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Koelnmesse Inc. Announces Transition in Leadership: Darrin Stern follows Mette Petersen as President and Managing Director

Mette Petersen to retire after 22 years of remarkable leadership
Effective 1 January 2026, Darrin Stern will assume the role of
President and Managing Director
Carefully planned handover underscores continuity, growth, and
long-term success in North America

Koelnmesse Inc. is entering a new chapter with a structured and collaborative leadership transition. Effective 1 January 2026, Darrin Stern will become President and Managing Director, succeeding Mette Petersen, who will retire 30 June 2026, after 22 years of remarkable leadership. Mette will continue in an advisory capacity through the first half of the year to ensure a smooth handover, mentoring team members and supporting key initiatives with Koelnmesse's headquarters in Cologne, Germany. This planned transition reinforces Koelnmesse's commitment to continuity, growth, and long-term success in North America.

Over the past 22 years, Petersen has grown the U.S. office across all key performance indicators—including profitability, personnel, exhibition square footage, and specialized exhibit options. She also introduced and successfully launched three major trade events in North America. Under her leadership the team earned consecutive Fastest 50 recognitions and two Gold 100 finalist honors from the magazine Trade Show Executive. Her leadership has forged a legacy of strong events, enduring industry relationships, growing Koelnmesse recognition in North America, and a resilient team positioned for continued success.

“It has been the honor of my career to lead Koelnmesse Inc. for more than 22 years. Together with an incredible team, we introduced new shows, expanded our reach, and secured our place in one of the most dynamic exhibition markets in the world. I am deeply proud of what we have accomplished, and I leave with full confidence that the foundation we built will carry Koelnmesse forward for decades to come,” says Mette Petersen, outgoing President and Managing Director of Koelnmesse Inc.

Effective January 1, 2026, Darrin Stern will assume the role of President and Managing Director of Koelnmesse Inc. Stern brings his own 22-year legacy with the company, most recently serving as Vice President of Business Development and Show Director for h+h americas and the Fiber+Fabric Craft Festival. Throughout his tenure, Mr. Stern has contributed to every show supported by Koelnmesse Inc., including leading roles in USA Pavilion initiatives, and has been instrumental in building the company's IT infrastructure and sales systems.

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Executive Board:

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Executive Officer)

Oliver Frese

Chairman of the Supervisory
Board:

Mayor of the City of Cologne

Torsten Burmester

Headquarters and place of
jurisdiction:

Cologne

District Court Cologne, HRB 952

“I’m honored and energized to step into this role on January 1. Mette built something extraordinary—and the team she led is a powerhouse. My goal is simple: protect her legacy by build on it. We’ll leverage our strengths, expand our family of events, and ensure the next chapter at Koelnmesse Inc. is more dynamic and future-ready than ever,” says Darrin Stern, incoming President and Managing Director of Koelnmesse Inc.

“Mette Petersen has been a remarkable leader and ambassador for Koelnmesse in North America. Her dedication, vision, and ability to build both successful events and strong partnerships have been invaluable to our global growth strategy. We are deeply grateful for her 22 years of service. With Darrin stepping into the role, we’re confident that Koelnmesse Inc. will continue to thrive and expand our global reach,” says Gerald Böse, President and Chief Executive Officer of Koelnmesse GmbH

“Darrin is the ideal leader for this next chapter—he knows our business, our people, and our purpose inside and out. Under Mette’s leadership, Koelnmesse Inc. has flourished. With Darrin at the helm, supported by an outstanding team, I’m confident we’ll continue to accelerate growth and strengthen Koelnmesse’s global family of events,” says Denis Steker, Senior Vice President International of Koelnmesse GmbH

Looking ahead, Koelnmesse Inc. will continue expanding the Koelnmesse family of events in North America, bringing more industries and communities together under one global platform. Over the next decade, the company is committed to:

- Growing its portfolio of shows across both established and emerging markets
- Expanding the reach of USA pavilions and deepening international partnerships
- Building new opportunities for exhibitors and attendees that foster commerce, creativity, and collaboration
- Ensuring the Koelnmesse brand remains synonymous with excellence, reliability, and global connection

Together, the team at Koelnmesse Inc. is poised to build on the strong foundation laid by Ms. Petersen and drive the next era of progress—marked by growth, international presence, and deeper industry impact.

Photos of Mette Petersen and Darrin Stern, as well as images from Koelnmesse Inc. trade fairs, are available for download here: [image database](#)

About Koelnmesse:

Koelnmesse employs around 1,200 people. As a city trade fair in the heart of Europe, it occupies the third largest trade fair grounds in Germany and, with almost 400,000 m² of hall and outdoor space, is among the top ten largest trade fair grounds in the world. Each year, Koelnmesse organises and manages around 80 trade fairs, guest events and corporate events in Cologne and in the most important markets all over the world. Its portfolio reaches over 49,000 exhibiting companies from 129 countries and around 2,5 million visitors from more than 220 nations. Until 2040, Koelnmesse is investing more than 1 billion euro in the development of the trade fair grounds

with the most extensive investment programme in its history, to allow it to cover all event formats in the future. Koelnmesse has celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2024. 100 years in which Koelnmesse has brought people and markets together worldwide.

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Photo material for media representatives:

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