

KARI F. WATKINS



Kari Watkins, a third-generation journalist, became the Oklahoma City National Memorial's first staff member as the Communications Director in March 1996. She was named Executive Director in 1999. Today, as President and CEO, she oversees the operations of the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum; one of Oklahoma's most visited sites and is Race Director for the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon.

Kari oversaw the design competition of the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial and the building of the Memorial Museum and worked with board and staff to raise \$29 million dollars for construction.

In 2013, Kari recognized the future of museums was changing and the Memorial had to adapt to maintain relevance. As a result, the Memorial began the \$10 million *9:03 Campaign* to update and enhance the existing Museum. Through the next two years, Kari led a team of board, staff, consultants and construction teams to design and build today's award-winning Museum.

For the 20th Anniversary, the Memorial opened the *Uncover-Discover Lab*, an academically oriented experience geared toward middle and high school students. The Lab integrates STEM concepts with lessons learned from the bombing, in an interactive environment connecting the past with the future.

Kari guided 2020's signature educational/outreach/training program for the 25th Anniversary – *Better Conversations*. Through online and in-person programs, visitors experience a safe space to have candid conversations about tough subjects including racial reconciliation, collective memory and uniting and moving a city forward.

Looking Back. Thinking Forward. written by Kari and Founding Memorial Chair, Robert M. Johnson, reveals the story of the violence of the Oklahoma City bombing turning to hope as the world witnessed a response characterized by courage, compassion and unity in the building of the Memorial.

Locally, she has been recognized with several awards including the 2000 *Women in Communications Byliner Award*, 2005 *Journal Record Woman of the Year*, 2006 *Stanley Draper Award for Community Excellence*, 2011 *University of Oklahoma Gaylord College of Journalism Distinguished Alumni Award*, 2016 *Lee Allan Smith Oklahoma Legacy Award*, and the 2017 *John F. Kennedy Community Service Award*.

Kari leads a staff that has been awarded the highest national recognition, accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums. The Memorial Museum has won numerous awards including The Videographer Award of Excellence, a Gold American Alliance of Museums MUSE, the FBI Director's Community Leadership Award, multiple Addy's, PRSA Awards, and Oklahoma Tourism RedBud Awards.

Kari serves on the board of directors for the OKC Convention and Visitors Bureau, MAPS3 Park Sub-Committee, Board of Visitors for the University of Oklahoma's Gaylord College of Journalism & Mass Communications and is an elder at Crossings Community Church.

She and her husband Hardy have two children, Ford and Caroline.



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