

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 22, 2022



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Leadership Changing at The Cowboy

Natalie Shirley ends tenure at National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum following five successful years; Pat Fitzgerald to be named President & CEO after nationwide search

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. – Natalie Shirley, President & CEO at The Cowboy since January 2018, is stepping down following a successful five-year tenure. Shirley announced her plans to the Museum board in April, and a national search for her replacement began shortly after.

“It was always my intention to be here 4 to 5 years,” said Shirley. “I love this Museum, and I have loved working with the incredible board and staff we have here, but I was brought in to accomplish specific goals and tasks which I have done. The timing is right for new leadership to take the reins and build on the achievements we’ve been fortunate to accomplish during my time here.”

During Shirley’s term, the Museum has experienced consistent success and significant growth. Major projects completed during her tenure include the completion of Liichokoshkomo’, the Museum’s 100,000 sq. ft. outdoor educational experience, as well as major renovations of the William S. and Ann Atherton permanent collection galleries and the Sam Noble Special Events Center. Less visible but critical building maintenance projects have also been completed under her leadership. Shirley also increased community outreach initiatives, building on her strong ties and record of community service. The number of exhibitions annually increased, the Museum’s annual events experienced growth in attendance and sales, the donor base increased and the number of local, national and international visitors saw double-digit percentage increases since Shirley assumed leadership in 2018.

“Natalie has been an absolute homerun for the Museum, and we are so grateful for the time we’ve been able to have her here,” said Jerry Winchester, Chairman of the Museum Board of Directors. “Through a global pandemic and other challenges that tested all of us these past few years, the Museum hasn’t just survived but thrived under her leadership. We definitely had the right person at the right time.”

The Board of Directors recently appointed Pat Fitzgerald as the Museum’s new President and CEO, effective October 10, 2022. Fitzgerald is a native Oklahoman with nearly 40 years of experience in various industries, including senior executive positions at Apple and Walt Disney Studios.

“The Board spent months conducting a national search that produced a number of incredible candidates,” said Winchester. “Pat’s leadership successes with major organizations, as well as his passion for the institution and the stories we want to tell here, helped him stand out as the best choice to lead the Museum into this next stage of growth. We’re excited to see where he takes us.”

Fitzgerald currently owns a consulting practice and also serves as an Operating Partner for Virgo Investment Group, advising entrepreneurs and mid-sized companies seeking operational expertise and capital. He served a two-year stint as a special advisor and Cabinet member for Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Entertainment under Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin.

Prior to this, Fitzgerald worked at Apple as Vice President and General Manager of iTunes where he led global operations for all of iTunes products and Apple's gift card business. Prior to Apple, he worked at Disney as the global EVP and acting COO for the Home Entertainment division of the Walt Disney Studios.

"I'm honored to serve as the next President & CEO of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum," said Fitzgerald. "This truly is the premier institution of Western history, art, and culture; all of which tell exciting and important stories. I am excited for the opportunity to build on this established legacy."

Fitzgerald received his BS from Southwestern Oklahoma State University in 1986 with a double major in Marketing & Accounting. Having relocated frequently during his career, he moved back to Oklahoma in 2015 with Barb, his wife of 35 years. Their daughter, son, daughter-in-law and two granddaughters also reside in Oklahoma.

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About The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum:

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City is America's premier institution of Western history, art and culture. Founded in 1955, the Museum collects, preserves and exhibits an internationally renowned collection of Western art and artifacts while sponsoring dynamic educational programs to stimulate interest in the enduring legacy of the American West. The Museum is located only six miles northeast of downtown Oklahoma City at 1700 Northeast 63rd Street. For more information, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org.