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CONTACT:

Claire Mullins
Director of Marketing and Events
410-727-4808 ext. 119
cmullins@thebmi.org

BMI Opens Tribute Display of Helen Bentley Garments

Former Congresswoman, Museum Trustee Was a Champion of American Fashion

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND – On November 4, 2016, as Baltimore says its official farewell to former U.S. Congresswoman Helen Delich Bentley in public and private memorial services, the Baltimore Museum of Industry (BMI) will open a tribute display of select dresses and hats bequeathed to the museum by Ms. Bentley. Known as much for being stylish as she was for her groundbreaking career as a maritime reporter and elected official, Bentley wore garments that reflected her civic pride in supporting American designers.

Four garments and 12 hats will be displayed, including an ivory brocade cocktail dress with matching coat, c. 1960, Jeanette Beck label; a moss green and lavender mottled dress, c. 1960, Pauline Trigère label; and a deep brimmed hat covered with multi-colored feathers, 1970s, Adolfo Saks Fifth Avenue label. The display will also feature photos of Ms. Bentley wearing the items featured.

The display is curated by museum volunteer Debbie Farthing and will be on display through April 30, 2017.

Inspired by her immigrant mother's journey to America onboard a German steamship, Bentley arrived in Baltimore from her native Nevada in 1945 and quickly made a name for herself reporting on the city's maritime industries for the *Sun*. Bentley's syndicated column, "Around the Waterfront," drew on a wide range of sources—she was as comfortable around longshoremen and union officials as she was with shipping executives and politicians—and frequently broke stories involving the Port of Baltimore and its competitors throughout the nation. Named the *Sun's* first female maritime editor in 1949, Bentley's growing expertise led her to become the host and producer of WMAR-TV's popular series "The Port That Built a City" in 1950. From this televised platform, Bentley not only helped lead the charge to put the aging Port of Baltimore under the modern control of the Maryland Port Authority, but also showcased an amazing collection of custom-made dresses and hats, some of which will be displayed. Much like her advocacy on behalf of the port, Bentley's support for American designers demonstrated her lifelong belief in the importance of local manufacturing and commerce.

The same civic pride that informed Bentley's waterfront reporting and fashion choices also eventually guided her into public service. In 1969, President Richard Nixon appointed Bentley Chair of the Federal Maritime Commission, making her the highest ranking woman in the Executive Branch. During her six years leading the Commission, Bentley was a strong proponent for improvements to the nation's aging merchant fleet. Following stints as a magazine columnist and shipping company executive, Bentley then turned her sights on Congress and was elected to represent Maryland's 2nd District in 1984. During her five terms, the Republican congresswoman worked tirelessly on shipping and trade issues, and secured millions of dollars to improve the Port of Baltimore. Bentley also backed numerous "Buy American" campaigns and could often be found driving across her district in an American-made station wagon bearing a "BUY USA" license plate. Though Bentley retired from public office in

1995 following a failed bid for Maryland governor, she continued to advocate on behalf of Baltimore's maritime interests as a consultant right up until her death.

Coupled with a close association to BMI founder Mayor William Donald Schaefer, Bentley's lifelong interest in promoting Baltimore's industrial heritage made her a natural advocate for the BMI. In 2003, she joined the museum's Board of Trustees and quickly became one of its most active members. During her time as a Trustee, Bentley's contributions to the BMI were numerous and included chairing multiple Board committees, skillfully guiding the museum through the transition between executive directors, and tirelessly promoting the museum amongst Maryland's most powerful economic and political leaders.

In her honor, the Baltimore Museum of Industry has established the Helen Delich Bentley Port Education Fund. Launched with a generous gift from her estate, this charitable fund seeks to heighten awareness of the Port of Baltimore through the enrichment of the BMI's educational and exhibition programs and the care and preservation of its historical collections. The fund will ensure the BMI continues to share the legacy of Baltimore's unique maritime and industrial heritage for years to come.

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ABOUT THE BMI:

The Baltimore Museum of Industry celebrates Maryland's industrial legacy and shows how innovation fuels ongoing progress. Our exhibitions, educational programs, and collections engage visitors in the stories of the people who built Baltimore and those who shape the region's future.

VISITOR INFORMATION:

The Baltimore Museum of Industry is located at 1415 Key Highway, Inner Harbor South, Baltimore, MD 21230. The BMI is open Tuesday – Sunday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., and closed Mondays and certain holidays. Free on-site parking is available. Admission prices, general museum information and directions can be found at www.thebmi.org. Follow us on Facebook at [BaltimoreMuseumofIndustry](https://www.facebook.com/BaltimoreMuseumofIndustry) and on Twitter at [@BMIatWork](https://twitter.com/BMIatWork).