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Southwest Airlines Senior Executive Ginger Hardage Retires From Airline After 25 Years

DALLAS, Nov. 12, 2015 /PRNewswire/ -- Ginger C. Hardage, Southwest Airlines Senior Vice President, Culture & Communications, announced her retirement from the carrier, effective Dec. 31, 2015.

As the senior leader overseeing Culture & Communication at Southwest—the nation's largest airline in terms of originating domestic passengers boarded—Hardage championed the airline's communication and outreach evolution, including Southwest's Companywide Emergency Response effort, expanding the communication functions to include more robust internal communications capabilities and a social business effort, and a focused corporate philanthropy program. For the past seven years, she also led the airline's Culture Committee, Employee recognition and engagement, and the Companywide celebrations. She was a member of various executive committees and led Southwest's "Best Place to Work" initiative.

"Ginger has been a joy to work with, and she has made countless contributions to Southwest," said Gary Kelly, Southwest's Chairman, President, and CEO. "She has been an invaluable business partner, advisor, and mentor. She brings constant, positive energy and enthusiasm to all those around her, and that is infectious. She has built superb Teams that we are both very proud of, and that I know will continue her special brand of excellence."

"Working for Southwest Airlines truly has been a 'dream job' because of the People of this great airline and the values that drive the Company's Customer-friendly decisions," Hardage said. "The leadership team has grown and transformed the airline while staying true to its Purpose. The future never looked brighter and the Culture and Communication Leaders are ready to soar."

With Hardage's retirement, the airline's Culture team and programs will report to Teresa Laraba, Southwest's Senior Vice President of Customers and Culture. Linda Rutherford, Vice President, Chief Communications Officer, will now report to Southwest Chairman, President, and CEO Gary Kelly and assume responsibility for the Employee Engagement & Travel teams in addition to her leadership of the Communication and Outreach teams.

Hardage joined the airline in December 1990 as the Director of Public Relations and moved to several senior leadership positions before being named the SVP of Culture & Communications in August 2005. Prior to joining Southwest, Hardage worked at Maxus Energy Corporation and its predecessor, Diamond Shamrock Corporation, holding a variety of public relations positions, including director of communications. She began her career in Dallas with Life Insurance Company of the Southwest in marketing communications, immediately following graduation from Texas Tech University.

Hardage has received numerous recognitions for her contributions to the communications profession, including being named to *PR Week's* "Top 50 Power List" for 2011 through 2014.

On Dec. 7, 2015, she will be inducted into *PR Week's* Public Relations Hall of Fame during a ceremony and awards dinner in New York City. In 2010, Hardage was named one of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Public Relations and one of Texas' Most Powerful and Influential Women. In 2002, under her leadership, the Southwest Team was named the best Corporate PR Team in the nation by *PR Week*.

Hardage currently serves on the International Board of Trustees for the Ronald McDonald House Charities, is President of the Trinity Commons Foundation and is on the boards of the Arthur Page Society and Trinity Trust. She previously served on advisory boards of Novartis in Basel, Switzerland; Business Civic Leadership Center, an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; Big Brothers and Sisters of Metropolitan Dallas; Southwest Cares; and the Council of Public Relations Firms. She is a past president of the Dallas Chapter of the International Association of Business Communications; a past member of the Southern Methodist University Public Relations advisory board; and formerly on the Texas Tech Rawls College of Business advisory board. Hardage is an avid public speaker at universities and organizations ranging from Google to Princeton University on topics related to "Building a Brand from the Inside Out."

ABOUT SOUTHWEST AIRLINES CO.

In its 45th year of service, Dallas-based [Southwest Airlines](#) (NYSE: LUV) continues to differentiate itself from other air carriers with exemplary Customer Service delivered by more than 48,000 Employees to more than 100 million Customers annually. Southwest operates more than 3,600 flights a day, serving 97 destinations across the United States and seven additional countries.

Based on the U.S. Department of Transportation's most recent data, Southwest Airlines is the nation's largest carrier in terms of originating domestic passengers boarded. The Company operates the largest fleet of Boeing aircraft in the world, the majority of which are equipped with satellite-based WiFi providing gate-to-gate connectivity. That connectivity enables Customers to use their personal devices to access streaming music provided by Apple Music or to view video on-demand movies and television shows, as well as nearly 20 channels of free, live TV compliments of our valued Partners. Southwest created [TransfarencySM](#), a philosophy which treats Customers honestly and fairly, and in which low fares actually stay low. *Southwest is the only major U.S. airline to offer bags fly free® to everyone (first and second checked pieces of luggage, size and weight limits apply, some airlines may allow free checked bags on select routes or for qualified circumstances), and there are no change fees, though fare differences might apply. In 2014, the airline proudly unveiled a bold new look: *Heart*. The new aircraft livery, airport experience, and logo, showcase the dedication of Southwest Employees to connect Customers with what's important in their lives.

From its first flights on June 18, 1971, Southwest Airlines launched an era of unprecedented affordability in air travel described by the U.S. Department of Transportation as "The Southwest Effect," a lowering of fares and increase in passenger traffic whenever the carrier enters new markets. With 42 consecutive years of profitability, Southwest is one of the most honored airlines in the world, known for a triple bottom line approach that contributes to the carrier's performance and productivity, the importance of its People and the communities they serve, and an overall commitment to efficiency and the planet. The 2014 Southwest Airlines One Report™ can be found at [SouthwestOneReport.com](#). Book Southwest Airlines' low fares online at [Southwest.com](#) or by phone at 800-I-FLY-SWA.

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