

NEW YORK — The National Home Furnishings Industry's chapter of the Anti-Defamation League, the fundraising leader among all ADL groups raised more than \$800,000 at its annual dinner here earlier this month.

This year's event honored three icons of the furniture industry, Jena Hall, president, Jena Hall Designs; Jerry Epperson, partner at Mann, Armistead & Epperson; and Todd Wanek, president and CEO of [Ashley Furniture Inds.](#)

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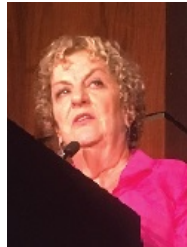
In addressing the capacity crowd for only his second time since taking the role as ADL's CEO, Jonathan Greenblatt told the audience, "The digital revolution has allowed hatred to seep into our culture in many ways," citing increased instances of cyberbullying and the use of social media to spread messages of intolerance.

He went on to note that in 2016 instances of antisemitism rose 34% over the prior year and that in the first quarter of this year there was an 86% increase in such instances over the same period of 2016.

He added, however, that even in the face of such instances "I feel hope that's something has been awakened. Across the country there is a new spirit of community. We need to lean in to this spirit."

The night's first honoree, Jena Hall accepted her award on behalf of the 6th generation on hand at the event since the family's first immigrants came to America.

"Everybody has a story about being an American," she said. "Cherish your heritage. Tell it to your children; keep that alive."



Jena Hall



In accepting his award, Jerry Epperson shared some of his own family history, using a story of receiving gifts from members of his community in small town Virginia as a metaphor for the support that so often underpins the achievements of successful people.

He went on to thank his wife of 47 years, Kathy: "The wonderful woman who gave up her career in medicine to give me the best children anyone could ask for."

Jerry Epperson

[Ashley's](#) Todd Wanek likewise struck a family theme in his remarks, expressing the blessings he felt for his wife, Karen, and children, Cameron and Gabrielle. He went on to draw a parallel to his larger [Ashley Furniture Inds.](#) family and the gratitude and honor he felt for being part of an organization that has made support of organizations like City of Hope, the Mayo Clinic and ADL, among others, an integral part of its culture.

"Whether it is your job or your family life, you have to bring passion," he said. "Thank you for being a part of our family. We're very proud to be associated with ADL."



Todd Wanek

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I'm Bill McLoughlin, Chief Content Officer at Furniture Today. In the 25 plus years I've covered retail the thing I've enjoyed most is the people; hearing their stories, learning about their companies and sharing insights on the business. Through this blog I hope to continue that dialogue. Sometimes you may agree with me, sometimes not. But it's my hope you will find a fresh perspective and perhaps an idea or two that helps improve your business. I welcome your comments and look forward to a long and productive dialogue.