an interest in kitchen and bath careers, NKBA local chapters — in collaboration with their wider network of local design and construction industry allies — will light the local path to nurture and mentor them.

It all comes together on the NKBA.org Jobs portal, where NKBA is expanding the job posting possibilities so members can post part-time jobs and internships that are open to students even while they are still in high school.

“How will our chapters support NKBA NextUp? A great start is to simply invite youth in, which many of our chapters already do, through special career days at shops, studios, and showrooms,” Darcy noted. “Now, with NKBA NextUp, our chapters will be able to better connect with potential talent while students can learn more about how a variety of kitchen and bath businesses thrive.”

Similarly, NKBA has invited students from the Clark County School District in Las Vegas to KBIS for the second year in a row. The number of participating students doubled in 2020 to 300 in total, compared to 150 in 2019. Follow-up research after the 2019 event revealed that 75 percent of the students who participated said they were more interested in a career in design and construction after attending.

“We know we have a big job ahead of us to attract the best possible talent that will contribute to the future prosperity and vibrancy of the kitchen and bath industry,” Darcy said. “It’s a tall order, but exactly what a trade association is designed to do: raising the level of professionalism by inspiring, leading and empowering each member of our community.”

For more information about NKBA NextUp, please visit NKBA.org/nextup.

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**About the National Kitchen & Bath Association**

The National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) is the not-for-profit trade association that owns the Kitchen & Bath Industry Show® (KBIS), as part of Design & Construction Week® (DCW). With nearly 50,000 members in all segments of the kitchen and bath industry, the NKBA has educated and led the industry since the association’s founding in 1963. The NKBA envisions a world where everyone enjoys safe, beautiful and functional kitchen and bath spaces. The mission of the NKBA is to inspire, lead and empower the kitchen and bath industry through the creations of certifications, marketplaces and networks. For more information, visit NKBA.org or call 1-800-THE-NKBA (843-6522).