



ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PAULA WILLIAMS TO RETIRE**

AMA Executive Director Announces She Will Retire on June 30, 2019

**[For Release Jan 28, 2019 – Albany, GA]** — Paula Bacon Williams, who led the Albany Museum of Art through its restoration after the devastating January 2017 storm damage that forced the museum to close for nearly nine months, has announced her retirement as executive director of the museum effective June 30, 2019.

“It really was not an easy decision,” Williams said. “I want to enjoy life while I can. This will give me more opportunities to do things I haven’t had time for and to spend time with family.

“Also, it’s a good transitional time for the museum. We’re fiscally strong. We’ve added excellent programming. We have strengthened our focus and commitment to serve our community and region.”

Board of Trustees member Kirk Rouse, who was board chairman when Williams was appointed executive director, said, “I’ve served on several boards, but I’ve never served with an executive director who was more committed to the mission of an organization than Paula.

“It’s clear that she has a true passion for what she does. Also, she’s all about inclusion. She made the museum more of a community organization than it ever was before. We will miss her. Paula has had a positive impact on the community for many years. She has always been a strong advocate for Albany and for the museum.”

R. Ripley Bell, Jr., chairman of the AMA Board of Trustees, said, “Paula has been an excellent executive director. She is leaving the museum on solid financial footing and with programming into the future. We wish her the best of luck in the future.”

This is Williams’ second time leading the AMA. She rejoined the museum as executive director in 2014. She previously served as executive director in 1990-93 after being promoted from the position as director of marketing and volunteer services that she held 1987-90.

"When I came back to the museum, I never considered it to be a long-term situation," Williams said. "I also never in a million years thought we'd have two tornadoes (Jan 2 and 22, 2017) and a hurricane (Michael on Oct 10, 2018) to deal with. But I learned a great deal and embraced the challenges."

In her first stint as executive director, Williams led the museum to accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums, a mark held by only 3% of museums nationwide. The museum takes great pride that it is a well-managed system that operates with distinction, serving as a national model by meeting the highest standards of the museum field.

Williams said one of the reasons she is comfortable with her decision is that she has assembled a quality team at the AMA. "We have a top-notch staff at the museum," she said. "I am confident in their ability to continue moving the AMA forward."

She said she is also grateful for the financial support the AMA has gotten from the community, corporations and foundations, especially the James M. Barnett, Jr. Foundation, the W.B. Haley Foundation, the Frances Bunzl Foundation and the Ralph Hodges Trust.

It takes strong staff and financial support for the museum to build community through art, both in the galleries and in the classroom.

"Our exhibition schedule and educational programming have been robust," she said. "We have been building on our successes, and I think things are moving in the right direction."

That is being done with thought-provoking exhibitions, educational programming and events such as Courageous Conversations, which encourages discussion about race, and opportunities for the community to participate in artist workshops and lectures.

"We're talking about things that we haven't always been able to talk about," Williams said. "We are showing more exhibitions in which artists make social commentary. That enables the museum to present conversations based on those exhibitions. We've pushed some boundaries, which I'm proud of. And I hope to continue to do so."

Williams reflected on the January 2017 storms, which severely damaged the museum building as they caused widespread devastation in Albany and Southwest Georgia.

"Looking back at the first moments with the first tornado and the destruction that followed, it was the most stressful time, but also one that provided inspiration as people rose to the occasion," she said.

Museum staff, trustees, volunteers and conservators were called in to work quickly to secure the museum's permanent collection and the artwork on exhibition in the AMA galleries. Thankfully, none of the art was lost or destroyed. One silver lining from the ordeal was the AMA's permanent collection was assessed and restored by trained conservators.

After months of repairs, on Aug 24, 2017, the AMA reopened its three first-floor galleries, auditorium, children's area and classroom, and resumed a full schedule of exhibitions and programming.

"Strength came from the storm," Williams said.

The event also afforded AMA officials the opportunity to explore a possible move to a downtown location. "Moving downtown was not an option before that," she said. "While that effort has run into some unfortunate roadblocks, the museum will continue to look at directions for the future that will best allow the AMA to fulfill its mission and its strong commitment to our community and region."

Establishing a new fall downtown Albany festival, AMA ChalkFest, was an achievement Williams said she is proud of. The first ChalkFest brought 11 professional chalk artists and thousands of visitors to downtown Albany last September for a daytime street festival filled with art, music and food. The second ChalkFest is scheduled for Saturday, Oct 5, 2019.

“We researched ChalkFest for three years before we found the right time to launch it,” she said. “A large part of what made the timing and the festival work was finding the perfect chairperson, Mallory Black, who is a member of the Board of Trustees. Her tireless work and leadership took it off the drawing board and onto Pine Avenue.”

Asked about what she was proudest of accomplishing during her second tenure as executive director of the museum, Williams said, “I think it’s getting the museum back on an even keel, expanding our membership and public support, getting strong policies and procedures in place, and helping the Trustees build the best board possible. I personally feel we have the best board in town. We are also grateful for so many who have stepped up and supported the museum during my tenure.”

### **ABOUT THE ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART**

The Albany Museum of Art, located in Albany, Georgia, adjacent to Albany State University West Campus just off Gillionville Road is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Albany Museum of Art is open 10 am through 5 pm Tuesdays through Fridays and noon until 5 pm on Saturdays. Admission is free.

For more information about the AMA please visit our website, [www.albanymuseum.com](http://www.albanymuseum.com) or call 229.439.8400.

### **CAPTION INFORMATION:**

**Paula Bacon Williams is retiring June 30, 2019 as executive director of the Albany Museum of Art. She has served as executive director since 2014. (Photo: Jim Hendricks/Albany Museum of Art)**

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